

UPF-Norway Celebrates UN Day with Mosque

Steinar Murud
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Oslo, Norway—UPF-Norway celebrated United Nations Day in partnership with Central Jamaat E Ahle Sunnat, the largest mosque in Oslo.

An evening program was organized on October 27, 2015, under the title “A Religious Contribution to the UN.” The format of the program was simple: seven speakers with seven minutes each, concluding with a few comments and finally refreshments and social mingling.

Imam Syed Nehmat Ali Shah, the main imam in the Central Jamaat E Ahle Sunnat mosque, welcomed the participants with the words “Peace is a word that unites us all.”

Ms. Malin Lenita Vik, the representative of the UN communications office in Oslo, mentioned the new sustainable development goals and explained about the talks in the UN on the topics of religion, freedom of speech and protection against blasphemy. Even though there are different opinions on this issue and on other questions, the UN is still our best arena to solve international conflicts, she said.

Ms. Charmaine R. Aviquivil, the deputy chief of mission at the Philippine Embassy, gave a very interesting report on “UN and Interfaith,” particularly about the Philippines’ experiences with interfaith dialogue both in the UN and in other international organizations.

Imam Hamid Farooq, a Sunni imam from a neighboring mosque, spoke on the topic “Religion and Peace.” No religion promotes war, he said. That is a wrong interpretation of religion. The Lord of the universe is the merciful Lord, Sustainer and Provider for all humans. He said the UN works to create an atmosphere of peace and added that this is also the work of religion.

Rev. Lars Martin Dahl, a vicar from the Church of Norway, addressed the topic “Is Peace without God Possible?” With the definition of peace as absence of war, he said, “Yes.” The ability to discern between good and bad is built into the heart of all human beings, independent of our belief, he said. All of us have the same basic law in our hearts, and by following this we can create peace in the world, even without faith in God.

Imam Sayed Mashi Soltami, a Shia imam, elaborated on the question “How Can Religion Create Peace?” Dialogue with respect was his key point. There are so many common points and principles in the religions. Peace can come when we practice these, while conflicts between religions result from ignorance of one’s spiritual roots, he said.

Finally Mr. Steinar Murud, secretary general of UPF-Norway, commented on the topic “Religion, Peace and the UN.” He emphasized the relevance of religion. One important role is to promote universal values, he said. He pointed at the need to strengthen our common platform of values. He expressed hope that religion could be a source of inspiration for individuals to work for peace, and introduced further the idea of an interfaith council in the UN.

Good refreshments provided by the helpful staff in the mosque closed the evening program.