

Nepal's first interreligious, interracial "Multicultural Family Education Festival"

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Nepal's first interreligious, interracial "Multicultural Family Education Festival" was held in the capital city of Kathmandu...

Pledging to "create a peaceful world through true families," the festival was broadcast live from 10 stations, including the national broadcasting station.

The story begins on a main street of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, also known as "the world's roof." The day is clear, but a thick cloud of dust flies toward the parking lot. Drivers honk their horns at motorbikes and pedestrians blocking their way. On both sides of the noisy, crowded street, a procession of Nepali citizens dressed up in colorful saris and traditional clothing forms a long line.

The procession is making its way towards Nepal's national stadium, the Dasarath Rangasala Stadium. In the noise and bustle of the crowd, the faces of the people are flushed with excitement. It takes barely over an hour for the stadium's seats to be filled over halfway. The atmosphere can be likened to the excitement before a K-pop concert or a Korean pro baseball opening game.

This scene is the site of the "Multicultural Family Educational Peace Festival 2015," hosted by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Family Federation) and the Universal Peace Federation in Kathmandu on February 21st. This festival was advocated by the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon as a way for the citizens of the world to sing together in unison for peace, and to establish true families who can overcome the barriers of nation, race and religion.

The UPF is a special advisory organization of the current UN Economic and Social Council, and was founded in September 12th, 2005. The UPF is an international NGO that currently manages a network of 154 nations and peace ambassadors around the world. "True love is UPF's ideal and philosophy" is the catchphrase of the organization, which works to play the role of soft power in connecting world leaders from political, religious, academic, press, cultural and sports fields in order to solve conflicts both large and small.

Emphasizing religious and familial peace through pure families

People have brought their entire families along with them to participate in the festival, under the banner, "Let Us Create a Peaceful World through Pure Families." With 70,000 participants from all over Nepal,

this festival is said to be the largest multicultural event to ever be held in Kathmandu. Huge balloons float in the sky around the stadium, and the center stage is bedecked with flowers and the national flags of 22 countries, building excitement for the event. 10 broadcasting stations, including the national broadcasting station, aired the event live, and dozens of reporters competed for coverage of the event.

“This is the 18th mass marriage ceremony to be held in Nepal,” said Family Federation Nepal President Ek Nath Dhakal (Nepali Constituent Assembly member, age 39), who took charge of the preparation for the day’s events. “Recently, Nepali society has seen a lot of conflict between married couples. I hope that the relationship between husband and wife can be improved through the mass marriage ceremony. We have been receiving a flood of requests for this event, so we have been working on preparing it since December,” he added.

He also explained that this was the first interreligious and interracial to be held in the history of Nepal. Nepal is a diverse nation, home to 126 minorities who speak 123 languages. Nepal, which is about two-thirds the size of the Korean Peninsula, has a population of a little over 30 million people. The constant conflicts between races have been pointed out as an obstacle to the development of Nepali society. The gathering of 80 different races at today’s events is a very uncommon sight in Nepal.

The diverse crowd of attendees bedecked in traditional garb was a splendid sight to see. When a parade of students in varied, multicolored traditional clothing did a turn around the stadium, the crowd of many colors was united in beaming smiles. Every new traditional dance performed on the stage drew cheers from the audience. Kunal Sanumaya (12) and Nepal Suntali (12) waited backstage in their red saris and beautifully painted lips. “Our hearts are racing with the thought that we are able to represent the diverse people of Nepal,” they said in trembling voices. It was heartwarming to watch students wearing the traditional costumes of the many races of Nepal gather together and sing the Nepal national anthem at the top of their lungs.

Today’s event was also regarded as a conduit to seeking harmony between the many religions of Nepal. Eight representatives from Hinduism (which accounts for about 80% of Nepal’s religious population), Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, Baha’i, Jainism and Sikhism came onto the stage in interreligious ceremonial clothing to perform the united holy water ceremony for the brides and grooms. The pouring of water into one place symbolized the pursuit of harmony between religions and cultures. “I look forward to the way in which the marvelous philosophy of peace will lead the people of Nepal towards tolerance, coexistence and harmony,” said Naramaya Illista (32), who attended the ceremony.

