



Vol. 2 Issue 2 Spring 2025

CONNECTIONS

A Publication of the Universal Peace Federation



Serving Humanity, Saving Our Home

Sunhak Peace Prize Laureates
Ecology of Peace and the Leda Settlement
Healthy Soil for a Healthy Climate
Our Sacred Bond with Nature



Dr. Charles S. Yang
Chairman,
UPF International

MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER

World Summit 2025 will be held in Seoul from April 10-14, bringing together over 500 leaders from 110 countries under the theme “Contemporary Challenges to World Order: Establishing a New Era of Peace and Prosperity.” I look forward to welcoming many eminent political and religious leaders, as well as experts and scholars, to South Korea. In addition to facilitating valuable exchanges of ideas and networking opportunities, I hope this gathering will motivate leaders to unite in a shared commitment to action that will help resolve conflicts and ease tensions in the Asia-Pacific region and the world.

I also hope and expect that participating in the entrance ceremony to the Cheon Won Peace Palace will be an inspiring and memorable experience for all Summit participants. In the future, we anticipate that this Peace Palace will serve as a venue for critical meetings and deliberations that will significantly impact our world.

Another highlight of the Summit will be the 6th Sunhak Peace Prize Award Ceremony. This prize is given to outstanding individuals who devote their lives in service to others, seeking to improve the well-being and prosperity of humanity, often working for the least privileged among us. The founders of the Sunhak Peace Prize seek to recognize such people, viewing them as the true heroes of our time.

In these pages we honor the Sunhak Peace Prize 2025 laureates: Wanjira Mathai, who has spearheaded the planting of millions of trees across Africa; Hugh Evans, who has connected millions of people in a network committed to helping others; and Patrick Awuah, who is raising up a new generation of African leaders of high integrity as well as strong expertise.

We also honor the Founders’ Prize laureates: former President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria, who greatly benefited his people while in office, and continues to promote democracy, peace and good governance across Africa; and Dr. Samuel Radebe, who serves as spiritual leader to countless followers in Africa, guiding them to fulfill their own spiritual and material potential.

Each of these laureates embodies the values that UPF promotes, in living for the sake of others.

Also in this issue we touch upon a critical problem that concerns us all, the deterioration of our natural environment. We feature several projects, large and small, undertaken by UPF’s founders, friends and ambassadors for peace, to address this situation. We also highlight our inextricable connection to nature itself, how our physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological well-being are impacted by the health and beauty – or lack thereof – of our natural environment.

There is a great deal of work to be done in pursuing the ideal of a peaceful, prosperous, healthy and beautiful world for all humanity. Through the World Summit and other UPF activities around the world, let us commit to bringing real progress toward that noble goal.



CONTENTS

02 Message from the Publisher
— Dr. Charles S. Yang

Features

04 The Sunhak Peace Prize: Honoring
Selfless Service to Humanity
— Sunhak Peace Prize & UPFI Staff

10 Preserving, Enhancing and
Enjoying Nature's Gifts
— Kathleen Hwang

14 Ecology of Peace and the Leda
Settlement
— Carol Pobanz

17 In Communion with Nature:
The Earth & I
— The Earth & I Editors

19 Sustainable Agroforestry to
Mitigate Climate Crises
— Prof. Jong-Choon Woo

22 Healthy Soil for a Healthy Climate
— Dr. Rattan Lal

24 Climate Anxiety
— Sharon Choi

26 Managing Household Hazardous Waste
— Dr. Adikwu Stephen Onum

28 Local Residents Save Iconic Coastal
Rocks in Azerbaijan
— Seyfulla Azer

Applied Principles

30 Interdependence: Science and Religion
— Dr. Dong Moon Joo

Commentary

32 Our Sacred Bond with Nature
— Dr. Lisa Miller

UPF Activities

34 UPF Co-hosts Panel at Religious
Freedom Summit in Washington, DC
— Larry Moffitt

35 UPF Chairman Pays Courtesy Call to
Nepal's Prime Minister
— Kahee G. Dhakal

36 Art Exhibition and Celebration
— Dmitry Samko and Dr. Sangita Swechcha

38 World Interfaith Harmony Week around
the Globe

Chairman: Dr. Charles S. Yang
President: Dr. Michael Jenkins
Secretary General: Young Tack Yang

Editor: Kathleen Hwang
Associate Editor: Larry Moffitt
Design and Layout: Karen Wai

To submit articles, ideas or comments, write to editor@upf.org.

Cover photo: Ms. Wanjira Mathai (right) plants a tree with a colleague from the Green Belt Movement.

The Sunhak Peace Prize: Honoring Selfless Service to Humanity



Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon founded the Sunhak Peace Prize in 2013 to continue the legacy of her husband, the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon, who dedicated his entire life toward realizing world peace and prosperity, where humankind thrives as “One Family Under God.”

Rev. Moon viewed humanity as a family comprised of successive generations. In this light, rather than focusing on individuals and organizations whose activities are specifically tailored to immediate, contemporary issues, the Sunhak Peace Prize Committee looks for people whose service benefits future generations.

Specifically, awardees are selected for their work in three areas: sustainable human development, conflict resolution, and ecological

The Sunhak Peace Prize Committee is chaired by Dr. Jose Manuel Barroso, former president of the European Commission and former prime minister of Portugal. The committee carefully reviews the nominees, with support from the Secretariat and in consultation with experts, to come up with a short list of the most promising candidates. The committee meets periodically throughout the year for this purpose.

The award ceremony is held biennially and has a prize pool of US\$1 million, which is given along with a medal and plaque for each laureate.

“Our hope is to lift up those worthy of praise for their sincere efforts to help others and improve the world and to encourage them to share the light of hope to all the peoples of the world who pray for world peace.”

- Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon



SUNHAK
SUNHAK PEACE PRIZE



Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon presents the Sunhak Peace Prize Founders' Award 2020 to former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (center), together with Dr. Hong Il-sik, then chair of the Sunhak Peace Prize Committee.

Wanjira Mathai

Preserving and building upon the legacy of a lifetime of devotion to humanity is the purpose of the Sunhak Peace Prize. Ms. Wanjira Mathai is an excellent embodiment of this very principle. Born in 1971, she grew up in Kenya as the daughter of Wangari Mathaai, a pioneer in social activism and environmentalism, who eventually became the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Before that recognition, however, she faced countless political and social obstacles, including multiple arrests, loss of her job, and media criticism, all of which might have discouraged her daughter from following in her footsteps.

But the opposite is true. Ms. Wanjira Mathai has become an outstanding activist and voice for the environmental movement in Kenya and throughout Africa. She has served as chair of the Green Belt Movement, founded by her mother in 1977, which expanded under her leadership to plant over 51 million trees. The movement has grown into a grassroots force for environmental conservation, economic development, and social change across Africa.

Ms. Mathai has championed renewable energy entrepreneurship for African women through the wPOWER program, providing training to over 5,000 women. These entrepreneurs promote solar power and sustainable energy solutions, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and improving energy access in underserved regions.

As managing director for Africa and global partnerships with the World Resources Institute, Ms. Mathai has been a driving force behind the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100), which collaborates with 34 African nations to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. To date, 30 million hectares have been restored, creating jobs, enhancing livelihoods, and boosting agricultural productivity.



“ Planting trees for future generations is our responsibility and our hope. ”

- Wanjira Mathai

She also serves as chair of the Wangari Maathai Foundation, created in 2015 to preserve her mother's legacy. The foundation partners with schools to promote socio-emotional learning and character education in young children; engages with young adults to foster leadership and empower collective action; and seeks to inspire people everywhere to make a difference in the world.

Ms. Mathai is an exemplary leader in environmental protection and practical social activism, as well as a role model for young women and girls in Africa and around the world.



Through her leadership in the environmental movement in Africa, Ms. Mathai has inspired and empowered countless women and girls to contribute to the preservation and sustainable development of their homelands, including her two daughters (pictured with her at right).

Hugh Evans

Hugh Evans is a young man with a big heart. Born in 1983, he grew up in a suburb of Melbourne, Australia. He was only 12 when he joined the 40 Hour Famine, a charity event organized by World Vision Australia in which young people set their own 40-hour challenge to raise funds for people suffering from hunger.

Two years later, at 14, Hugh Evans spent the night in a Manila slum, an experience that motivated him to try to change the lives of people living in poverty. In 2002 he volunteered for World Vision on a project in rural South Africa. After that he launched his humanitarian career, co-founding Oaktree, an organization to train youth activists and raise funds for aid and development projects in the Asia Pacific region.

In 2008 Mr. Evans co-founded the Global Poverty Project, which became Global Citizen in 2012, dedicated to eliminating global poverty and promoting sustainable development. Grasping the potential of the internet to build a worldwide community, he set up digital platforms that link donors and activists with communities in need, pioneering a new era of citizen action for global change. Global Citizen has over 12 million members, has mobilized over US\$43.6 billion in commitments, and triggered more than 30 global policy changes, positively impacting the lives of 1.3 billion people worldwide.

That's not all; Mr. Evans understands the power and appeal of music. Already at 18 he was organizing concerts in his home country to raise awareness about world poverty; he helped prompt the Australian government to double its foreign aid commitments. In 2012 he held

the first Global Citizen Festival in New York, attracting popular musicians and donor commitments. Since then, the festival has featured world-class artists such as Beyoncé, Rihanna, and BTS, offering audiences an opportunity to engage in meaningful action beyond mere entertainment.



“ Poverty, climate change, and gender inequality are global problems. To solve them, we need global citizens to act together. ”

- Hugh Evans

In 2018, the Global Citizen Festival: Mandela 100 in Johannesburg raised US\$7.4 billion to provide healthcare and education for 122 million Africans. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the One World: Together at Home online festival, curated by Lady Gaga, raised US\$127 million across 175 countries to support healthcare workers and pandemic response efforts.

Also during the pandemic, Mr. Evans' leadership led to the Global Goal: Unite for Our Future campaign, raising US\$7 billion for vaccine equity and treatment distribution, contributing significantly to global health crisis management.

Mr. Evans' innovative approach has expanded civic engagement, with special appeal to his generation, inspiring collective action and catalyzing global support for large-scale problem-solving.



Global Citizen CEO and Co-Founder Hugh Evans hosts a panel discussion on impactful ways to drive change at Global Citizen NOW in New York on May 1, 2024. Photo: Ryan Muir

Patrick Awuah

Patrick Awuah was born in 1965 and grew up in Accra, Ghana. He went to Swathmore College in the United States on full scholarship in 1985, graduated with degrees in engineering and economics, and found a job at Microsoft. He married and had a son. Many of his contemporaries would consider that he had achieved the ideal life.

But Mr. Awuah wanted to do something for his country, and offer young people the kind of education he had received. He moved back to Ghana with his family and founded Ashesi University, with the dream of empowering young Africans with the motivation and skills to address Africa's challenges. The university opened in 2002 with just 30 students; it now has 1,500 students from 31 countries.

