

UPF Europe and the Middle East ILC2022 Focuses on UN Reforms

Alan Sillitoe
April 6, 2022



Europe and the Middle East - An interreligious council at the United Nations was one of the proposals discussed during Session II of ILC2022.

The webinar "How Can the United Nations Be Re-empowered to Fulfill Its Mission and Prevent Future Threats to World Peace?" was held jointly on April 6, 2022, by the Europe and Middle East (EUME) and the Japanese branches of UPF.

The first three sessions of ILC2022 were held on April 6 and 7 under the theme "Contemporary Challenges to the World Order: The Search for Solutions."

A fourth webinar, "The International Peace Highway Project and Eurasia," was held on April 12, organized by UPF-Russia.



Session II had approximately 100 viewers on Zoom, 120 on Facebook, and the recording on Vimeo and YouTube continues to attract viewers.



[Mrs. Marcia De Abreu, Secretary General, WFWP Europe](#) The session was moderated by Marcia De Abreu, the secretary general for Europe of Women's Federation for World Peace, an organization that is affiliated with UPF.



[Mr. Mark Brann, Vice President UPF Europe and Middle East and Director of ISCP Europe and Middle East](#) Mark Brann, the EUME vice chair of UPF and the EUME director of the UPF association International Summit Council for Peace, introduced the session by explaining that we would be discussing important structural and cultural changes that might make the UN better able to fulfill its fundamental purpose of enabling the nations of the world to live in peaceful and productive coexistence.

the General Assembly.

The current crisis in Ukraine has brought the topic of UN reform to the fore, Mr. Brann said. He explained that in the year 2000, the late UPF co-founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon delivered a very important address at the UN, in which he proposed the establishment of a religious assembly on a par with



[Mr. Masayoshi Kajikuri, Chairman, International Highway Construction Foundation; Chairman, UPF Japan](#) Masayoshi Kajikuri, the chair of UPF-Japan and president of the International Highway Foundation, continued with an introduction to UPF-Japan's activities. In its efforts to help end the crisis in Ukraine, UPF-Japan is holding prayer meetings with religious leaders, academic conferences with intellectuals, and fundraising activities.



[Amb. Nobuyasu Abe, Former UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs; Former Commissioner, Japan Atomic Energy Commission](#) The first speaker was Ambassador Nobuyasu Abe, a former UN under-secretary-general for disarmament affairs and a former commissioner of the Atomic Energy Commission of Japan. Ambassador Abe described the three main roles of the UN in which it can work to prevent the recurrence of war and to keep peace - advocacy, mediation, and legal force.

Advocacy does not have a direct force to stop fighting, he said, but only long-term, indirect influence to move nations and people to act. In the UN, this role is performed mainly by the General Assembly, but also sometimes by the secretary-general and the Security Council. A recent example is the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, created by the General Assembly, which came into force in 2021. In this sense, an interreligious assembly could promote peace in calling for the prevention of threats to peace.

The second role is mediation, which is practical action to avoid confrontation. Usually it is the secretary-general or his special representative who performs this role in a discreet manner behind the scenes to avert confrontation or stop fighting. It is not easy to succeed in these mediation efforts, Ambassador Abe said, but there are some successful cases. For example, when former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari was UN under-secretary general (1987-1991), he succeeded in stopping fighting in Southwest Africa and bringing independence to Namibia. However, there also have been some tragic cases, Ambassador Abe said.

Finally, there is the legal force of the United Nations, based on the UN Charter, but which very often is

violated. Indeed, if this principle were observed, the Ukrainian conflict would not have started, Ambassador Abe said. And because the permanent members of the Security Council have veto power, they can block decisions. This is also where the International Criminal Court comes into play, but Russia is not a party to this court.



