

UPF Canada: Montreal Conference Models Interfaith Harmony

Franco Famularo
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Montreal, Canada – To mark World Interfaith Harmony Week, on February 8, 2026 – a cold day typical of Quebec – 40 people gathered to reflect together on the challenges facing our societies in preserving freedom of belief, which is central to the harmony of any society. Those attending in person in Montreal were joined via Zoom by participants from across Canada – Nova Scotia, Toronto area, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Québec City and Vancouver.



Among the participants were leaders from a variety of faith traditions: Christian (Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, Focolare Movement, United Church), Muslim, Hindu, Ahmadiyya, Baha'i, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Unificationists.

Reflections were propelled by four speakers. The first, **Rev. Rosemary Lambie**, interim minister of Mount Royal United Church and retired executive minister of Regional Councils in Quebec and Eastern Ontario, gave a deeply felt, colorful presentation based on a life devoted to hers and others communities. She offered an uplifting song, through which she called very gently but also very clearly for commitment, unity, and shared love among communities of faith and toward others.



Ms. Hanan Masuod, founding president of Together to Protect Our Children, began by emphasizing that faith traditions share common values. She pointed out, however, that although Canada is recognized as a land of freedom, believers feel insecure in the face of a secular government that challenges faith and religious values.



Mr. Franco Famularo, president of UPF-Canada, stated that freedom of religion, even in countries that proclaim themselves to be free, is under threat. His message was a call to cooperate beyond differences and strengthen freedom of belief for all. His argument was based on the following points:

- Freedom of belief is a universal right.

- Interfaith harmony is essential to true freedom of belief.
- Diversity is a strength, not a threat.
- Freedom applies to individuals as well as communities.
- Engaging in dialogue prevents abuse and promotes accountability.
- Most religious traditions support freedom of belief.



Ms. Sherry Marceil joined the panel from Vancouver. She is a member of the Board of Directors of Canadian Interfaith Dialogue, involved in the British Columbia Interfaith Summit Council, and chair of the British Columbia Interfaith Women's Council. Reinforcing the points already discussed, she reiterated the importance of interfaith dialogue and its contribution to society as a whole.



Dialogue flowed during a Q and A session, and the speakers fielded questions from across the country. **Mr. Alan Wilding**, director of UPF activities in Western Canada, expressed confidence in UPF-Canada's ability to be a significant leader in the field of interfaith relations in this country.

The speakers, as well as many of those present, were already actively engaged in interfaith dialogue. Their approaches reach beyond the conceptual, and it was clear that UPF has become a key player in this development. The meeting exuded a very convivial atmosphere. The networking period allowed people to exchange contact details and invite one another to collaborate on each other's projects.

A palpable sense of hope is building in the realm of interfaith action, as promoted by the United Nations with this year's theme: "Harmony: We All Have a Role to Play."