

Wellbeing and Sustainability - UPF South London Conference

Lance Gardiner

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“We need to restore people’s interconnectedness through reviving our sense of being part of a community”, concluded a small but enthusiastic group of nearly 20 Ambassadors for Peace and UPF associates who convened at the Peace Embassy, Thornton Heath, on 17 March to explore the topic of Wellbeing and Sustainability. Introducing the theme, Lance Gardiner, as MC for the proceedings, highlighted Prime Minister David Cameron’s directive in November 2010 to the Office of National Statistics to devise measures of wellbeing which would eventually feed back into informing and directing national policy. Professor Satish Desai OBE, opened the speaker program with a highly informative and at times humorous presentation on the use of concrete in sustainable construction. He outlined how the industry is attempting to reduce its environmental impact through reduction in concrete usage and choice of sustainable materials given that 10 per cent of the world’s energy output is utilized in building and construction.

The second speaker, Nigel Barrett emphasised the role of community in creating a sense of wellbeing through shared values and closeness to nature, and mentioned the cohousing movement which is making inroads into restoring a communal way of living, which at the same time reduces the demands on the environment. The final speaker Sheridan Mangal spoke about what wellbeing means to youth, and how to engage young people to promote a sense of wellness that goes beyond the individual. In a very hopeful message he spoke about creating a circle in which people looked after each other as a model of wellbeing at various levels embracing families, communities, nations and the world.



The speaker presentations were followed by group discussions which centred on global measures of the quality of life such as the Human Development Index (HDI), a conventional measure of progress used by the United Nations, and the Happy Planet Index (HPI), which also takes account of the ecological footprint. One group concluded that in the affluent countries of the West people were never satisfied with their material wealth and were constantly caught up in a tide of consumerism whereas in less developed nations near the top of the HPI rankings, people learned to live within their material limits in greater harmony with the environment. Towards the end of the programme an Ambassador for Peace award was presented to Ricardo Bhola for his contribution to working with youth. The conference closed with announcements of upcoming events followed by refreshments which were enjoyed by all participants in a spirit of fellowship.

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