[Amb. Makarim Wibisono, Former Perm. Rep. of Indonesia to the UN in Geneva, New York; Special Rapporteur on the situation of HR in the occupied Palestinian territories](#) The second speaker was Ambassador Makarim Wibisono, a former permanent representative of Indonesia to the UN in Geneva and New York, former special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, and former president of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Responding to the question of how the UN can help the present situation of an economic war between the United States and China, a pandemic, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and international economic stagnation, Ambassador Wibisono explained that already in 1986, then UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar complained about the disunity and lack of respect between the members of the Security Council, preventing good decisions from being taken.

Ambassador Wibisono gave the example of Myanmar, from where more than 600,000 Rohingya have moved to Bangladesh, with the UN being powerless to do anything about it, and Syria, where more than 600,000 people have been killed, creating a problem of migration in Europe. He also pointed to the disharmony between the high politics movement and the low politics movement.

He described how in 2000, when he was president of ECOSOC, he was requested by UPF to propose the creation of an interreligious assembly at the UN. This came at a time when the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and a unipolar system had come about. Along with UPF co-founder Dr. Moon, he believed that the creation of such an assembly, to exist alongside the General Assembly and Security Council, would enrich the UN and provide it with the wisdom needed to deal with some of these problems.

Ambassador Wibisono concluded by suggesting that perhaps this is the time to create such an interreligious assembly to enhance the mechanisms that don't work fully at the moment.



[Amb. Dr. Jesus \(Gary\) Domingo, Ambassador of the Philippines to New Zealand; Former Assistant Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines](#)

Ambassador Dr. Jesus (Gary) Domingo, the ambassador of the Philippines to New Zealand and a former assistant secretary of foreign affairs of the Philippines, seconded the call for an interreligious council at the UN, saying that as the UN has various bodies and councils for peace, development and humanitarianism, why not a body for faith?

"Given the continuing importance of faith and religion for the majority of mankind, it behooves the UN system to consider the establishment of an interreligious council," he said. In this context, he mentioned the Geneva Interfaith and Intercultural Alliance in Switzerland, whose activities included a model interreligious council for students, like the model UNs held around the world which simulate the UN General Assembly and other bodies.

Ambassador Domingo cited New Zealand's exemplary response to the Christchurch mosque shootings of 2019, saying it was high time the UN adopted a spirit of inclusivity and of welcoming rather than being wary of religion. Even if an interreligious council could stop just one death, it definitely would be a plus to diplomatic efforts at stopping violence and fostering harmony. As the Holy Quran states, "If you save the life of just one person, it's like saving all of humanity," he said.



[Bishop Munib Younan, Bishop Emeritus of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land; Former President of The Lutheran World Federation; Honorary President of Religions for Peace](#) Bishop Munib Younan, bishop emeritus of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, former president of the Lutheran World Federation, and honorary president of Religions for Peace, struck a more optimistic note in relation to the UN, saying that it had succeeded in some parts of the world in preventing conflicts, and that its programs have helped in many countries. However, it hasn't succeeded in other places. "Why couldn't it solve the problem in Ukraine or in the Palestinian territories, for example?" he questioned.

According to Bishop Younan, it is because the UN is not more powerful than individual governments. The veto system is a remnant of the imperialist era, he said. The UN's location in New York is also problematic. A location in Asia might be better. He mentioned Religions for Peace as an organization promoting the common values of religions which is situated close to the UN in New York. "Religion must be a force for solutions," he affirmed. For example, when negotiations on Jerusalem take place, the religious leaders should be involved.

He explained that in 2012, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who was then the UN high commissioner for refugees, invited all major religious leaders to Geneva to discuss the role of religions in receiving refugees, forcibly displaced people and migrants. Bishop Younan attended as president of the Lutheran World Federation and made a proposal for the development of a code of conduct for receiving these groups.

Today we hear from certain religious leaders about a "holy war" in Ukraine. "Today in our world, we no more need just wars," he chided. "We need only just peace." In conclusion, Bishop Younan affirmed that it is time for religious leaders' voices to be heard in the UN, and for its vision to be fulfilled.