**“ The most important question is:
What is a good society,
and how do you organize it? ”**

- Patrick Awuah

Ashesi University introduced a groundbreaking educational model that integrates STEM-focused learning with ethical leadership. With 92% of graduates securing quality jobs or launching successful businesses within six months of graduation, Ashesi has become a driving force for sustainable economic and social development in Africa. The Ashesi Venture Incubator, launched in 2019, has fostered over 30 startups, driving innovation and generating US\$1.5 million in revenue.

Currently, 55% of Ashesi University students receive scholarships. Mr. Awuah has championed women's participation in STEM fields through mentorship and scholarship programs, empowering them to thrive in areas like engineering, computer science, and business. Half of the university's graduates are women, advancing gender equity across the continent.

Mr. Awuah has said he asks his students to consider the question, "What is a good society and how do you organize it?" Rooting out systemic corruption is one challenge; to address this, Mr. Awuah introduced Africa's first honor code at Ashesi University. Through programs focusing on ethics, collaboration, and entrepreneurship, Mr. Awuah teaches responsible leadership. His pioneering ethical leadership program fosters a culture of accountability and integrity, equipping students to tackle societal challenges and to lead by example within their communities.

Ashesi University is recognized as a leader in African higher education. It is ranked No. 1 in Ghana, No. 9 in Africa, and among the top 400 universities globally, according to the 2020 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings. Ashesi graduates are driving sustainable development, combating corruption, and contributing to Africa's growth.



Students at Ashesi University learn critical knowledge and technical skills grounded in a culture of accountability and integrity that encourages them to lead by example.

Dr. Goodluck Jonathan

It is sometimes said that former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan has led a charmed life. At the time of his birth in a small town in Nigeria in 1957, his father had a premonition that this child would bring good luck – and so he was named. But good fortune only goes so far – it is Dr. Jonathan's service to his country and his people that brought him to Seoul to receive the Sunhak Founders' Award.

Dr. Jonathan studied zoology and biology, earning a doctorate degree from the University of Port Harcourt, and worked as an educator and environmental protection officer in his early years. His later served as governor of Bayelsa State, then vice president, before assuming the presidency in 2010. He is described as having innate traits of humility, service, and loyalty that endeared him to the public.

During his presidency, from 2010 to 2015, Dr. Jonathan pursued a "transformational agenda" that included building new roads, railways, bridges and airports; increasing agricultural and industrial production; and reforming the power sector to stabilize the nation's electricity supply. His policies spurred economic growth that led Nigeria to become Africa's largest economy.

Dr. Jonathan also promoted democratic values and principles, enacting electoral reforms and promoting access to education, especially for girls.

During his tenure, Dr. Jonathan also worked with heads of state in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with commitment and passion, to resolve political crises and stabilize democracies on the continent.



“ We must first build hope ... hope inspires love, love promotes peace, peace engenders justice while justice guarantees freedom and trust. These universal virtues are central to our quest for a peaceful and prosperous continent. ”

- Dr. Goodluck Jonathan

After leaving office, Dr. Jonathan continued to promote democracy, peace, and prosperity in Africa through the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation, which he chairs, and its West African Elders Forum. He has led international missions to observe elections in various nations, including Tanzania, Zambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Mozambique. He also serves on the ECOWAS Council of the Wise, which strives to prevent and mediate conflicts and promote good governance in the region.

In 2019 he was appointed chair of the African chapter of the International Summit Council for Peace, and in 2020 he was appointed to the senior panel of the Kofi Annan Foundation's Electoral Integrity Initiative.

Through his life of public service and commitment to peace, democracy and good governance, Dr. Jonathan serves as an example for Africa's aspiring future leaders.



Nigerian President Bola Tinubu congratulates former President Goodluck Jonathan on winning the 2025 Sunhak Peace Founders' Award. Photo: Nigeria Union of Journalists

Dr. Samuel Radebe

Dr. Samuel Radebe, born in 1977, grew up in a township not far from Cape Town, South Africa, in a clan that had produced several spiritual leaders. It was apparent that the young Samuel had spiritual gifts; as a child he saw visions and had other spiritual experiences.

Dr. Radebe lost both his parents by the time he was a teenager. After the passing of his mother, following his intuition, he set out to serve his Creator. His journey led him to Johannesburg, where he briefly joined a Brazilian Pentecostal church. There he developed his own healing powers, which attracted many followers. Then, in a prayerful visit to a river, he had a spiritual vision that led him to leave the group and find his own way.

Since then, Dr. Radebe has devoted himself to the mission of reviving African indigenous spirituality. His experience led him to believe that Western religions, brought to the continent by colonizers, had resulted in distancing African peoples from their own, inborn spiritual nature. His organization, the Revelation Spiritual Home, invites them to awaken their inner awareness and return to their spiritual roots.

"The Revelation Spiritual Home is a place where you feel you belong, although you were not born there, because you have a lot in common with the people, the culture, and the way of life"; so states the organization on its website. It also advocates the virtues of honesty, pride, keeping promises, helping others, respect, responsibility and humility.



This message has resonated with hundreds of thousands of people – some say millions – across South Africa and beyond. There are now more than 50 “homes” where members gather; some offer services every day of the week.



**“ Just like your flesh,
your spirit must also be fed. ”**

- Dr. Samuel Radebe

But the group's activities are not limited to spiritual practices and healing; it also conducts business activities and encourages its followers to be self-reliant. Dr. Radebe founded Trillion Cart Holdings, an umbrella group that oversees some seventy businesses. Many followers work in these companies, while others are trained to start their own small businesses.

Dr. Radebe has also created a charity that distributes food and blankets to the needy, offers scholarships to poor students, and opens libraries to provide books for underprivileged children. And last but not least, he conducts a forum for interreligious dialogue that gathers organizations representing more than ten million followers.

To masses of people in South Africa and beyond, Dr. Radebe represents a holistic life path that promises spiritual health, material prosperity, and wholesome community.

Dr. Samuel Radebe and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon celebrate the conclusion of the Africa Continental Blessing Ceremony at the FNB Stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Dec. 7, 2019.

Preserving, Enhancing and Enjoying Nature's Gifts

By Kathleen Hwang



In her many speeches and prayers around the world, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon has expressed countless times her love and appreciation for the beauty of nature. In her homeland of Korea, she has undertaken several

projects designed to protect and accentuate the natural environment. Three of them are highlighted here, along with her work to beautify the area surrounding the Cheon Won Peace Palace in Gapyeong County.

Gapyeong Cruise

The Gapyeong Cruise features Korea's very first eco-friendly, fully electric cruise boat. Launched in October, 2022, it departs from the HJ Marina and travels along the scenic Bukhan River to various locations, the most popular being Nami Island theme park.

Compared to traditional fuel-powered boats, HJ Cruise significantly reduces carbon emissions. It produces no exhaust and minimizes noise and vibration, ensuring passengers a pleasant ride.

The three-story boat can accommodate 250 passengers, seated comfortably at small tables on the lower levels, with an open space on the upper deck that can accommodate musical performances or other programs.

Local officials have happily supported this initiative, as a project to support sustainable tourism in one of Korea's beautiful, less populated areas.



The HJ Marina in Gapyeong, departure point for the Gapyeong Cruise.



Korea's first eco-friendly electric cruise boat, HJ Cruise, carries passengers on the Bukhan River toward Nami Island.



Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon leads a prayer to dedicate a new trail through the forest of thousand-year-old yew trees at Mona Park on June 13, 2022.

Mount Balwang Mona Park

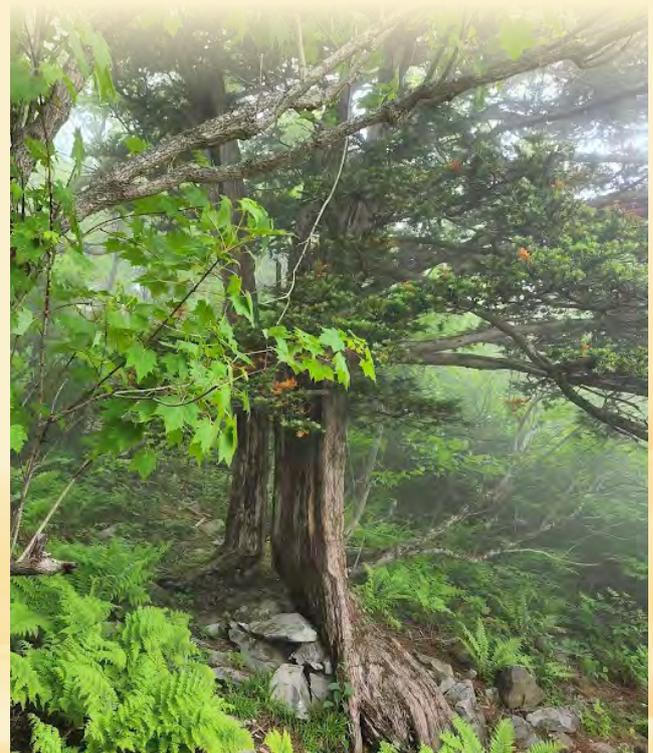
Mona Park (the name derived from “mother nature”) is considered an eco-tourism site, located at the top of Mount Balwang in Pyeongchang, Gangwon-do. Visitors may take a 20-minute cable car ride, enjoying lovely scenery, to access the mountain peak. There, one may follow a series of nature trails to view rare species of trees and wildflowers.

A highlight are the 1000-year-old yew trees that dot the side of the mountain, carefully protected by small fences.

Many of the trees have been given special names, indicated on plaques beside the trees. One example is the Tree of Humility, so named because its branch hangs low over the trail, and visitors must bow down to pass under it. Caretakers here view the preservation of these ancient trees as a sacred duty.

“ In this natural beauty, let true families...as well as all citizens of this world, experience Your deep love from this one place. ”

- Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon’s prayer at the dedication of the yew forest trail at Mona Park on June 13, 2022.



A pleasant walkway carries visitors along the mountainside, past ancient trees and lush foliage.



The Hanjip Teahouse is built from wood in traditional Korean architectural style. In the warm and welcoming interior, visitors may choose from a variety of specialty teas, while enjoying a lovely view of Cheongpyeong Lake.

Begonia Bird and Flower Garden

This lovely garden in Gapyeong offers bursts of color to brighten the spirits of all who come there. Outdoors are plants, shrubs and flowering trees, including cherry and plum trees, and a waterfall and pond filled with colorful carp. Inside the greenhouse, begonias of every color are the highlight of the flower garden, which also features hanging plants and clusters of other flowers, depending on the season.

In the bird zone, parrots sit in the trees or flock to sit on the heads, arms and shoulders of visitors who offer them birdseed. Peacocks share the paths with people, while other wild birds flit here and there above their heads. It's a great place for young people to take photos, and for families, where parents can relax and children can run freely around.



