

World Interfaith Harmony Week Observed in Australia

Greg Stone
February 1, 2016



Sydney, Australia—UPF marked World Interfaith Harmony Week 2016 with a program titled “Interfaith in Action: Working Together for the Common Good.”

The program, which was held on February 1 at the Oceania Peace Embassy, was also the first bimonthly meeting of Sydney-area Ambassadors for Peace in the new year.

In his message on the occasion of the United Nations-designated week, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated: "World Interfaith Harmony Week celebrates the principles of tolerance and respect for the other that are deeply rooted in the world’s major religions. The observance is also a summons to solidarity in the face of those who spread misunderstanding and mistrust."

Ms. Aila Willitts, president of the New South Wales chapter of Women’s Federation for World Peace, an organization that is affiliated with UPF, served as emcee. She gave a warm welcome to around 60 UPF Ambassadors for Peace and friends who had come to celebrate the occasion.

The first speaker, Mr. Greg Stone, president of UPF-Australia, spoke about World Interfaith Harmony Week, which was established by the United Nations in 2010 to promote dialogue among different faiths and religions and to enhance mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among all people.

Mr. Stone read a message that Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, the co-founder of UPF, had once directed toward religious people around the world: “First, respect the traditions of other religions and do everything you can to prevent conflict and discord among religions. Second, all religious communities should cooperate with each other to serve the world. Third, the leaders of all religions should work together to develop a structure that will let us accomplish our mutual mission of establishing world peace.”

The second speaker was Mr. Greg Johns, vice director of Soka Gakkai International Australia (SGIA) and manager of its Peace, Culture and Education portfolio. He explained about the history and principles of SGIA and gave examples of its work in the community and world to promote harmony and understanding, especially a recent project, conducted together with Latrobe University's Centre for Dialogue, to create a dialogue between Muslim and Buddhist young people.

Ms. Anne Lanyon, deputy director of the Columban Mission Institute and coordinator of the Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice and the Faith Ecology Network (FEN) was the concluding speaker. She gave a very informative PowerPoint presentation on FEN’s work in promoting mutual appreciation of religious traditions regarding ecological insights and strengthening the dialogue of science and religion between different faith groups, professionals and the community.

It proved to be a highly informative meeting and a most fruitful opportunity for networking and cooperation among the various faith traditions represented.