UPF Montreal, Canada Honors more than 70 Ambassadors for Peace

Robert Duffy
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Montreal, Canada – UPF-Canada held its second annual appreciation luncheon for Ambassadors for Peace on May 24, 2025, at Hotel Ruby Foo's in midtown Montreal. More than 70 Ambassadors for Peace and friends attended the four-hour program, with **Mr. Robert Duffy** and **Ms. Chantal Viau-Lee** serving as co-hosts.

Dr. Franco Famularo, president of UPF-Canada, introduced UPF's global work, highlighting the World Summit conference in April in Seoul, Korea. Federal member of parliament **Hon. Samir Zuberi** then addressed the gathering, emphasizing that peace comes through patience, perseverance and consistency.

Senior advisor and former chair of UPF-International, **Dr. Thomas Walsh**, currently serving as rector of the HJ International Graduate School of Peace and Public Leadership in New York, gave a global historical overview of the universality and pervasiveness of religion. He highlighted its common components – mythos, logos, practices, theodicy, heroes, and community solidarity – which shape cultural and ethical life, as well as human identity, with significant social impact throughout the world.

Next was a musical interlude by **Mr. Mishael Eusebio,** a Filipino-Canadian tenor who has worked with operatic organizations from L'Opéra de Montréal to the Houston Grand Opera Company to the Banff Opera Centre, symphonic orchestras, and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. A graduate of the Juilliard School of Performing Arts, Mr. Eusebio was a finalist in the American National Opera Association Auditions 2020. He sang two arias – "The Prayer" and "Nella Fantasia."

The keynote speaker, **Mayor Alan DeSousa**, has been mayor of Saint Laurent since 2001. He has received various awards for his sustainable development initiatives. A longtime friend of UPF and an Ambassador for Peace, Hon. DeSousa explained how spirituality and faith play critical roles in his borough, with its diverse population of around 100,000, and where some 60 languages are spoken.

Mr. Robert Duffy, secretary general of UPF-Canada, then expanded on the conceptual framework of the Ambassador for Peace program, comparing them with ambassadors representing countries or international bodies. While the latter represent national or organizational interests, he said, the former represent the Divine, reporting and receiving guidance and inspiration accordingly.

The program featured testimonies from three prominent Ambassadors for Peace who shared presentations on their work for peace and social well-being.

Mr. Al Abdon, a leader in the Filipino community in Montreal, shared about his life as an immigrant, his work as a Canadian Reserve Forces Instructor, a technician in the Chemistry Department of Concordia University, and his dedicated role in helping to build the Federation of Filipino Associations of Québec, the Filipino Golden Agers, and the United Filipino Seniors, all of which continue to be active.

Ms. Penny Rankin is vice-president of the Conseil Provincial des Femmes du Québec, as well as vice-president in charge of children and youth at the National Council of Women of Canada. In 2020, she co-founded Canadians4Action, an informal collective campaigning for legislative reform to protect children from online abuse. Their efforts were instrumental in persuading MasterCard and Visa to suspend payment processing for PornHub, which has been accused of allowing children to appear in pornographic videos on their platform for years, with limited recourse for removal.

An active member of the Anglican Church of Canada, Ms. Rankin spoke of her work as co-chair of the Canadian Council of Churches' Task Force on Sexual Exploitation, among other roles for the Anglican Diocese of Montreal. Several days after our meeting, she assumed the role of president of the National Council of Women of Canada, continuing her long-standing commitment to advocacy, leadership, and community involvement.

Long-time UPF friend and Ambassador for Peace, **Rev. Samuel King-Kabu,** who will soon retire as pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church congregation in downtown Montréal, gave an update on his multi-year project in Ghana, east of the capital of Accra. His interfaith retreat center for clergy is almost completed, and he explained his plans to continue to develop healthy interfaith relations between Christian and Muslim clergy, leaders of the two prevailing religious communities in Ghana.

Finally, the new Ambassador for Peace nominees were introduced:

– Mr. Boufeldja Benabdallah, international expert in renewable energy, co-founder and spokesperson for La Grande Mosquée de Québec, from Québec City.

– Mr. Larbi Bennouna, Chairman and CEO of SETYM International, a management training institute specializing in capacity building for international development, since 2014. He is the Honorary Consul of the Democratic Republic of Congo for Montréal.

– Ms. Gabriella Guilbeault, vice-president of Femmes Internationales Murs Brisés, and involved in the Interfaith Forum for Peace, a Canadian Centre for Ecumenism program.

– Rev. Rosemary Lambie, retired executive minister with the United Church of Canada, who oversaw

450 communities of faith throughout eastern Canada.

– Mr. Éric LeReste, long-time journalist and producer at Radio-Canada, the national media outlet in the French language, and national coordinator for the International Brahma Kumaris Organization in Canada.

– Ms. Kadiétou Savadogo, King Charles III Coronation Medal recipient and Executive Director of the Centre Communautaire Bon Courage.

– Dr. Denitsa Tsvetkova, co-director of the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism and founder/coordinator of the Interfaith Forum for Peace. She holds a doctoral degree in practical theology from the Université de Montréal.

– Ms. Gigi Vidal, member of the Comité des Organismes sociaux de Saint-Laurent for 45 years, co-founder of the Comité Interculturel de Saint-Laurent, community affairs representative for Baha'i Montréal.

Each nominee received a framed certificate, and photos were taken, first of each recipient, then all Ambassadors for Peace present, and finally all the more than 70 participants. Lunch was then served, and opportunities for networking rounded out the program.