Beautiful flowers line the walkways in the botanical garden.



The garden is also home to different colorful tropical birds.



A celebration on May 7, 2023, at the Cheon Won Peace Palace marked the completion of the building's construction. Interior decoration was then completed for a dedication ceremony on April 13, 2025.

Hyojeong Cheonwon

Adjacent to Cheongpyeong Lake in Gapyeong County, about 50 kilometers from Seoul, lies a 6500-acre stretch of land that has come to be known as Hyojeong Cheonwon. This translates as the Heavenly Garden of Filial Piety, representing a place where people respect and love God as their Heavenly Parent, and love and serve one another as brothers and sisters.

Buildings on this land include a training center, a hospital, a middle and high school, a graduate school and Korean language academy, a retirement home, and residential apartments. There are also a stadium, a museum, an office complex, restaurants and coffee shops, a teahouse, and the newly built Cheon Won Peace Palace. All of this comprises the heart of the Unificationist community inspired by the teachings of Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

Many of these buildings feature an elegant, classical style, and the area surrounding them is beautifully landscaped, featuring decorative rocks, ornamental trees, and flowering shrubs.

In the years since her husband's passing in 2012, Dr. Moon has directed the construction of two of the largest and most impressive of these buildings, the office complex and the imposing Cheon Won Peace Palace, using exceptionally high-quality natural materials. She has also added many organic features, including gardens and nature paths, as well as an elegant traditional Korean teahouse built of wood.

Through each of these projects Dr. Moon honors God and nature, and seeks to inspire everyone who enters these spaces to feel closer to their Creator by experiencing the beauty of creation.

– Kathleen Hwang is the editor of Connections at UPF International in Seoul, South Korea.



Ecology of Peace and the Leda Settlement

By Carol Pobanz



The “ecology of peace” refers to the interconnect- edness of environmental, social, and political factors that work together to create peace and stability within societies. This concept sug- gests that peace is more than just the absence of conflict – it’s a dynamic, holistic system where relationships between people, nature, and in- stitutions are nurtured and maintained.

The term “ecology” draws a parallel to eco- systems, where all elements – whether living organisms or the environment – work together to maintain balance and health. Similarly, an “ecology of peace” highlights the importance of collaboration, mutual respect, and under- standing among individuals, communities, governments, and nature in order to create and sustain lasting peace. In essence, the ecology of peace emphasizes the crucial role of interconnectedness in building a sustain- able and harmonious world.

Though not using the exact term “ecology of peace,” Reverend Sun Myung Moon and his wife Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon set out to create such an environment in 1999.

Starting from Scratch

In the heart of South America lies Paraguay, a landlocked country surrounded by vast stretches of land. Reverend Moon and his wife poetically referred to the wetlands of Para- guay as the “womb of South America” and the Paraguay River, which flows north to south, as the “birth canal” for a new civilization. They claimed Paraguay as a protected space – a “New Eden” or God’s Kingdom.

The Leda Settlement, founded by Reverend and Mrs. Moon with the help of Japanese missionaries from the Unification movement, is a remarkable initiative that has transformed a remote area of Paraguay into a thriving, sustainable community. Located between the Pantanal – one of the world’s most vital wetlands – and the arid Chaco region, Leda was designed with a vision of harmony between people and nature. The settlement is rooted in spiritual beliefs and serves as a model for environmental stewardship and cooperation.

Rev. Moon referred to this area as the “least developed place on earth, and hence, closest to the original creation,” a land filled with potential to give birth to a new civilization.



Rev. and Mrs. Moon with Japanese missionaries on the steps of a newly built house on the Leda property, November 30, 2000.



When the first missionary settlers arrived, the land was harsh – thick forests, unpredictable weather, and a lack of infrastructure made survival difficult. Despite these challenges, the Japanese pioneers persevered, clearing the land, building shelters, and establishing the foundations of a self-sustaining community.



A volunteer from the International Youth Project chops trees to clear a piece of land.

The Human Factor

Mr. Minoru Nakata, one of the first settlers, shared in his testimony about one of the greatest challenges they faced:

“As we pioneered the Leda Settlement, we made every effort to be sensitive to the purity and divinity of the natural environment. But even more difficult was the challenge of human relationships – living for the sake of one another. Day after day, the heat and mosquitoes surrounded us, but we could endure those things. What was hardest was the human interaction. We worked together from dawn to dusk with the same people, and tensions began to build. Our love for one another started to fade. It was certainly hard to practice living for the sake of others...internal conflict was the hardest to bear.”

Mr. Nakata highlights in his testimony how the pioneers initially learned to persevere. However, they eventually realized that mere endurance was not enough to make progress. He explains further that when facing difficulties, people struggle to think beyond their personal problems, making it hard to focus on humanity as a whole. Ultimately, the pioneers discovered that the true solution was to sincerely live for the sake of one another.

Resourcefulness in Adversity

In the Chaco region, food security has always been a major challenge. The Japanese pioneers introduced aquaculture, developing fish farms to provide a consistent food source. They also experimented with various crops suited to the region’s climate and soil, making significant advances in sustainable agriculture. Notably, the cultivation of taro root became an efficient way to grow food while preserving the natural environment. Sustainability is at the core of the Leda Settlement’s mission. Unlike traditional development projects that often exploit natural resources, Leda prioritizes environmental conservation. Settlers have adopted eco-friendly farming practices and conservation programs to protect these fragile ecosystems.

One of Leda’s greatest achievements is its aquaculture system. By cultivating native fish species in controlled environments, the settlement reduces pressure on wild fish populations while ensuring a sustainable food source. In collaboration with Paraguay’s National University and the Federation for the Sustainable Development of the Americas, the pioneers initiated a fish release program – releasing tens of thousands of pacu fingerlings into the Paraguay River to restore natural balance to the overfished waters.



Volunteers from the International Youth Project plant trees and clear debris at the Leda Settlement.

The Leda Settlement's focus is not just on developing land but also on uplifting people. It is home to Paraguay's First Peoples – indigenous communities who have long faced poverty, limited access to education, and marginalization. Recognizing these challenges, Leda has worked closely with local villages to improve living conditions, build schools, and provide vocational training. Education is a key aspect of the settlement's outreach efforts. Schools built with Leda's support offer both traditional education and practical training in agriculture, aquaculture, and sustainable development. By equipping local and visiting international youth with these skills, the settlement is helping to prepare a new generation of leaders who can guide their communities toward a better future.

The Leda Settlement has come to embody the vision of an "ecology of peace," where the harmony between people, nature, and culture

is at the heart of its development. Through its focus on sustainability, spiritual values, and cooperation, the settlement has turned a once harsh and undeveloped land into a thriving model of environmental stewardship and community empowerment.

The efforts of Reverend Moon and his wife, along with the resilience of the settlers, have proven that lasting peace is not only achievable but can be cultivated through dedication, mutual respect, and a deep understanding of our interconnectedness with the earth and one another. As Leda continues to grow and inspire, it stands as a testament to the power of human collaboration in creating a more sustainable and harmonious world.

– Carol Pobanz is a freelance writer and advocate for eco-peace and peace within us and with our surroundings. She has co-directed several projects at the Leda Settlement in Paraguay, as well as working with UPF and Religious Youth Service projects in Honduras, Brazil, and across the United States.



In Communion with Nature: The Earth & I

By Christoph Wilkening, Jerry Chesnut and Shimpuku Uezono

When people hear of a new environmental magazine coming online, it is to be expected that they will ask, “Why start another one? How will this one – The Earth & I – be different?”

The answer is in the name: The Earth & I. What better way of telling readers that this magazine is about the human bond with nature, a sacred bond that has been slowly deepening through time, only to grow more intense and poignant in this century as humans realize their survival, and the survival of nature, depends on it.

Sure, The Earth & I covers natural disasters, new scientific solutions to environmental problems, heroes in service to nature, etc., but it always does so with that “bond” in mind; how to foster it, honor it, and marvel at its power to transform.

And what kind of transformation will that be? The magazine’s motto provides a clue: “Loving Nature, Healing the Earth.” The Earth & I wants to serve readers who love nature and want to ease its plight and who, together, will do so.

The Beginnings

The story behind launching such an ambitious, perhaps idealistic, venture begins with the magazine’s sponsoring organization, The Hyo Jeong International Foundation for Environmental Peace (HJIFEP) – a non-profit organization that champions environmental restoration – initiated about seven years ago by its current president, Dr. Douglas Joo, at the request of HJIFEP’s founder, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

In 2017, the founder asked that HJIFEP restart and repurpose a conference series that she had co-founded in 1972 with her late husband, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, called the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences (ICUS), to focus entirely on scientific exchange that fosters environmental restoration.

“ The Earth & I wants to serve readers who love nature and want to ease its plight and who, together, will do so. ”

The founder later asked that a second science conference series be added, The International Conference on Science and God (ICSG), to focus on the unity of traditional, materialist science, and frontier, post-materialist science (science that approaches a First Cause) also in service to the environment. The presentations at these various conferences would provide rich material for The Earth & I articles, as well as scholarly expertise in support of various topics.

The online, bi-monthly, digital environmental magazine, The Earth & I, was conceived in 2021 to serve HJIFEP’s educational role, launching its inaugural issue on April 22, Earth Day. The Earth & I was described by its president to resemble the branches of a tree in relation to HJIFEP, which serves as the tree’s roots via its conference series and other projects. Ultimately, HJIFEP plans to roll out environmental service projects, which will serve as the “fruit” of the HJIFEP “tree.”



Once this trinity is established, The Earth & I will continue to share HJIFEP's many projects with the world, from science conferences to tree plantings to educational projects, and so on, all the while continuing to cover environmental stories that foster a "skin touch" relationship of "heart" between humans and nature, thus inspiring its readers to be nature's stewards.

The magazine's editors have three basic principles in mind when developing content. The first is to educate, not just by presenting facts, but by helping readers develop a pro-environmental "character."

Secondly, the editors try to choose stories about projects that succeeded because all parties 1) honored the need for mutual prosperity for all; 2) respected that interdependence exists throughout nature; 3) acted based on shared values.

Finally, the editorial team looks for stories that expand the scope of conventional science and technology to frontier science and technology. This reflects our understanding that conventional science cannot solve today's environmental problems without help from a post-materialist perspective that points to the existence of a First Cause or Infinite Creator of the natural world and the principles by which the natural world operates.

Achievements and Plans

Nearing its fourth anniversary, The Earth & I has featured articles by luminaries such as Princeton University's Nobel laureate Prof. David MacMillan, Columbia University's Prof. Lisa Miller, and renowned chef Dan Barber. We often feature outstanding individuals, companies, and organizations that foster and provide environmental service and solutions, such as Malawi small-holder farmer Ms. Alice Kachere; non-profits like Save the Rain, RethinkFood, Green School Bali, and Regenerative Organic Alliance; as well as many entrepreneurs, artisans, herbalists, tribal chiefs, architects, scientists and others who are leading the planet toward its healing.

