

Peace Starts with the Middle East summer workshop took place in Shile, Turkey

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The Middle East Region is a special place that connects people heartistically across language and cultural divides, but it is very difficult for these people to physically meet each other. Some countries are at war and people are not allowed to cross certain borders; however, we made a determination with the motto of our workshop: "Peace Starts with Middle East". This time our summer workshop took place in Turkey, Shile on July 23 to 27, 2018.

The purpose of the Middle East Blessed Family Workshop is to give members that are isolated and separated a chance to unite and overcome many barriers. For many of them, it was the first opportunity to leave their own country and meet members from around the world. The workshop is also a catalyst that inspires them to carry out Tribal Messiah activities; more than 20 guests were among the participants this year, including close ambassadors for peace and relatives of Blessed Families. They all received Divine Principle education as a condition to attend the workshop and as one member from Israel testified, it was a powerful motivator for them to initiate DP workshops in their nation.

As most of the members are struggling financially in our region, we had to find funds to support them and bring them to the workshop. Our fervent desire to make this workshop happen led us to launch an online fundraising campaign and through God's blessings and the support of many brothers and sisters around the world, we were able to make it.

The workshop is in its third year and each time it has expanded. In 2016 there were about 30 participants and staff, and the following year this increased to 80 people, thanks to the addition of Iranian members. This time we had 123 participants and staff, with people from 21 nationalities representing the following countries in the Middle East: Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE, and Yemen.

The workshop culminated in the Blessing Ceremony on July 26, which was the first Blessing held for previously married couples in the Middle East. At this historic occasion, four couples received the Blessing, two from Iran and two from Israel. They had all received Blessing education and committed to the five steps, including the 40-Day separation period and the three-day ceremony. The Regional Chairman Dr. Balcomb and his wife, as the representatives of True Parents, presided over the ceremony, which included the holy juice, holy water, indemnity stick and benediction prayer.

The Blessing was preceded by a purity pledge for more than 40 youth and unmarried people who promised to stay pure until marriage. They made this vow in front of Heavenly Parent, True Parents and their brothers and sisters in the Middle East.

Later that afternoon we held a Peace Road event for the whole region; all workshop participants walked around the area carrying banners and chanting peace slogans in Farsi, Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish and English. The excitement was infectious and some lifeguards on the beach joined in, carrying a huge Turkish flag with them.

The workshop brought hope and new life to many people. One Iranian German participant gave a moving testimony about her experiences, saying that this is the first time she understands the Unification Movement after getting to know us three years ago and she has been born anew. Now she could really believe that peace would come to the Middle East.



Reflections

Greetings from Iran, I deeply feel that I want to bring all the blessing and grace that I received here in this workshop with my people and my tribe. Actually, True Parents are the greatest gift to the world. This workshop gave to me a great chance to enjoy and learn many precious things about my True Parents and Divine Principle. I have learned that "love" is beyond all the borders, all the cultures and all the religions. – A. Motlagh, Tehran, Iran

As an 18-year-old teenager, under the cultural influence of Europe, Asia and the Middle East, it was a struggle to have a clear vision while growing up. Now to have a model is so satisfying and enlightening. Seeing the models and principles in action at the workshop was a whole different level of spiritual realization. People were awesome, lectures were inspiring and clear, and activities were fun. What else is there to ask for in the Middle East in the middle of all these conflicts around the world? I am so glad to be a part of this. Looking forward for more events including both physical and spiritual world in it. Thank you everyone involved in the making of this experience. – A. Kahya, Istanbul, Turkey

First of all, I want to say "Thank you very much for all your investment and sincere heart" to Mr. and Mrs. Angelucci and Natascha and Donelly. I can't imagine how much hard work it was to fundraise and organize everything. All lectures and testimonies and HDH were excellent. All material of lectures were very high quality and I felt in our county it is very useful also. This workshop is the third time and every year it is increasing in the number of participants. It is really amazing. As a 1600 Japanese missionary to Israel it was most heart moving workshop. I determined to work hard more and invest to guide the people. First "Peace Starts with Me" I will start. – H. Morita, Nazareth, Israel

The idea of peace is inside my mind and heart. I always dreamed about peace among people around the world disregarding religions or nationality. In this workshop, I felt connected to my idea about peace. I see so much disasters around me especially for the children who are suffering from all kinds of moral harassment. This is pushing me to do my best to help them and bring peace to the region. I hope that after this conference, together with FFWPU we can bring peace among the Arab and Israeli children in my country. Thank you for such a wonderful experience of hope. – K. Wahbi, Jerusalem, Israel