

Peace Embassy

SOUTH LONDON CHRISTMAS PARTY

South London, UK , 15th December 2012



It was an enchanting evening at the South London Peace Embassy when more than 100 UPF associates, guests and Ambassadors for Peace gathered to celebrate the annual Christmas party of UPF (Universal Peace Federation), WFPW (Women's Federation for World Peace) and IRFF (International Relief and Friendship Foundation) organisations on Saturday, 15 December 2012. With an exceptional mosaic of reports, entertainment and one of the jolliest buffets in memory, the evening provided a classic example of inter-faith unity in all its forms.

As mistress of ceremonies, Margaret Ali, spiced the night with glamour and humour and first introduced Lance Gardiner as co-ordinator of the South London branch of UPF, which has experienced an extremely active year. This included conferences on Wellbeing and Sustainability and commemorations of United Nations Days of Families and International Peace, the latter centring on the Korean Peninsula. A highlight was the series of character education forums and small group discussions promoting an exchange of views and opinions. Lance emphasised the work of Father Moon in seeking reconciliation between North and South Korea.

There was a particular focus on North Korea, as one of the recipients of an Ambassador for Peace award from UPF was Joo Il Kim, who defected from the country in 2005 and who is now director of the North Korean Residents Society. He touched a humorous chord in the audience with an ironic anecdote, for this was his second award after being so honoured by the late premier of North Korea, Kim Jong Il. During the proceedings, other Ambassador for Peace awards were presented by UPF to Frederick Clarke, director of Mighty Men for Valour, and by WFPW to master therapist Kapila Patel.

Dolores Read, chairwoman of South London WFWP, spoke about the organisation's 20th anniversary which focused to a great degree during the year on women of faith. One of the messages presented was that we all have a guardian angel. Among the year's speakers was Doris Richards, who talked about her visits to Palestine and Israel as an ecumenical observer. In August an interfaith conference focused on how to bring peace to our society. Coffee mornings featured cross-cultural awareness, a therapy demonstration by Mrs Patel and even music from Handel. Finally there was another interfaith conference in November. A very busy year, according to Dolores. And there was also a Bollywood dance by Tavisha!|

The tremendous work by the WAIT team in Africa was described with a slide presentation by Ashley Crosthwaite (IRFF) with particular emphasis on the Destiny Junior School in Uganda, which is deeply supported by South London. Ashley passionately spoke about the efforts to challenge HIV and Aids in sub-Saharan Africa with the performing arts group WAIT visiting schools in rural areas to illustrate the widespread problem through music, dance and theatre. Volunteers from Europe visited this year to help build classrooms in the Destiny school for 90 children.

Ashley spoke of the need for funding to develop the Destiny school further by adopting a child or teacher, and particularly the building of a kitchen. The focus next year will be on Zambia and Malawi as well as Uganda. Ashley summed it all up as a "labour of love" for children who have only one school meal a day. A raffle was held to support the Destiny school during the evening with a host of gifts as prizes, while an anonymous donor was so enamoured of the song, 'Have Yourself a Merry Christmas', by Dong Soon Chen, that he offered to contribute a hundred pounds if she sang another melody. Of course, the young lady duly obliged.

In a beautiful night of entertainment Dong Soon Chen was joined by many other singers, including the South London Band of Melanie, Carmel, Mia, Natalia and Theo, putting everyone in the festive mood with their sweet rendering of 'Silent Night'. These young performers also sang modern hits and Elanna gave a lovely presentation of 'Alleluia'. A cute Bollywood-style dance routine was performed by Malaika Naim from the Sabrang Ladies Group and finally the 'The Rose Dance' was captivantly performed by the WAIT team of Melanie, Natalia and Elna-Marie.

No celebration would be the same without Nigel Barrett's quiz show and this event was no exception with tricky maths questions, geographical conundrums and magical mind-benders that tested the audience to the limit. Needless to say, no team emerged with a complete halo! The beautiful feast that rounded off the evening was a great tribute to the generosity of those who contributed and arranged it so delightfully, making it a night to remember.