Looking to the future, The Earth & I recently launched a Korean language version with plans to roll out versions in other languages. At present, the staff is preparing for its upcoming fourth anniversary issue with new section titles, such as Forward Thinkers and Environmental Heroes, establishing a strong partnership with UPF-UK and other UPF offices, increasing a growing social media presence, and harnessing AI for topic research and marketing.

As environmental awareness increases, The Earth & I looks forward to partnering and working together with like-minded stewards who share our vision.

Sustainable Agroforestry to Mitigate Climate Crises

By Prof. Jong-Choon Woo



According to the 2018 Special Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the global average temperature has risen by about 1°C compared to pre-industrial levels, and if current trends continue,

it is projected to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2050. This pace is much faster than initially anticipated. The difference between a 1.5°C rise and a 2°C rise could have profound impacts on both ecosystems and human societies, making it crucial to limit the temperature increase to within 1.5°C.

In August 2022, South Korea experienced a record-breaking heavy rainfall not seen in 115 years. Seoul metropolitan area saw rainfall reaching up to 141.5 mm per hour, resulting in unprecedented urban flooding. Approximately 12,000 vehicles were submerged, and the damage exceeded 160 billion won.

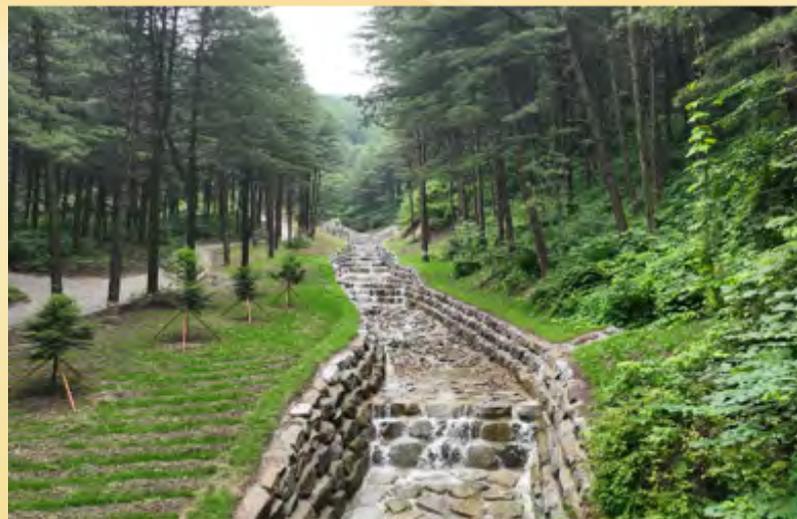
In 2022, China experienced an extreme drought that led the Yangtze River to reach historically low water levels. As a result, a Buddhist statue created 600 years ago was unexpectedly discovered on the riverbed – a remarkable yet unwelcome sight. The Yangtze River is a major source of water for both agriculture and industry in China, and such drought conditions pose serious threats to food security and economic activities.

Also, in October 2024, the United States witnessed the landfall of Hurricane Milton – the worst in a century – which caused power outages for approximately 2.6 million households and forced the evacuation of millions of people.

This pattern of flooding in one region and drought in another is a defining characteristic of the modern climate crisis. Global warming triggers a cascade of disasters across the world's ecosystems and human civilization. As glaciers melt, sea levels rise, leading to coastal flooding. Extreme weather events are reducing crop yields, diminishing biodiversity, and increasing complex risks such as the spread of disease. According to UN analyses, the economic losses caused by these climate changes are estimated to reach hundreds of billions of dollars annually.

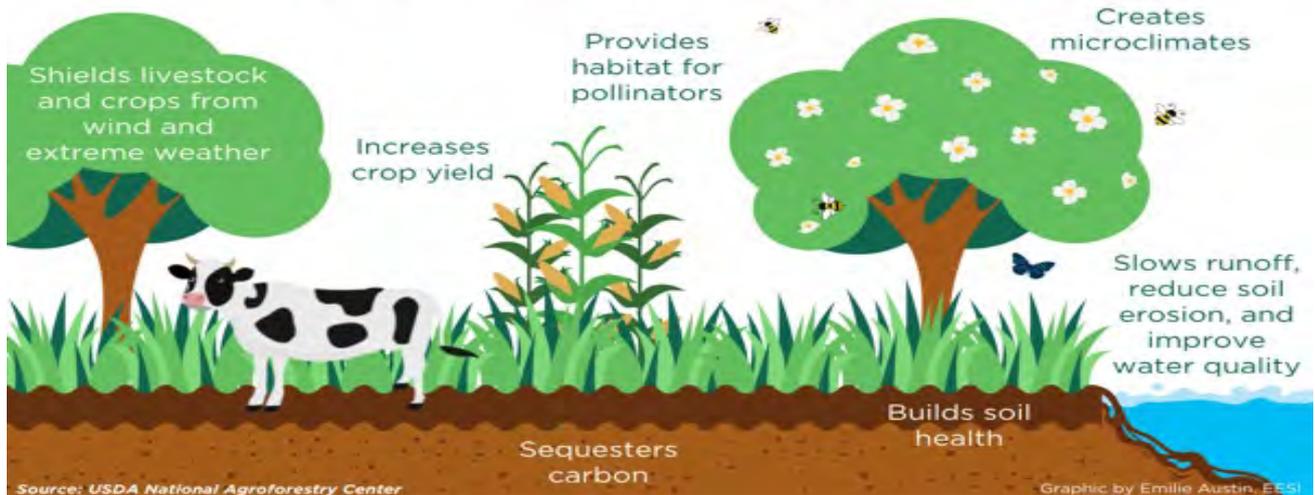
Agroforestry as a Solution

One effective solution to address this climate crisis is agroforestry. Agroforestry is an integrated agricultural system that combines crop cultivation, forestry, and even livestock production. Importantly, this is not merely a change in farming practices but a sustainable land-use system. It is an innovative approach that restores environments and ecosystems degraded by slash-and-burn agriculture, while simultaneously generating food production and economic benefits.



This firebreak was completed in 2024 in Hoengseong County, Gangwon Province in South Korea, as part of a pilot agroforestry program.

Benefits of Agroforestry



Agroforestry can be categorized into three main types. First, pure agroforestry involves either cultivating crops on forest land or planting trees on farmland, thereby producing both crops and timber simultaneously. Second, forest-livestock farming involves converting forest land into pasture or planting trees in pasture areas to produce livestock and timber together. Finally, integrated agroforestry combines the previous two methods, resulting in the simultaneous production of timber, crops and livestock – the most complex form. Each of these approaches can be selectively implemented based on local environmental conditions and the specific needs of farmers.

There are several types of agroforestry:

1. Forest understory cultivation: This method involves cultivating high-value specialty crops in the understory of a forest. Crops such as wild ginseng or shiitake mushrooms can be grown.
2. Silvopasture: In this approach, livestock are raised alongside timber production, combining animal husbandry with forestry.
3. Windbreaks: This technique involves planting trees around croplands to protect crops from wind and other environmental factors.
4. Riparian forest buffers: Here, trees are planted between waterways and cultivated lands to protect water quality and enhance biodiversity.

Each of these methods offers unique benefits and can be selectively applied based on local environmental conditions and the specific needs of the farming community.

Mixed farming, or agroforestry, offers four key benefits: 1) The integration of trees and crops helps prevent soil erosion and enhances biodiversity; 2) Tree litter acts as a natural fertilizer, reducing the need for synthetic chemicals; 3) Trees play a crucial role in absorbing and storing carbon dioxide, making this approach a powerful tool in addressing climate change.

Projects in Asia and Europe

The South Korean government currently supports 24 forest management projects. The strategic direction is to promote private, autonomous management through the participation of landowners and professional managers; to develop long-term management plans and systematic forest management practices; and to maximize investment efficiency while generating stable income and creating a virtuous cycle through reinvestment.

One example is a large-scale firebreak project completed in 2024 in Hoengseong County of Gangwon Province. It serves the purpose of disaster prevention and also plays a significant role in ecosystem conservation.

Agroforestry in Asia exhibits unique characteristics, reflecting the region's high population density and limited arable land. Plantation agriculture and tree management dominate, with well-developed structures such as gardens, windbreak forests, living fences and riparian forests. Asian agroforestry tends to combine crops and tree species – such as coconut and jackfruit – that suit the region's climatic conditions and meet market demands.

Agroforestry in Europe is broadly of three types: silvopastoral systems, high-income forestry systems, and agroforestry systems. In terms of area, the forest-livestock system is the most extensive. In Switzerland, for instance, growers combine the cultivation of cherry trees with organic vegetables. In Greece, olive trees are integrated with grains and leguminous crops. Two standout systems are Portugal's Montado system, where cattle and pigs are raised alongside oak trees, and Spain's Dehesa system, which involves raising Iberian pigs together with oak trees.

Protecting Forests

According to current estimates, deforestation

contributes roughly 12-20% of global greenhouse gas emissions, as it releases large amounts of stored carbon dioxide from trees when they are cut down or burned.

REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) is an international framework developed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to protect forests in developing countries and combat climate change. It includes forest conservation, sustainable forest management, and enhancement of carbon sequestration. Under this system, countries can access funding from developed nations in the form of results-based payments for demonstrably reducing deforestation and carbon emissions.

In today's era of climate crisis, more attention is needed to innovative approaches to forest protection and to sustainable agroforestry. Especially, integrating agriculture, forestry and livestock farming can help solve environmental, economic and social issues, allowing both human communities and the natural ecosystem to thrive.



Silvopasture systems improve both soil and animal health.



Understorey cultivation makes efficient use of land to diversify farm yields.

– Dr. Jong-Choon Woo is honorary professor at the College of Forest and Environmental Sciences at Kangwon National University in Chuncheon, South Korea. He serves on the board of the Hyo Jeong International Foundation for Environmental Peace (HJIFEP) and as an advisor to the Northeast Asia Education and Culture Foundation at Pyongyang University of Science and Technology. This is an extract from his presentation at the 5th International Conference of Hyo Jeong Academy on February 21, 2025.

Healthy Soil for a Healthy Climate

By Dr. Rattan Lal



Scientists refer to soil health as its capacity to provide ecosystem services, such as food and nutritional quality, water filtration, and moderation of climate. These critical ecosystem services really come from soil. Then

the question as a scientist is how to determine that quality. Soil organic matter content is the key; like for human health, you would look at body temperature, blood pressure, and so forth.

The climate is a control factor

In soil, it is all organic matter content and its ability to hold water and nutrients, and its ability to grow plants. The climate is a control factor of soil organic matter content and it is at the heart of soil health.

