

UPF-Norway Celebrated the United Nations 2018 World Interfaith Harmony Week

Steinar Murud
February 15, 2018



Oslo, Norway -- UPF-Norway celebrated the 2018 World Interfaith Harmony Week with an event in the Oslo Jewish Museum.

In previous years, UPF has observed this United Nations-designated week in churches, mosques and temples. This was the first time that a Jewish location served as the venue.

The topic for the event was "World Peace through Interreligious Harmony: Cooperation around Common Values."

The February 15 program opened with religious representatives lighting candles for peace. As each one lit a candle, a holy scripture was read. The Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Buddhist representatives offered a short meditation for peace as a conclusion.

Following the opening ceremony, a panel of five speakers took their seats. The moderator welcomed everyone and explained the background for the initiative.

The Muslim speaker, Basim Ghozlan, who is often interviewed by the Norwegian media, spoke on the topic "Common Values – Different Practices."

At their core all religions have similar values, he said. When conflicts arise, they usually contradict the message from our sacred texts, he said.

The second speaker, the Christian minister Liv Hegle from the organization Areopagos, spoke on "Globalization of Religion."

Our part of the world used to be a homogeneous society where interfaith dialogue was either hardly heard of or else something for the specialists, she said. It is not like that anymore; today interfaith dialogue is a necessity, she said. She also emphasized that such dialogues usually provide positive stimulation for both parties.

Our third speaker, Lynn Claire Feinberg, the first female rabbi in Scandinavia, elaborated on the title "Bridges across Opposites." As a female rabbi and a pioneer for the role of women in an Orthodox Jewish community, she could give practical applications on the topic.

As a general metaphor she used the body as an example and said that all religions or cultures can be compared with the different organs in the body: We all have a purpose to the whole and need to work in harmony.

The next speaker, Bhante Manirathana, the head monk from the Oslo Buddhist Vihara, a Sri Lankan Buddhist community, spoke on the topic "Religion and Peace." He stated that religion is a positive force. Wars occur from other causes than our spiritual affiliation, he said. Many people think about changing the world, but very few think about changing themselves. Only peace based on inner peace is stable in the long run, he concluded.

The final speaker was Steinar Murud, secretary general of UPF-Norway. His topic was "The Role of Religion in the 21st Century." He opened with a definition of religion: to bind together, in the form of binding ourselves with God, the origin or the universal ideal. The role of religion is to provide a spiritual path toward this goal, he said.

He suggested that we all are part of a greater master plan which is greater than any individual religion and we need to cooperate to fulfill this plan.

Rajwant Singh Patpatia, a board member of Oslo's Sikh community, also took part in the event as one of the participants in the interfaith Candle Ceremony.

Although the event was organized on short notice, around 30 people attended it. The event ended with refreshments and informal discussions.

