

The Austrian chapter IAPP of inaugurated at the United Nations Office at Vienna

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Vienna, Austria -- The Austrian chapter of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace was inaugurated at the United Nations Office at Vienna.

To mark the 2017 International Day of Peace, UPF-Austria organized a conference at the Vienna International Centre (United Nations building) on the theme "Perspectives for Sustainable Peace in Europe: The UN Vision, the Role of Parliamentarians and Civil Society." The September 15 meeting was also the occasion to launch the national chapter of IAPP.

The event was co-sponsored by the United Nations Correspondents Association Vienna (UNCAV), The Best of the World Network, the International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies (IFIMES), and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an organization affiliated with UPF.

The conference hall was filled, and the audience of 200 included representatives from the whole political spectrum of the Austrian Parliament, members of the diplomatic corps, and NGO representatives. Three parliamentarians came from Italy, Ukraine and the Czech Republic.

In his welcoming remarks, Peter Haider, president of UPF-Austria, described the two purposes of the meeting. The first was celebrating the UN International Day of Peace, with its theme for 2017 of "Together for Peace" based on UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and the message of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

The second purpose of the meeting was inaugurating the Austrian chapter of IAPP, a UPF initiative providing a forum for parliamentarians from all nations and political parties to search for solutions to local, national and global problems in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation. In 2016, a regional launch of IAPP was held on every continent, including a conference at the Parliament of the United Kingdom in September 2016 for Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East. After the Global Assembly of Parliamentarians held in Seoul, Korea, in February 2017, national chapters have been launched throughout the world.

The first session of the conference, on the theme "Perspectives for the 21st Century: Migration, Refugee Crisis, European Identity," was moderated by Mrs. Heather Wokusch of the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Vienna.

Mr. Ismail Balla, the chief of the Vienna UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, began with a report on UN efforts to control the arms trade. Austrian parliamentarian Nikolaus Berlakovich of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), a former minister of agriculture, then spoke about the issue of peace in the Western Balkans. Padre Alejandro Solalinde, a Catholic priest and human rights activist from Mexico, spoke about the need to embrace refugees with humanity and respect for human diversity.

Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, president of UPF for Europe and Eurasia, gave an insight into the UPF founders' philosophy of peace and described some practical projects they launched for peace and reconciliation, such as the Korea-Japan Undersea Tunnel.

The final speaker was Mrs. Nina Novakova, a member of the Czech Parliament, who described the challenge Europe is going through regarding its values and identity.



The second session, on the theme "The Role of Parliamentarians for Sustainable Peace in Europe," was moderated by Jacques Marion, the vice president of UPF for Europe. The session began with a video of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' International Day of Peace message.

The panel comprised four members of the Austrian Parliament representing different political parties: Mrs. Karin Doppelbauer from NEOS -- The New Austria and Liberal Forum; Mrs. Petra Bayr from the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ); Mrs. Barbara Neuroth from the Austrian Green Party; and Dr. Andreas Karlsböck from the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ).

The four speakers described their parties' perspectives on the need for intranational and international communication, beyond party lines, and described their contribution to sustainable peace through projects in areas such as climate change, ocean protection, aid and trade, or co-development.

Mr. Roberto Rampi from the Italian Parliament spoke about the problem of refugees and the need to adapt to the changing nature of our identity in a multicultural society. In conclusion, Mr. Marion read the main points of the resolution to launch IAPP in Austria, and called for all parliamentarians to join in a commemorative photo and sign the resolution, which had been mounted on an easel on the stage.

Dr. Dieter Schmidt, the vice president of UPF-Germany, moderated the final session on the theme "Europe-Eurasia and the Balkans: Building Trust and Securing Cooperation." Mrs. Christine Muttonen, member of the Austrian Parliament and president of the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly, spoke about the assembly's efforts to deal with conflicts in Europe, such as that in Nagorno-Karabakh. She pointed to art and culture as important tools for resolving conflicts.

Dr. Alena Kupchyna, the ambassador of Belarus to Austria, spoke about her country's European identity and its commitment to mediating conflicts in the region through a "New Helsinki Process." Ambassador Dr. Peter Schatzer, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), gave his perspective on various crises in Europe, from refugees to cooperation in the Balkans.

Professor Viktor Ielenskyi, a parliamentarian from Ukraine, gave a detailed account of his country's conflicts with Russia and Ukrainians' efforts for resistance. The final speaker, Mrs. Marijana Grandits, from the University of Vienna's Human Rights Research Centre, spoke of her experience in promoting human rights in the Balkans, and insisted that sustainable peace could appear only on the foundation of restorative justice.

The prestigious venue of the UN, the expertise of the speakers, and the challenging but relevant theme of sustainable peace contributed to the success of the conference and to an auspicious launch of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace on the UN International Day of Peace.

The International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace was launched by the Universal Peace Federation so that parliamentarians can apply their experience and wisdom to solving the world's problems. Parliamentarians from around the world have remarked on the value of increased cooperation in addressing the critical issues that we face on the local, national, regional and global levels.