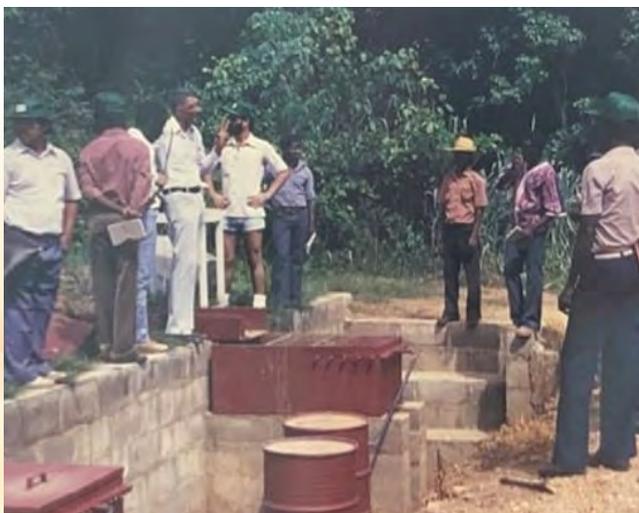
Carbon sequestration is a mechanism to improve, protect, and sustain soil health. The reason soils in Africa have bypassed the green revolution is because they did not have fertilizer and irrigation, and the soil organic matter content was so depleted – at less than 0.5% in the root zone, where it should be 2 to 3%. Therefore, the productivity of soils in Africa without fertilizer is extremely low.

In India and Mexico, where the green revolution happened, they had access to rain (or irrigation) and fertilizers. The soil was in poor health, so they used fertilizer and doubled or tripled their production. But in the long run, we cannot continue dumping fertilizer. We must restore soil health.

Soil health is the missing link

In the United States there is a Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, but only New York State now has a New York Soil Health and Climate Resiliency Act and related legislation. This can serve as a model for all states to follow, and hopefully the US Senate and Congress will follow a similar path of rewarding farmers for restoring soil organic matter content at US\$50 per credit (one metric ton of CO₂ equivalent). Such payment for ecosystem services would motivate farmers and ranchers, who are the biggest stewards of soil, to transform agriculture from a problem into a solution for restoring the environment and advancing food, nutrition and climate security.

The reason I think there is a Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act is because air and water are easy to see. Air that is hazy, dusty, or smoky, as well as water that is muddy and polluted, are easy to see, but people do



Dr. Rattan Lal conducting a training course on soil erosion in 1986. ©OSU



Dr. Rattan Lal conducting agricultural fieldwork. ©OSU



Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel poses with Dr. Rattan Lal and fellow recipients of the Gulbenkian Prize for Humanity 2024. ©Marcia Lessa/C. Gulbenkian

“Clean air and clean water, as well as climate, depend on the ability of the soil to be a sink of atmospheric CO₂.”

not see that clean air and clean water are, in fact, dependent on healthy soil. That link is not obvious. That is where there is a social disconnect.

From that point of view, there is also a political disconnect. Clean air and clean water, as well as climate, depend on the ability of the soil to be a sink of atmospheric CO₂. That link is not easy to understand, because even now when you talk to people about soil as a potential solution to climate change, they always talk about fossil fuels as an issue since they do not see the link.

The fact is that ever since agriculture began, going back 10,000 years ago, it and soil have been sources of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. As of today, soil and land that has been used for agriculture have contributed more than 550 gigatons of carbon into the atmosphere. Fossil fuels used since the year 1750 have contributed about 450 gigatons.

Smart policy can promote healthy soil

A soil health act would encourage farmers to mitigate and adapt to climate change, conserve, purify, and denature pollutants from water, and improve the activity and species diversity of the land. I think there's a bright future, and eventually people will realize it. I'm convinced that it will happen – it's a matter of time. I'm optimistic that there will be a federal soil health act eventually.

Government policymakers have realized the importance of air, water, soil, and biodiversity. These are four components of the environment that go together. Biodiversity, air, and water – and their foundation is soil.

Now Europe is doing something like that. In Germany there is the Federal Soil Protection Act. It is a soil health act that rewards farmers for following legislation. I think it will happen in the United States as well.

– World Food Prize 2020 winner and renowned soil scientist Dr. Rattan Lal serves as director of the Rattan Lal Center for Carbon Management and Sequestration at The Ohio State University. This content is extracted and edited from an interview with Dr. Dinshaw Dadachanji, research director at the Hyo Jeong International Foundation for Environmental Peace, published in *The Earth and I* magazine.

What is Climate Anxiety?

By Sharon Choi

Climate anxiety is a new term encompassing fears, mental distress, and negative emotions related to the climate crisis. It describes the phenomenon where individuals experience mental and emotional distress due to worries and fears about climate change and environmental issues.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) definition: "Climate anxiety refers to the distress and emotional turmoil caused by the anticipation of future environmental disasters related to climate change."

Severe climate anxiety can lead to depression. An increasing number of people are experiencing anxiety after watching news about extreme weather events and climate change. Additionally, many young people categorized as Millennials and Gen Z are afraid to have children or have given up on the idea altogether due to these fears. This shows that climate anxiety extends beyond mere worry and significantly impacts individual mental health.

As climate change becomes more severe, there are limited actions individuals can take, leading to feelings of helplessness and anxiety. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 6th Assessment Report in 2023 stated that climate change will increase mental health issues, including disease, premature death, anxiety and stress.

Climate Anxiety is Increasing

Indeed, climate anxiety is on the rise globally. This is clearly reflected in Google search trends. Between 2018 and 2023, searches related to "climate anxiety" increased by 45 times (4,590%).

A data analysis by the BBC and Google in October 2023 revealed that the most searched questions included "How to overcome

depression caused by climate change?" and "How to sleep without worrying about the environmental crisis?"

Particularly, the younger generation shows significant levels of anxiety. According to the Climate Psychology Alliance, which published a study titled "Climate Anxiety in Children and Young People and their Beliefs about Government Responses to Climate Change" in the international journal *The Lancet* in 2021, a survey of 10,000 youth (aged 16-25) from 10 countries revealed that 59% of respondents were "extremely worried" about climate change. So many young people experience feelings of sadness, anxiety, anger, helplessness, powerlessness, and guilt due to climate change.

Adults are similarly affected. A study by Yale University revealed that about 7% of American adults suffer from psychological distress related to climate change.

Types of Climate Anxiety

Public Health Watch explains that climate anxiety can manifest as dysthymia, causing people to feel sadness about the state of the world, and can lead to general anxiety disorder, major depressive disorder, panic disorder, and insomnia.

The WHO's 2021 Health and Climate Change Survey Report classifies mental health issues arising from climate change as follows:

- **Eco-Anxiety:** Anxiety and stress caused by climate change, including persistent fear and worry about environmental disasters.
- **Eco-Guilt:** Guilt felt when individuals believe they have violated environmental protection standards, stemming from the perception of having a negative impact on the environment.



- **Eco-Grief:** Sadness over ecological losses due to climate change, including the loss of physical environments, anticipated future losses, and the collapse of environmental knowledge systems.
- **Eco-Paralysis:** A sense of helplessness in responding to climate change issues, which can occur when there are too many or conflicting action options.
- **Solastalgia:** The distress and despair felt when beloved places deteriorate due to environmental changes.
- **Eco-Nostalgia:** Nostalgia and sadness when revisiting places that have been significantly altered by climate change.

Reducing Climate Anxiety

To reduce climate anxiety, a multifaceted approach is necessary. First, it is crucial to provide accurate information about climate change through education. Understanding information related to climate change can help manage climate stress. Secondly, schools and communities should establish counseling services and support programs for youth experiencing climate anxiety. Here are some programs:

- **Australia’s “Climate Counseling” Program**
This program provides psychological support related to climate change to young people in schools and communities. Professional counselors help youth experiencing climate anxiety, build knowledge about climate change, and offer opportunities to participate in environmental protection activities.

- **Iceland’s “Green Healthcare” Program**

This program addresses mental health issues caused by climate change by conducting counseling sessions in nature. Youth relieve stress and discuss their fears related to climate change in a natural setting.

- **UK’s “Youth Climate Now” Project**

This project helps young people learn more about climate change and actively participate in environmental protection activities. Regular sessions with psychological counsellors provide opportunities to share feelings related to climate anxiety and learn coping strategies.

Encouraging youth to directly participate in environmental protection activities is also effective in reducing climate anxiety. Community activities such as environmental clean-ups, recycling campaigns, and tree planting projects provide opportunities for youth to take active measures against climate change.

As the Earth continues to warm, climate anxiety is no longer just an individual issue but a problem for all humanity.

More active responses are required at the family, school, community, and government levels to help youth overcome anxiety caused by climate change and lead positive changes towards the future. It is time to seek a comprehensive approach and integrated solutions to this problem.

- Sharon Choi is director of planning at the Sunhak Peace Prize Secretariat in Seoul, South Korea.

Managing Household Hazardous Waste

By Dr. Adikwu Stephen Onum



Household hazardous waste is anything with a warning symbol on the label (such as flammable, corrosive, explosive, or poisonous), as well as anything unidentifiable. Some of the most common examples include appliances

containing refrigerant (fridges, freezers, etc.) and automotive wastes (motor oil, antifreeze, etc.)

Proper hazardous waste management can lead to significant economic benefits. It can reduce costs associated with waste disposal and potential fines for non-compliance. Moreover, it helps protect the environment. It prevents pollution, conserves natural resources, and contributes to a healthier and safer community.

Impacts on Humans and the Environment

Hazardous waste enters the environment through improper disposal, including dumping, landfills, and burning. It then contaminates the air, soil and water. Toxic fumes from burning waste, for example, significantly downgrade air quality. This can have a global warming impact. Also, long-term exposure to toxic air can lead to severe health conditions, especially respiratory diseases.

Toxic waste can contaminate both surface water and groundwater, impacting drinking water and marine life. The long-term accumulation of toxins in soil results in soil degradation and reduced fertility, with serious impacts on agricultural output and health.

As for impacts on human health, exposure to hazardous waste can, in the short term, cause skin irritation, eye damage, and poisoning. In the long term, it can cause cancer, neurological disorders, and respiratory diseases.

These pose significant risks to vulnerable groups including children, the elderly, and waste workers.

Wildlife and biodiversity are also affected by exposure to hazardous waste. Bioaccumulation in the food chain can lead to unhealthy disruptions in ecosystems.

Common types of household hazardous waste



Challenges and Sustainable Solutions

The main challenges in managing the disposal of toxic waste are a lack of public awareness and education, as well as limited access to disposal facilities, which leads to illegal dumping and improper handling. If large-scale mismanagement of such waste continues, the future implications are dire. It will lead to increased environmental degradation and higher rates of pollution-related illnesses, putting greater strain on healthcare and waste management systems.



Hazardous household waste should be safely disposed of at designated recycling centers or collection sites.

