

# UPF-WFWP Forum in Paris

Let us draw a freer and friendlier France

Paris, France, 24. January 2015



Following early January terrorist attacks, a large debate began in France about the protection and prevention against the spread of violence: police action and security measures on one hand; a reassessment of values taught in schools on the other hand.

Responding to the situation, the UPF and WFWP chapters in France organized a forum in Paris on the theme of « Let us draw a freer and friendlier France ». Each of the two sessions was designed to raise fundamental issues at stake: Interreligious dialogue and the role of religions in a peaceful society; and the role of family and school in building a culture of peace. The two themes are meant to become the basis of ongoing discussion in further meetings throughout the year.

Peace Ambassadors, new guests and UPF volunteers, about 80 people, managed to pack themselves in a humble, 70 seat hall. Pictures of the major saints of world religions decorated the wall – Islam was represented symbolically, by respect for Muslims.

The event began with a candle lighting ceremony: Four candles representing Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam were lighted in turn by a representative of each faith, who then read an excerpt of their holy scriptures. Participants listened respectfully, as the ceremony set the tone for the meeting.

UPF-France secretary general Jacques Marion gave opening remarks, recalling the long tradition of interreligious dialogue and action set by UPF Founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon. He emphasized why the issue of the family, which was absent from the current national discussion on values and education, had to be brought to the fore as the original nurturing place of true love, which is the essence of religious teaching and the core value uniting all religions.



The first session theme was “Religions as the conscience of the nation”. The first speaker was Monseigneur Jacques Gaillot, Bishop of Partenia. A Catholic bishop, Mgr Gaillot is also an activist for human rights; he visits prisons and is well known in France for his actions against exclusion. Standing in the middle of the assembly, he spoke on the spiritual values conducing to solidarity in society, charming participants with wisdom and heart.



The second speaker was Mr. Larbi Haouat, president of the Association for solidarity through integration by education, language and culture, a member of the NGO committee at UNESCO. As a Muslim scholar, he gave some perspective on the discussion about freedom of expression, but also shared with sincere dismay how Muslims felt misunderstood and disrespected in light of the recent events.

Laurent Ladouce, head of the “Centre culture et paix” in Paris, in charge of research at UPF, then gave an insightful presentation on the values underlying a nation of peace. Drawing from French philosophical tradition and putting it in the perspective of Unification philosophy, he outlined the principles of co-existence, mutual prosperity and universally shared values.



Many questions were raised in the discussion that followed, related to the current debate in France and the “Charlie controversy”. Imam Achour, an imam from a local district in Paris and a disciple of late Syrian Grand Mufti Ahmed Kuftaro, came several times to the podium to share the viewpoint of Islam.

The second session, on the Role of the family and education in building a culture of peace, was headed by Women’s Federation for World Peace representatives. Mrs. Fatiha Bemmousat, vice president of the French Union of Muslim Women,

spoke movingly about the recent events and the pain it caused in families. She recalled her own experience of terrorist years in Algeria, moving the audience with her sincerity.

Mrs. Brigitte Wada, WFWP president in France, spoke on the way family education affected youth, how dysfunctional families often nurtured youth that became involved in violence. She introduced the philosophy of character development through the four realms of heart, putting powerfully in perspective the levels of interaction and responsibilities within the family.



Jacques Marion concluded the presentation by presenting the Unification philosophy of education, emphasizing the need for heart and norm education as the basis for academic education, relating it to the wider discussion going on in the country about “republican values” in schools, and calling for an interreligious education.

This led to a very lively debate about family relationships, the role of women in Islam, the role of the father in current society, the husband and wife relationship, etc. Many viewpoints were expressed, from the Jewish scholar to the local imam, the Muslim businesswoman, the school teacher, the family counselor, all passionate but respectful.

The meeting ended on a high note, with the feeling that the four realms of heart should be one of the ongoing themes of discussions this year, together with diverse religious viewpoints, in our joint monthly UFP-WFWP meetings - and should then be conveyed to the public.