[Dr. Thomas Walsh, Chairman, UPF International, Chairman, World Peace Road Foundation, United States](#) The final speaker was Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, the chairman of UPF International and the chairman of the World Peace Road Foundation, who affirmed that we are indeed at an inflection point, at which there is a challenge to the world order, with the conflict in Ukraine having shocked the world. Therefore the world is looking to the UN, and, indeed, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the UN Security Council on April 5, the day before this webinar.

Dr. Walsh explained that the UN was founded with a great vision of perpetual peace, and religion has been a partner, though a marginal one, because the political vision prevailed. In 1945, or from 1943 or so onward, on the foundation of efforts by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, there was some degree of spirituality when the charter was envisioned. Indeed, the denominations have representatives at the UN, as was alluded to by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

In 2000, at the time of the Millennium Summit at the United Nations, there was hope, and a major interfaith summit was convened which included many major figures, including Ambassador Wibisono.

It was at this time that Dr. Sun Myung Moon made a specific proposal for an interreligious council, and Jose de Venecia Jr., the former speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, became an evangelist for this cause, advocating it to many high-level political leaders. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations was formed; World Interfaith Harmony Week was established through the Jordanian mission; and an interagency task force was set up. Religions have been central to the environmental movement, and faith-based organizations can be seen at the UN. Dr. Walsh suggested that it's perhaps time for a re-examination of the charter, which of course is difficult, but it comes down to the P5 (permanent members of the Security Council) and their ability to come together.

Question-and-Answer Session

Which of the three functions would be the most efficient for reform in the UN system?

Ambassador Abe: Advocacy to press the Security Council to change is needed. To change the charter, we need the support of the P5. We can press them to change. A lot of people don't like veto powers. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy is saying this. But majority rule is also problematic and is fearful for the

minority. Veto power is one way to protect the minority. But the current veto power is too strong. Their veto power should perhaps be reduced, but we haven't found the best solution yet.

How can we prevent religious leaders coming in who are just used for political purposes? Would there be a screening process?

Bishop Younan: The interreligious council should have an autonomous status. We want independent religious leaders who have a "prophetic voice of morality." They should have the vision of all humanity. They can bring a sense of morality to the political leaders.

Ambassador Wibisono has been involved for a long time in the issue of an interreligious council. The reforms after the 61st session of the Commission on Human Rights were beneficial. Could they be applied to the UN as a whole?

Ambassador Wibisono: The UN is an intergovernmental body, so its decision making involves its members. In the first few decades, its mechanism worked well. More recently, it's become more difficult. All governments should have a say. We need the engagement of the private sector, NGOs, etc. The inaction of the Security Council is because there is a loss of trust. There is a need for morality to enrich our perception, as Bishop Younan said. You cannot have constructive agreements without trust, and an interreligious council could help this. Therefore, the past idea of Reverend Moon is a good one to bring about a spirit of trust.

How can UPF and other NGOs be effective in bringing about reform in the UN?

Dr. Walsh: We need to build the global, social capital that is the role of civil society and NGOs, bridging the gap between the nation-states or international organizations and the individual. Father and Mother Moon's vision was to bring into dialogue these two gigantic spheres of human life: the nations on the one hand, and religions on the other hand, creating a great, global dialogue between the nations and the religions.

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April 6-7, 2022
*Contemporary Challenges to the World Order:
The Search for Solutions*

SESSION 2
HOW CAN THE UNITED NATIONS BE RE-EMPOWERED TO FULFILL ITS MISSION AND PREVENT FUTURE THREATS TO WORLD PEACE?

MODERATOR
MRS. MARCIA DE ABREU
Secretary General,
Women's Federation
for World Peace Europe

SPEAKERS
DR. NOBUYASU ABE
Former UN Under-Secretary-General for
Disarmament Affairs,
Former Commissioner,
Japan Atomic Energy
Commission

SESSION STARTS IN:
03:17
01:00

BACKGROUND
Since its founding in 1945, The United Nations (UN) has been an essential force for peace and good order in the world. However, despite major achievements, it remains far from being fully effective in preventing conflicts from breaking out. Indeed, it would appear to have lost much of its influence in trying to prevent the current crisis in...

00:00

AMB. MAKARIM