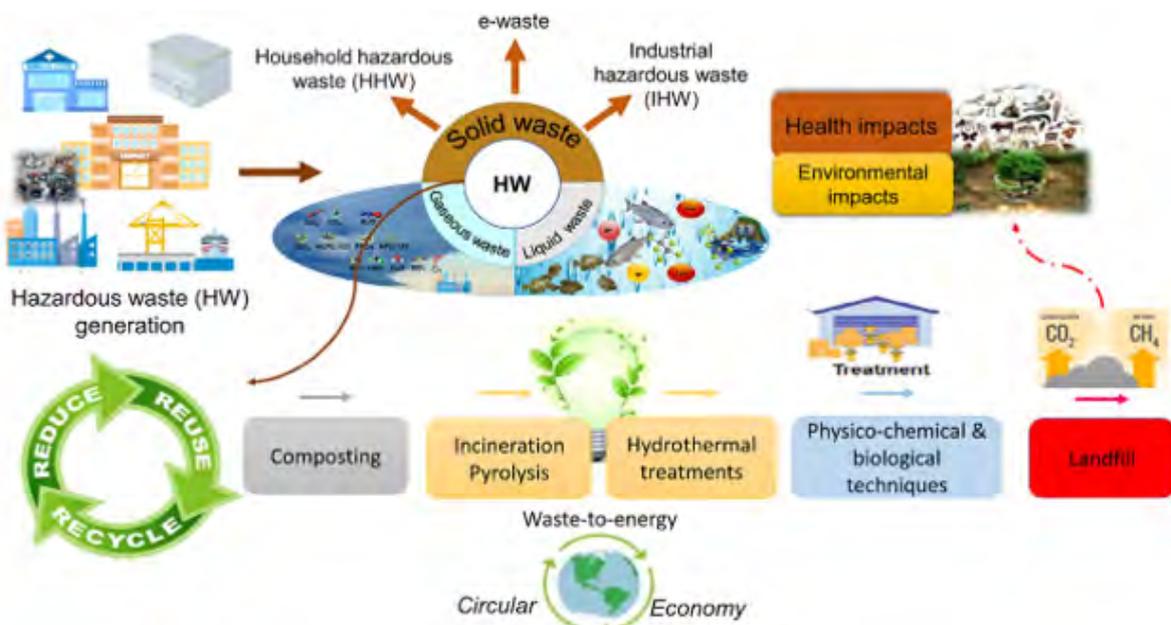
There are sustainable solutions that could bring about better management of hazardous waste. One is for authorities to impose stricter environmental regulations and enforcement. They can also encourage the use of non-toxic, eco-friendly alternative substances. Finally, more public awareness campaigns and educational programs are needed.

These include buying products with less packaging; choosing companies committed to sustainability; disposing of household hazardous waste properly; organizing waste collection drives; promoting recycling in the community; and advocating for local waste reduction and recycling policies.

Everyone can contribute to sustaining a healthy community and environment by taking responsibility for personal behavior, and advocating for collective solutions.

Awareness and responsibility are the keys to a cleaner, safer environment for everyone.

– Dr. Adikwu Stephen Onum is the president and CEO of Nano Georesources Ltd., which pioneers projects in resource exploration, environmental sustainability, and technological innovations. He is also the founder of the Dr. Adikwu Stephen Foundation, which provides access to higher education for less privileged youth in Nigeria, and a UPF ambassador for peace.



Local Residents Save Iconic Coastal Rocks in Azerbaijan

By Seyfulla Azer



The Absheron Peninsula is a semi-desert area devoid of forests, rivers, or mountains. Its beauty lies in sandy shores and picturesque rock formations, which play a crucial role in the region's eco-

system. In the northeastern part of the peninsula lies the village of Buzovna, where a rocky ridge stretches for about two kilometers along the Caspian Sea coastline.

These rocks are home to various bird species, such as seagulls and white cranes, and serve as a haven for seals and fish populations. Moreover, these natural landmarks have often been featured in films and music videos. According to Azerbaijani law, the coastline is public property and cannot be privatized under any circumstances.

However, after the chaotic 1990s and early 21st century, these unique rocks began to be illegally seized by local officials and wealthy individuals. By April 2022, only 100 meters of the two-kilometer rocky ridge remained accessible to the public. Taking advantage of

the Caspian Sea's receding water levels, land grabbers extended fences and expanded their holdings, angering local residents who longed to reclaim the land and restore its beauty.

The First Steps

In April 2022 I visited the coastline with my family, hoping to show my wife and daughter the legendary rocks. Instead, we found new fences blocking access to the area. Outraged, I filmed a video message and shared it on social media. Another resident, faced with a similar situation, did the same, and this marked the beginning of a collective effort. I then proposed organizing a cleanup event so that Buzovna residents could take responsibility for preserving the natural monument.

About 20 people attended the first cleanup event, clearing 100 meters of space free from trash. Despite challenges in removing the waste due to fenced-off areas, the activists recorded an appeal to the country's president, explaining the situation. The response was swift: in some locations, fences were moved back, giving hope for further progress.

Volunteers come out to clean up trash around the Buzovna Rocks and surrounding beach.





After clearing sacks of debris from the beach, volunteers show off the certificates of appreciation they received from an NGO, backed by the Ministry of Youth, for their community service.

Scaling the Initiative

The cleanup participants and I created a WhatsApp group to coordinate efforts and organize weekly events. Simultaneously, we began collecting signatures for a petition to the presidential administration. In total, 820 signatures were gathered, along with a video report, which I personally delivered to a presidential aide. The movement gained momentum, drawing attention from major television channels.

On June 22, 2022, Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev issued a decree to demolish illegal structures on the Buzovna Rocks. As a result, 11 out of 15 illegally seized areas were freed, leaving only four plots under illegal development.



Seyfulla Azer, with his daughter and neighbor, holding the certificate of appreciation for their service in leading the restoration of Buzovna Rocks.

Protecting a Natural Monument

Activists began gathering scientific assessments and documentation to submit a request for the rocks to be designated as a natural monument. With support from the Academy of Sciences and other institutions, the importance of the rocks was recognized. In May 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers and the Ministry of Ecology officially declared the Buzovna Rocks a natural monument, a significant step toward protecting them from further destruction.

Despite this achievement, as of January 13, 2025, the Buzovna Rocks’ territory has yet to be fully organized and protected as a natural monument. Activists continue to hold cleanup events, attracting participants from various Baku districts. This cleanup initiative is not only about protecting the rocks, but also about setting an example of a responsible and cultured approach to nature conservation.

– Seyfulla Azer is an environmental activist and a resident of Buzovna.

Interdependence: Science and Religion

By Dr. Dong Moon Joo



Historically, there has been a wall separating science and religion. Science investigates the world of nature, while God belongs to the world of religion. However, while science began by investigating external features of the tangible, material world, its explanations have been increasingly relying on the existence of intangible fields and energies – such as quantum fields and bio resonance – ultimately seeking to explain the First Cause.

Religion, on the other hand, started by declaring the existence of a Creator and has been uncovering the internal attributes of humans and nature. Thus, science seems to be ending up where religion began, and the two have a reciprocal relationship in exploring the universe.

In 2020, the Hyo Jeong International Foundation for Environmental Peace began a series of conferences on the theme “Science and God.” The purpose is to explore the trajectory by which these two fields of inquiry – science and religion – find their meeting point.

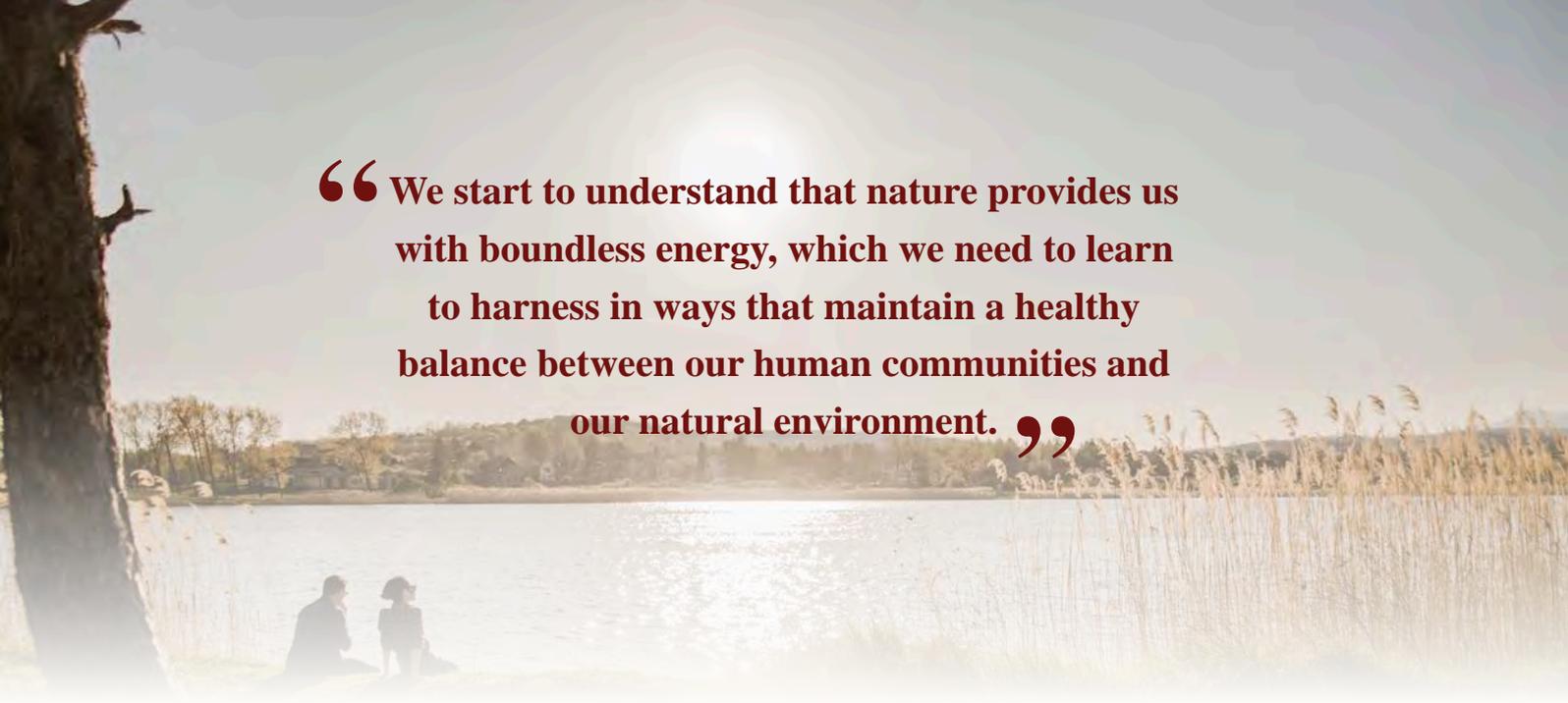
The first conference uncovered a surprising reality, as described by Dr. William Keepin of the Satyana Institute in Boulder, Colorado. He described “a major paradigm shift that is emerging at the frontiers of science today and will accelerate in the near future toward what is

sometimes called a ‘postmaterialist’ paradigm in science.” He noted that science has yet to explain the nature of the mind and consciousness, or the reality of death.

