

## UPF Kathmandu, Nepal webinar COVID-19: The Role of Faith-based Organizations

Binod Dangi  
June 10, 2020



Kathmandu, Nepal -- UPF-Nepal held its first national "Peace Talks" webinar, on the theme, "COVID-19: The Role of Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders," on June 10, 2020, in partnership with the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD).

A total of 150 attendees -- including religious leaders, representatives of faith-based organizations (FBOs) and religious institutions, academicians, government officials and Ambassadors for Peace -- participated in the more than 70-minute virtual conference.

The program started with warm greetings and an introduction from the moderator, Dr. Milan Ratna Shakya, president of the IAPD-Nepal, who afterwards offered a prayer with a shloka, a poetic form used in Sanskrit.

Dr. Shakya continued with remarks on the theme of the webinar. He encouraged the cooperation of religious leaders and emphasized that the role of religious leaders during this time is to advocate the common values and teachings of the world's religions and become the conscience of the people. He also said that this is the time to pray and humble ourselves in front of the living God.

Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, chairman of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), in his welcoming remarks, commended UPF-Nepal for launching the "Peace Talks" webinar series and thanked the IAPD-Nepal for hosting this first webinar.

He emphasized the ideals of interdependence, mutual prosperity and universally shared values that were discussed during UPF's recent World Summit 2020, held in February in Seoul, Korea. Several hundred different religious leaders and representatives of FBOs participated in the conference to show their solidarity, which has become more relevant as the world passes through the coronavirus pandemic. Hon. Dhakal also shared that in midst of this crisis, UPF encourages the following best practices: unity, cooperation, dialogue and compassion.

The first panelist was Dr. K.B. Rokaya, president of the National Council of Churches of Nepal. He underscored the need for all religious leaders to reflect on their own religious traditions and teachings and come out with the common and mutual understanding of the depth of the COVID-19 crisis and the role of religious leaders in comforting people who are deeply distressed and grieving during this time.

He also called on local governments to open up religious sites and temples so that people can come for spiritual guidance that can bring calm, tranquility and harmony to their lives. Due to the lockdown, religious leaders have not been able to directly serve those in need.

Mr. Pandit Keshab Prasad Chaulagain, secretary general of the Interreligious Council of Nepal, highlighted that the pandemic reminds us of our interconnectedness as everyone is affected by it.

The Most Venerable Bhikkhu Maitri, president of the All Nepal Buddhist Association of Nepal, said that in the past there were pandemics that killed thousands of people and that there was one during Buddha's life. One story says that Buddha and his entourage of disciples went to the city of Baisali, where the pandemic spread, to chant Ratana Sutra (Sutra of Blessings) to eradicate the pandemic. After the chanting and spiritual compassionate healing, the pandemic was eliminated. He further added that the world today

is very materialistic and is forgetting spiritual values -- and stressed the importance of spiritual values, religious teachings and the guidance that has been given by UPF co-founders Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

Mr. Moulana Nazrul Hussain Falahi, president of the Assalam Society in Nepal, said: "In this pandemic, the best thing [that we can] do is to [recognize] what we can do as religious leaders for our brothers and how we [can] become a blessing to them."

**UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION - NEPAL**  
**PEACE TALKS**  
**WEBINAR**

**"COVID-19 Pandemic: Role of Faith-based Organizations and Leaders"**  
**"कोभिड-१९ महामारी: धार्मिक क्षेत्र तथा अगुवाहरूको भूमिका"**  
**June 10, 2020, Kathmandu, Nepal, 11:00 AM**

**SPECIAL REMARKS:**  
**Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal**  
 Chairman, UPF/IAPP Asia-Pacific  
 Former Minister, Government of Nepal

**MODERATOR**  
**Prof. Dr. Milan Ratna Shakya**  
 President, Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) Nepal

**PANELISTS:**

**Rev. Santosh Kumar Paudel**  
 Director, UPF/FFWPU South-Asia

**Dr. K. B. Rokaya**  
 President, National Council of Churches Nepal

**Mr. Keshab Prasad Chaulagain**  
 Secretary, Interreligious Council Nepal

**Ven. Bhikkhu Maitri**  
 President, All Nepal Buddhist Association

**Mr. Nazrul Hussain Falahi**  
 President, Assalam Society

**Mr. Piya Ratna Maharjan**  
 Secretary General, Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) Nepal

**RAPORTEUR**

Organized by Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) Nepal

He said the government should allow all religious sites, such as masjids, temples, churches, synagogues and monasteries, to remain open during the lockdown so that these spiritual places can provide services to those in need.

He also emphasized that the role of religious leaders during this pandemic is "to give people healing."

Rev. Santosh Kumar Paudel, director UPF-South Asia, urged religious leaders to work with leaders of their nation to form a religious assembly or a council of religious representatives within the structure of the United Nations.

He added that the UN, recognizing the important role of FBOs and religious leaders in addressing global issues, has urged all religious institutions, FBOs, interfaith leaders and religious groups around the world to work together to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Rev. Binod Dangi, secretary general of UPF-Nepal, thanked all the panelists for their time and

valuable sharing and the attendees for their participation.

Mr. Piya Ratna Maharjan, secretary general of IAPD-Nepal, read questions from the audience to the panelists during the QandA session.

The webinar concluded with closing remarks by Dr. Shakya.