Almost 3,000 existing couples participated in the re-blessing ceremony. They may have practiced different faiths, but they all made the same promise to raise true families and work together to bring about a world of peace.

Family Federation Asian Continental Director Chung-Shik Yong and his wife served as officiators of the ceremony on behalf of the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, as seven representative couples took their places on the stage for the marriage ceremony. After the holy water ceremony, in which they pledged to “be reborn as new families and live transparent lives,” the officiators asked the couples four questions, including “Do you pledge to become pure families centered on God?” The couples answered “Yes!” in a loud, resounding chorus. Then, the rings, representing the exchange of vows, were exchanged between the brides and grooms. The ceremony then ended with the proclamation of holy marriage, signaling rebirth for all of the families present. “I think that many people of Nepal were moved by the idea of protecting purity and linking many families together as one through the marriage ceremony,” said Bhidak Bhandari (27), who participated in the marriage ceremony. The Nepali government was very supportive of the “Multicultural Family Educational Peace Festival,” as was evident from the attendance of Vice President Parmanand Jha. “When I met Rev. Moon in 2010, he promised to work together with us to revive the values of the family and to bring peace to Nepal and the world,” he said. “Without true love in the family, peace cannot come about, and a nation of love cannot be built,” he continued. After the event was over, he expressed his satisfaction with reporters. “I was able to feel that the family traditions are alive and well even among our youth,” he said. “I hope that our Constituent Assembly, which is in its primary stages, will be able to create a new constitution which reflects morality and family values.” (Referenced from a separate interview)

Then, Family Federation International Headquarters Director-General Sun Jin Moon stepped up to the platform to deliver the Head of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon’s message. “Although our religious backgrounds may be different, our sacred essence and our hope for love, happiness and peace will ring throughout the world,” she said. “This blessing will become the foundation upon which the ideal true family can begin its journey.” She then urged the participants to become the “veterans of peace who create a peaceful world” and emphasized each individual’s responsibility in creating an ideal true family.

“We must promise to fulfill our individual responsibilities, act morally and live a life of sacrifice for the sake of others, become the embodiment of love in our couples and families, and fulfill the responsibility

of always ruling over creation. In order to accomplish these things, we must create a heart of global culture—a culture of unity in which all of humankind lives as one family under God in love. Through this culture, we will bring peace and prosperity to the entire world.”

“I think that today’s event will play an important role in impeding the steady breakdown of the family,” said former Police Chief Bahadur Shrestha (58), whom we met at the stadium. “Most of Nepali citizens are Hindi, but I feel that they will be able to internalize the peace principles of Rev. Moon.”

The Need for a New Method of Cooperation between Nations

The South Asian Peace Initiative (SAPI), International Conference, Universal Peace Federation and PPC Nepal co-hosted the “The Increasing Challenges from Extremism to Democracy: Issues and Responses” International Conference from February 19th to the 22nd. The event was attended by about 300 people, including Nepal Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, former Nepal Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, former Nepal Deputy Prime Minister Upendra Yadav, Nepal Parliament Member Ek Nath Dhakal, India Parliament Member Bhagat Singh Koshyari and other current and former political leaders from 22 nations.

Nepal Prime Minister Sushil Koirala gave the keynote address on February 20th at the SAPI International Conference. “Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi reminded us that even in the worst of circumstances, we should always search for peaceful solutions. The principles of non-violence and living for the sake of others taught by the saints are the keys to solving all of the problems faced by all nations.”

This year’s event is the 16th of its kind to be held by the South Asian Peace Initiative, which began holding international conferences under the banner “Innovative Approaches to Peace through Responsible Leadership and Good Governance” in 2005 in Lumbini, the birthplace of Sakyamuni (the Buddha). These conferences have been attended by Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal Prakash Man Singh, Mahatma Gandhi’s descendant Tushar Gandhi, South and Southeast Asian heads of state, parliament members, diplomats, educators and women leaders who gathered together to seek ways of bringing about peace in the world.