The second conference reaffirmed and added substance to the viewpoint that we are at the threshold of a scientific revolution. A major feature of this revolution is the concept that consciousness, and not matter, is primary in the universe.

The study of consciousness has several ramifications. For example, it shows that the mind is not a simple product of the brain, but it interacts with the brain. Moreover, it shows that we are all interconnected with one another and with our natural environment. Once we realize this, we can have a genuine connection of heart with our surroundings, motivating us to exert proper stewardship over the environment and to live in peace with one another.

In the third conference this line of thinking was advanced, covering several key points. First, postmaterialism is not only related to the study of consciousness but also extends to spirituality, affirming that we are spiritual beings. Second, we are all interconnected with one another and with our natural environment. Thus, if we harm others or the environment we are harming ourselves. Also, phenomena that are called anomalous because they cannot be explained by materialist philosophy are actually quite common in everyday life.



“ We start to understand that nature provides us with boundless energy, which we need to learn to harness in ways that maintain a healthy balance between our human communities and our natural environment. ”

The conference also covered amazing discoveries in frontier science that are helping us with healing illnesses – such as the use of various devices and techniques to treat imbalances in the human energy field, as explained by Dr. Christina L. Ross – and novel technologies that can produce energy without releasing greenhouse gases – including undersea turbines powered by ocean currents, geothermal power plants that tap into the earth’s molten magma, and graphene harvesters that store sustainable energy on tiny silicon wafers, as explained by Dr. Thomas F. Valone.

We start to understand that nature provides us with boundless energy, which we need to learn to harness in ways that maintain a healthy balance between our human communities and our natural environment.

We have come to recognize that scientific research has its limits, and science based on a materialist philosophy is not enough to protect and preserve the environment. Rather, by treating nature as sacred and expressing divine love toward all things, we can ensure a bright future for our planet and all its inhabitants.

The scientists involved in these conferences, and others working with a similar mindset, have made tremendous progress toward the shift to a postmaterialist worldview. To expand this to the general public requires combined efforts of those working on academic, educational, socio-economic and political levels. This paradigm shift will open great possibilities in almost every field of human endeavor, giving us cause for optimism that, in our future world, humans and nature will thrive together, living in symbiotic harmony.

– Dr. Dong Moon Joo is chair of the Hyo Jeong International Foundation for Environmental Peace, and chair of the International Conference on Science and God (ICSG). This content is compiled and edited from his remarks at the three ICSG conferences from 2020-2022.

Our Sacred Bond with Nature

Excerpts from an Interview with Dr. Lisa Miller



At Columbia University Teachers College, I started The Spirituality Mind Body Institute to intentionally put spirituality first. That is because there is this deep way of being through which we will renew our way of

living on our gorgeous, loving, guiding Earth through our awakened awareness.

We need to know who we really are to one another and who we are to all emanations – like rays of the sun – our fellow living beings in nature. When I speak to my students at Columbia on this point, I say we are a “point” and part of a “wave.” We are each distinct and unique. We have different, zipped-up, bio bodysuits and GPS coordinates, and we are, indeed, part of the mind and body of life, one sacred consciousness field – whitecaps on one ocean.

This generation, Gen Z, has grown up with an implicit understanding of a unitive reality, whereas, forty years ago, we picked up a telephone that was connected by a wire; everything had a mechanistic route. Gen Z has spent their whole life pulling information out of the air, or being connected to people at radically different GPS coordinates simultaneously.

So the notion that we inhabit one unitive consciousness field, and yet are distinct points in a three-dimensional sense, is very much resonant and at home with them. Gen Z hungers for a language, for a system of meaning, for an academia, a science that you show up in and share that lived reality. And I think you have people now – activists, scholars, people of great wisdom – who are bringing forward – verbally, explicitly, through action and activism, and walking the walk – a unitive reality.

Attraction to the Sacred

Gen Z is very quick and hungry for this, and when the conversation in other settings might slide into the materialistic and mechanistic, I watch their eyes glaze over because it does not resonate with their reality.

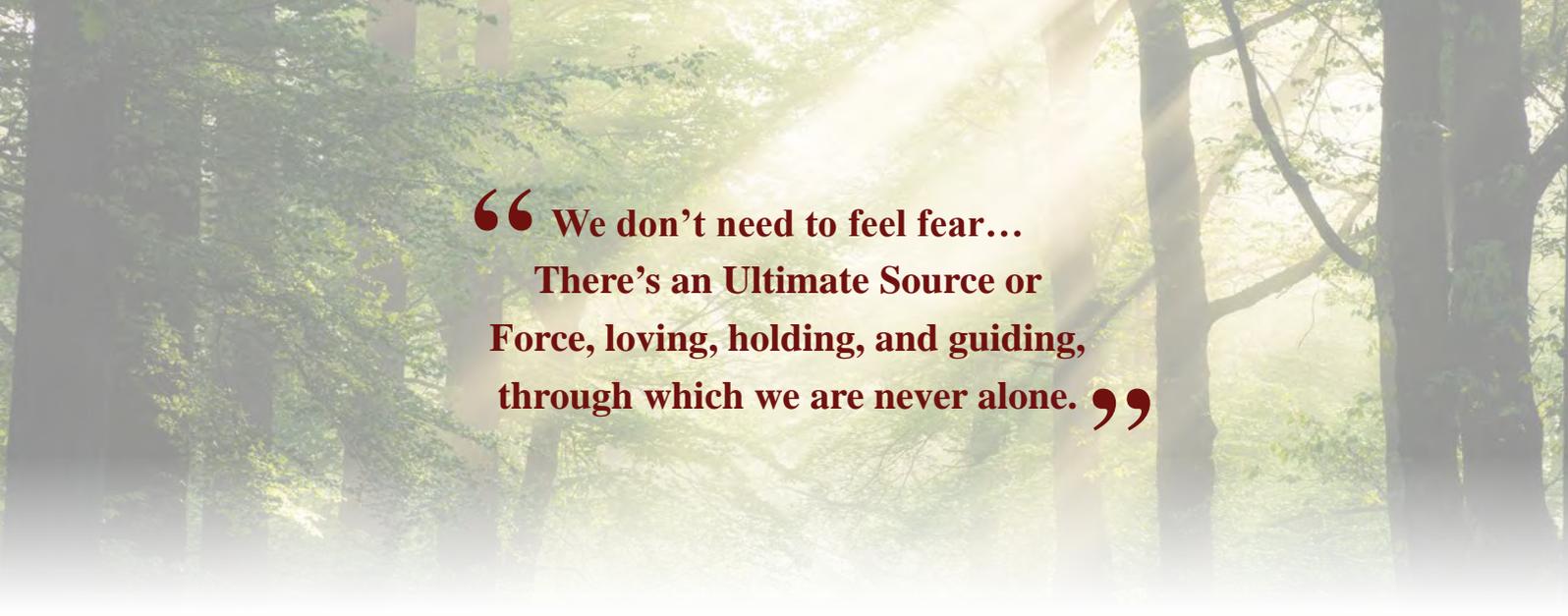
So we are poised and ready to go. I think where Gen Z might continue to expand and flourish, and perhaps where we can be helpful is in the realization that every bit of this unitive field is sacred.

We don't need to feel fear; we're not going to fall through an existential hole into oblivion. There is something in the deep fabric of reality, who I call God and others might say Source or Hashem, Jesus, the Universe, Allah, whatever one's word might be. There's an Ultimate Source or Force, loving, holding, and guiding, through which we are never alone.

And because the very resource that nature absorbs is loving, holding, and guiding, not only will we not erupt or existentially face Hell, but our way forward will unfold if we allow ourselves to be an open system to be used with what is our birthright, the neuro docking station that is awakened awareness.

I share in my book, *The Awakened Brain*, that every one of us is born innately with this neuro docking station, an innate transcendent awareness. We are built for the sacred, transcendent relationship through which we receive guidance, as well as direction for our frightened, seemingly isolated moment in which we are actually loved and held. This is our birthright and how the universe is built.

I think we then step into the urgency of understanding our environment more deeply,



**“ We don’t need to feel fear...
There’s an Ultimate Source or
Force, loving, holding, and guiding,
through which we are never alone. ”**

just as we are built – to be loving, holding, guiding to one another and other beings. Not only do we have a transcendent relationship, not only do we feel God’s presence through our neuro docking station, but it is the very same neuro docking station through which we perceive immanence, the presence of all sacred force in every being – in every tree, in every ray of sunlight, in every fish and bird.

Misguided by Science

So, where is God? Well, God is here and in this beautiful planet. God is everywhere. And this is something that inhabited human knowledge for so many thousands of years; we knew this. And then we got a little bit frozen out and lost sight of this. And no one was more lost than perhaps the sciences in the 20th century when we moved away from a deep intersubjectivity with all living beings, where nature was not just beautiful, but we were emanations of nature. Nature was our guide, our teacher, our parent, our child for whom to care. Nature is part of our family.

The sciences got very lost in the 20th century and objectified nature. And nothing, I think,

was a worse lesson for humanity than to dissect a frog in fifth grade to say “this life only has knowledge for you when it is dead and cut open on the table.” That is a real violation of the life of that living being, the little frog, and it is also a violation of the growing child who actually would learn far much more, I’m sure, if she or he were to watch the frog and befriend the frog and learn how the frog handles weather when it’s cold and how it learns to work with its own little babies and tadpoles. That would have been a lesson in relationship, and certainly a relationship in sustainability.

We need to revisit how we teach science. We need to revisit how we teach who we are in our relationship to Earth in just about every academic discipline. That is because the “silent” curriculum is the one that is infused with radical materialism, a lack of intersubjectivity, and radical objectivity that, in the end, really leads people to feel lonely, and isolated, and willing to harm the Earth. We end up thinking that we are stampeding on an inert Earth, as opposed to being in a deep, connected relationship, learning from and watching Earth, while giving something back to protect Earth.

*– Dr. Lisa Miller is professor of psychology and education at the Teachers College and founder of the Spirituality Mind Body Institute of Columbia University. She is also the bestselling author of *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and Our Quest for an Inspired Life*. This content is extracted and edited from an interview, published in *The Earth & I* online magazine.*

UPF Co-hosts Panel at Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, DC

By Larry Moffitt

For the third year in a row, UPF and The Washington Times Foundation (TWTF) served as major co-sponsors for the International Religious Freedom Summit, which took place at the renowned Washington Hilton Hotel in Washington, DC, on February 4-5, 2025.

