

## UPF Activity in the Middle East

David Fraser-Harris  
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*David Fraser-Harris - UPF in Middle East*

David Fraser-Harris, Universal Peace Federation's (UPF) Middle East Secretary General, described some of the UPF's activities in the region during a rare visit to London last night.

As well as explaining his own experience in the region he described the UPF humanitarian and interfaith activities in Jordan and Lebanon. Having lived through the reverberations of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts he commented on the clumsy interference from the West in Muslim nations. On Syria he had perceived communities living together for many years with 'surface tolerance'. Tensions grew as the Arab Spring developed in other nations until in 2011 this 'surface tolerance' was not sufficient to hold the nation together.

David outlined humanitarian projects that are ongoing in Lebanon and Jordan. Fusayo Irikura in Jordan, through the Women's Federation for World Peace, supports Iraqi and Syrian refugees. She is well aware of the needs of the refugees in the Zadari camp and those who have to rent housing outside the camp.



Thomas and Hermine Schellen, who coordinate UPF Lebanon, are mobilizing Syrian youth refugees to participate in the Beirut Marathon on November 10th that bring all Lebanese communities together. They also support an important Druze community medical centre.

David Fraser-Harris also mentioned several youth projects that promoted better inter-community understanding in the region that had taken place. The Religious Youth Service and Play

Football Make Peace were two prominent David Fraser-Harris Talkorganisations involved in these projects.

David explained that the precious nature of religion in the region had protected, so far, the fourth most holy site in Islam, the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, from damage, despite the ferocity of the civil war in Syria. This is one indicator that religion has a place in the solution of the crisis.

The role of interfaith dialogue to assist the resolution of Middle Eastern crises is being promoted by UPF, along with other groups. David announced the upcoming consultation on solutions for the Syria crisis to be held in Amman, Jordan, with a number of prominent international religious and academic figures.

David added that UPF has a history of interfaith conferences in the Middle East. He pointed to previous conferences in Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian West Bank.

He explained that although the UPF had had extensive delegations (now more than 40 visits have been held) visiting the region to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict better and promote reconciliation he had not been able to participate in them because of his Syrian residency. He therefore largely omitted this area from his talk.

There followed a few questions and comments and a time for personal discussions and networking.