In his welcoming address, Family Federation Asia Continental Director Chung-Shik Yong criticized religious egotism. “Extremism seeks to sacrifice others for the benefit and profit of the individual. It is a very dangerous and destructive philosophy, as it seeks to use any methods necessary to reach the goals of the individual,” he noted. The interreligious harmony which is so fundamental to the Family Federation can find its origins in the couple, the origin of all humankind. “In the beginning of history, all humankind was ‘One Family under God.’ Unfortunately, our first ancestors (Adam and Eve) acted selfishly and misused the precious gift of conjugal love. The original, ideal love of God was abused for selfish purposes,” he continued. The Family Federation seeks to build world peace through a new method of cooperation between nations and through international marriage which transcends the borders of race and religion. “In this age in which nations are being brought closer together, we must now create a new system of cooperation between nations centered upon ‘One Family under God,’ in order to bring about technological, economic and geopolitical growth.”

Nepal Prime Minister Sushil Koirala made an appeal for a democratic solution to the political conflicts of Nepal. “I cannot count the number of Nepali citizens whose lives were sacrificed by extremism and combat. The common love between the nation and its citizens can bring about the solution to our problems,” he said. “When our patriotism transcends political party, race, class and all other dividing groups, and transforms into a love that encompasses our entire nation, we will be able to live together peacefully as one Nepali family. We must all work hard to listen to the opinions of those with different beliefs than us with calm minds and open hearts.”

The Family Federation, which has two seats in the Nepal Parliament as the Family Party, has carried out peace movements in Nepal since 1975. In November, 2005, Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon visited Nepal and founded the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in Kathmandu.

Nepal also participated in the 120 day “120 Nations World Peace Tour” carried out by Rev. and Dr. Moon, in which they founded UPF chapters in countries around the world. They also held peace talks with Prime Minister Adhikari and Vice President Parmanand Jha. Rev. Moon is considerably well regarded in many parts of Nepal for his evangelistic work. “Most Nepali citizens have heard of Rev. Sun Myung Moon,” said Kathmandu citizen Kaju Depp Raju (27). “Even if they do not know much about the actual principles of the Family Federation, they know about it as a ‘peace organization.’”

The Family Federation has worked hard to expand its political influence in order to bring about the settlement of its peace movements. One of the fruits of this effort is the formation of the Family Party. The Family Party is a minority party which occupies only two spots in Nepal’s parliament, but it is said to be more active and effectual than any other party.

Family Party Parliament Member Ek Nath Dhakal was selected as the first Minister for the Ministry of Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation. “Although racial conflict has been at the center of Nepali society, this large-scale event is a chance for the interracial peace movement to really gain footing,” he said. When asked about the role of the Family Party in the Nepali government, he answered, “Although we only occupy two seats in Parliament, we accomplish much more than our seats’ worth. We work hard to educate our citizens about peace in the family. Our influence among the 31 parties of Nepal’s Parliament can be likened to that of the top four influential parties.” The Family Party is currently making plans to announce the establishment of “Parents’ Day” as an official national event in Parliament.

“The Family Federation has been carrying out many activities for the sake of peace in the global village, including the 3,000-couple International Mass Blessing Marriage Ceremony, held in Korea in March, the Wonmo Pyeongae Foundation Scholarship Awards Ceremony, in which about 2,000 students from around the world received a total of 10 billion won in scholarships and the World Media Conference, which utilized the media to find peace in Northeast Asia,” said a representative of the Family Federation. Expectations of the outcome of these events are high for the Family Federation, which transcends religion, race and national borders to carry out peace movements.

“Even though we come from different religious backgrounds, we share the same genuine essence and the same love, joy and hope for peace which will ring throughout the entire world,” he continued. “The blessing is the foundation upon which the ideal true family can begin.”