The panels and speakers included some of the most credible and influential voices for religious freedom in the world. These voices include Amb. Sam Brownback, former US ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom; Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, co-chair of the summit and of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea; journalist and human rights defender Mr. Marco Respinti; attorney Mr. Tatsu Nakayama; Mr. Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the US House of Representatives; Mr. Tomihiro Tanaka, president of the Family Federation for World Peace-Japan; and Dr. Michael Jenkins, president of UPF International, among others.

Speakers drew attention to threats to religious freedom around the world, including pressure

from authoritarian regimes such as China and Iran, the plight of Christians in Ukraine after almost three years of war with Russia, and the expansion of Islamic extremism across Africa.

A highlight of the event was a dinner sponsored by UPF/TWTF, which was attended by all of the influential people mentioned above. On that occasion, FFWPU-Japan president Mr. Tanaka explained with clarity and thoroughness the situation of the Japanese government's persecution of the FFWPU, which began following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in July 2022. The FFWPU became a target when the assassin claimed that his motive was related to Mr. Abe's relationship with the organization. Since that time, rather than investigating the assassin's links with other groups that oppose religion in general, the authorities have relentlessly investigated the FFWPU.

The dinner and speeches were followed by an Interfaith Water Ceremony, which was done for the first time at the IRF Summit. Everyone was deeply moved, as it demonstrated the hosts' shared commitment to embrace all religions, and the participants' determination to unite in protecting one another, aspiring to win religious freedom for all.

As Dr. Lantos Swett commented, "This lovely ceremony we just witnessed with all the various faith communities pouring their water together into that shared bowl really has distilled in a beautifully symbolic way what the ... summit is all about: coming together in unity, sharing our faith, and combining forces to defend the rights of all of us."

— Larry Moffitt is secretary general of UPF-North America and executive director of The Washington Times Foundation.



TWTF director Mr. Thomas McDevitt, Amb. Sam Brownback, Mr. Tomihiro Tanaka, Dr. Katrina Lantos-Swett, Mrs. Reiko Jenkins and Dr. Michael Jenkins at the UPF/TWTF program.

UPF Chairman Pays Courtesy Call to Nepal's Prime Minister

By Kahee G. Dhakal

Dr. Charles S. Yang, UPF's international chairman, visited Kathmandu, Nepal, on February 13-14, 2025, to meet with high-level officials including Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and Hon. Dev Raj Ghimire, speaker of the Nepalese Parliament.

Prime Minister Oli welcomed Dr. Yang and a UPF delegation, including Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, member of the House of Representatives of Nepal, in his office on February 13. Dr. Yang invited the prime minister to the World Summit 2025, and also urged him to contribute to efforts aimed at reducing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Prime Minister Oli extended heartfelt greetings to Mother Moon, recalling his fond memories of meeting her during the Asia Pacific Summit in Nepal in 2018.

He also expressed his hopes for the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula and emphasized the importance of preserving peace in the region. The prime minister highlighted that violence and conflict hinder progress, and reaffirmed his commitment to fostering peace through diplomacy and

strong, friendly relations with both North Korea and South Korea.

Hon. Dhakal highlighted the activities of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), which he chairs in the Asia Pacific. UPF-Nepal President Mr. Santosh Kumar Paudel and Mr. Rajesh Bajracharya, the prime minister's secretary, were also present at the meeting.

In his meeting with Speaker Ghimire, Dr. Yang introduced the concept of the Inter-parliamentary Speakers' Conference (ISC) that will be inaugurated at World Summit 2025, which will take place in Seoul from April 10-14. He emphasized the organization's potential role in fostering international dialogue and cooperation.

Dr. Yang also had a productive meeting with the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Federal Parliament of Nepal, Hon. Raj Kishor Yadav, at his office, concerning diplomatic efforts to promote regional peace.

– Kahee G. Dhakal is a staff member at the UPF Asia-Pacific Secretariat.



Dr. Yang and the UPF delegation meet with Nepal's Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli in his office.

Moscow Art Exhibition: “Everything Begins with Love”

By Dmitry Samko

Paintings, poetry and people – this was the magic formula for an enchanting evening on February 22, 2025, hosted by the Moscow office of UPF-Russia as the closing ceremony of a nationwide exhibition, “Everything Begins with Love,” organized by the International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP).

Ms. Tatiana Kuznetsova, the coordinator of IAACP, served as the evening’s host. In her opening remarks she reminded everyone that creativity is the power to move people by giving shape to invisible thoughts and feelings in the form of art.

The exhibition provided a space for profound reflection on the theme of love, invoking inspiration and deep emotions. Each painting was accompanied by a poem, either written or carefully selected by the artist, and included in the catalog. The exhibition demonstrated that art knows no boundaries: a painter can be a poet, and a poet can be a painter.

Artist Ms. Natalia Naumova presented two portraits of her children, symbolizing that love primarily manifests within the family. She highlighted the importance of preserving family values and passing them on through art.

Mr. Konstantin Krylov, secretary general of UPF-Eurasia, explained that the exhibition’s title originated in a line from Russian poet Robert Rozhdestvensky, “Everything begins with love,” which carries a deep meaning. He noted that these words complement the biblical verse, “In the beginning was the Word,” as love itself is the driving force of life and the foundation of human existence.

Ms. Svetlana Savitskaya, prolific writer and founder of the Golden Pen of Russia National Literary Award, shared her thoughts on how

words and art have the power to create and inspire. She emphasized that literature, poetry, and painting have always been inextricably linked, and this exhibition was a vivid example of that unity.



Visitors discuss a painting while touring the exhibition.

One of the highlights of the evening was the presentation of Ambassador for Peace certificates to outstanding cultural and artistic figures. Mr. Dmitry Samko, head of UPF-Moscow, presented this honor to Ms. Oksana Buryakova, a member of the Union of Artists of Russia whose works have appeared in numerous exhibitions, including solo art shows; Ms. Olga Namestnikova, vice president of the Princely Council, educator, and long-time director of a music school; and Mr. Andrey Alexandrovich Tyunyaev, a Russian writer, poet, journalist and academician of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences.

The closing ceremony was accompanied by musical performances, creating an atmosphere of harmony and beauty. Ms. Kuznetsova concluded the event with words of gratitude to all participants, emphasizing that art continues its mission beyond the exhibition hall, and that love is what inspires, unites, and fills every work of art with meaning.

London Celebration: “A Canvas of Cultures”

By Dr. Sangita Swechcha

Talented artists, poets and musicians gathered in London for the “Canvas of Cultures: A Celebration of Art, Poetry, and Music” hosted by UPF-United Kingdom on January 25, 2025, to celebrate the transformative and unifying power of creativity across cultures. The program was organized by the International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP), and highlighted how art, poetry and music transcend boundaries to foster dialogue, empathy and peace.

Special guest Mr. Ian Pelham Turner, an international TV broadcaster, graced the event, along with Duchess Nivin ElGamal of Lamber-ton, patron of UPF-UK, who gave the welcoming address. Representing UPF-UK, Secretary General Mr. Robin Marsh and Director Ms. Margaret Ali spoke about UPF’s activities and the role of the arts in building bridges of understanding.

Dr. Sangita Swechcha, chair of IAACP, explained the program’s purpose, saying: “This event takes us on a journey through the transformative power of art. We are privileged to hear from extraordinary individuals whose works transcend boundaries and speak to

the universal values of peace, resilience and unity ... Today, we are not merely spectators; we are participants in a collective celebration of creativity and culture. Together, we are making a difference.”

The event featured a discussion with Ms. Amina Art Ansari, a celebrated British Pakistani artist with works in Windsor Castle’s Jubilee collection, and Ms. Rhoslyn Singh, a 20-year-old artist from Nepal whose work reflects British and European influences.

Poets from around the globe, including Ms. Shahd Karaeen from Palestine, Dr. Rupak Shrestha from Nepal, Ms. Nayeema Mahjoor from India, and Britain’s Ms. Catherine Tuit, shared verses on resilience, heritage and unity. Musical performances by Italian opera singer Ms. Marisa Di Muro and oud player Mr. Saife Al-Naffak from Iraq captivated the audience with their unique talents.

The IAACP and UPF-UK concluded the program by thanking all attendees and participants for their support in making this event a success, demonstrating the profound impact of art, poetry and music in fostering peace.



Ms. Shahd Mahnavi recites her poem, accompanied by oud player Mr. Saife Al-Naffak.



Artist Ms. Rhoslyn Singh is interviewed by Global Broadcaster Ian Turner.

World Interfaith Harmony Week 2025

UNITED KINGDOM



Speakers from different faiths share the stage during an event focused on building dialogue, trust and spiritual collaboration between religious believers, at UPF-UK headquarters in London on Jan. 28.

ITALY



An audience listens to speakers from the Islamic, Jewish, Christian and Buddhist traditions speaking on “Interreligious Cooperation – A Foundation for Human Fraternity and a Culture of Peace” in the beautiful Zuccari Hall of Palazzo Giustiniani in the Italian Senate in Rome on Feb. 4.

PERU



Religious leaders take part in a Blessed Water Ceremony for Life and Peace during an interfaith program at the Congress of the Republic of Peru in Lima, Peru on Feb. 20.

FINLAND



UPF members and friends gather in their new Peace Center in Helsinki, Finland, on Feb. 8, for an interfaith program on the theme “Toward Harmony in the Human Family.”

THAILAND



Thai youth visit the Wat Ban Thung Seri Buddhist temple in Bangkok on Feb. 15, as part of a program including visits to a church and a mosque, to promote understanding of different faith traditions.



AUSTRIA



Representatives of Muslims, Christians and the Austrian Foreign Ministry participate in an interreligious conference at the United Nations in Vienna on Jan. 31, on the theme “Harmony among Religions and Cultures – A Precondition for World Peace.”

CANADA



Religious and community leaders of different faiths gather at the headquarters of the Montreal chapter of UPF-Canada for a luncheon and discussion on promoting social harmony on Feb. 1.

Student participates in a speaking competition on “Interfaith Harmony: Path to World Peace,” organized by UPF-India in collaboration with the Peace Club of Mata Sundri College for Women at the University of Delhi, on Feb. 6 at the college’s seminar hall in New Delhi.

NEPAL



Prominent religious leaders and representatives of faith communities gather for an interfaith breakfast hosted by UPF-Nepal in Kathmandu on Feb. 9.

CZECH REPUBLIC



Religious representatives from different faiths gather in the chapel of the Community of Christians in Prague on Feb. 10 for a program on “The Role of Religion in the 21st Century,” organized by UPF-Czech Republic and the Community of Christians.

INDIA





Universal Peace Federation

6F, 319 Cheongpa-ro, Yongsan-gu
Seoul, South Korea, 04308

+82-02-3279-4100, 02-3279-4105
info@upf.org • www.upf.org

Copyright © 2025, Universal Peace Federation.

All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part prohibited except by written permission.

UPF is an NGO in General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.