

UPF and WFWP Melbourne, Australia Commemorate International Day of Peace

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Melbourne, Australia -- The Australia chapters of UPF and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an affiliated organization, hold a yearly one-day conference in Melbourne to commemorate the UN International Day of Peace and to support and foster peacebuilding within the diverse multicultural city.

The International Day of Peace ("Peace Day") is observed annually around the world on September 21. It was established in 1981 by a unanimous UN resolution and as a day devoted to "commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples." The 2020 theme for the International Day of Peace is "Shaping Peace Together." It focuses on celebrating the day by spreading compassion, kindness and hope in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, and standing together with the UN against attempts to use the virus to promote discrimination or hatred.



This year, the conference went national and virtual, and was convened on September 21. A total of 152 participants joined the event via Zoom or live streaming through the WFWP Oceania YouTube channel. The organizing committee comprised members of UPF-Australia's Victorian Peace Council and WFWP Victoria.

The goals of this year's conference were the following:

support the realization of the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through implementing Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals; showcase presenters from the multicultural and multi-faith Australian community to discuss current issues to acquire, understand and implement the right values in one's life and manage human affairs towards peacebuilding; honor the legacy of Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, who encourages us to live for the sake of others; and share insights that will enrich the life of participants.

Program

Mrs. Tua Manase-Ale, president of WFP Samoa, introduced the speakers and hosts.

Universal Values in our Global Village

Dr. John Bellavance, vice president of UPF-Australia, gave a presentation on "Universal Values in our Global Village." He spoke about one of the core principles of peacebuilding of the host organizations, namely, universal values, which transcend national and religious self-interests. As our world shrinks into a global village, people are challenged to overcome national, racial and religious barriers, and to learn to live together in harmony. Why do we need universal values in our global village? Conflicts can occur in the absence of shared values. How do we find unity of purpose when we face a crisis? We usually look for shared values. Values allow people to understand each other and stabilize human interaction. Values-driven behaviors increase cooperation and trust.

What are the obstacles that inhibit us from finding shared universal values?

The first obstacle is selfishness. It is hard to find the common good when selfishness is the motivation. The division, corruption, injustice and conflict in the world are ultimately a conflict of values that are based on self-centered values.

The second obstacle is the need to formulate a convincing values framework that will appeal to the mind and the heart.

The third obstacle is the mindset that value-free choices exist.

The fourth obstacle is the absence of global consciousness in the minds of human beings.

Love is the basis for morality and universal values. There are several reasons for this:

First, love serves others and has been at the forefront of human morality for millennia.

Second, values centered on love are broader and more enduring than value systems that focus on narrow ideologies or beliefs.

Third, love and ethics in the family has been unchanging across culture and time. For example, one could say that parental love for a child has been the most altruistic and unchanging value in human history.

Fourth, rationality is not enough for humans to act morally. The bound of love creates a strong incentive for people to act morally towards one another. The ethics of love established in the family sets the standard for universal values in society.

Fifth, love is also the basis for justice and equality.

Spiritual traditions also play an important role in fostering universal values, because historically they have focused on the big questions of life, rather than just political or national interests. From a spiritual perspective, a standard of values that serves the welfare of others and is unchanging is based on God's love. Dr. Moon referred to this as an "absolute value perspective."



Keynote Address

Hon. Dame Annette King is the New Zealand High Commissioner to Australia. Prior to this, Dame Annette served as the deputy leader of the New Zealand Labour Party and deputy leader of the Opposition. She was a senior cabinet minister in the fifth Labour government of New Zealand and was a member of parliament representing the Rongotai electorate in Wellington, New Zealand.

In her keynote address, Dame Annette focused on her country's approach to peace rights and security. "New Zealand," she explained, "followed a rules-based approach to peace and security, one advocated by Eleanor Roosevelt and the United Nations."

She provided several cases where New Zealand has exhibited its responsibility in the promotion of wider security and the protection of human rights to demonstrate practical examples that others can follow. Besides its involvement in several peacekeeping missions over the years, New Zealand has continued to oppose nuclear testing in the Pacific and the stockpiling of biological weapons, even though this has been diplomatically challenging. To honor their commitment to ensuring there is peace in the world, New Zealand has also signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and has declared the country to be a nuclear-free zone.

Dame Annette acknowledged that while we live in what she termed "turbulent times," her advice for the audience was to redouble their efforts towards collective decision-making and work towards the creation of a safe and secure world for future generations.



Presenters

Professor Fethi Mansouri is the founding director of the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University Australia, and holds the UNESCO Chair in comparative research on "Cultural Diversity and Social Justice" and the Alfred Deakin Research Chair in migration and intercultural studies.

Dr. Mansouri believes that "peace is not simply the absence of conflict, nor is it the absence of tensions across states." Global disparity between rich and poor nations, inequitable distribution of resources, injustice and intolerance of differences, he believes, all contribute to the absence of peace.

His advice was that if we seek peace, we need to ensure universal values are shared with the marginalized and the disenfranchised. Working towards global justice, multilateralism and using love as a force for good would be the best recipe to create a pathway to peace.

The once in a lifetime global health challenge posed by COVID-19 has shown the magnitude of tensions in the world, he commented. At the same time the lack of progress on climate change action and the misguided reliance of some leaders on "power" and "might" in conducting national and international affairs continue to handicap the realization of many of the UN SDGs. He recommended that we rethink our vision of peace and work towards interdependence and interconnectedness, as this would be the ultimate avenue through which the achievement of true peace can be ensured.

Dr. Noel Kanagaraj is a philosopher, a psychologist and an author with an honorary doctorate in religion and philosophy. He received the prestigious Gem of India Award in 2007 for his leadership in promoting road safety in his nation.

Dr. Kanagaraj opened his address by reflecting on a question that he feels has been posed by COVID-19: "Can you beat me?"

One of the strategies Dr. Kanagaraj suggested to answer this question is by each person showing compassion and care. To support his advice, he highlighted four individuals who exemplified these qualities and made a contribution to resolving difficulties caused by different crises.

The four individuals were Jesus, Florence Nightingale, Mother Teresa and Princess Diana. These individuals, he explained, demonstrated through their actions that by "doing little things with great love," the rifts created by disease, discrimination and intolerance could be healed. Following this way on a global scale could be one means of beating the virus. He encouraged each individual to become a peacemaker and reach out to others with compassion and care as this could be the way to reducing the impact of the virus.



Mahboba Rawi received the Order of Australia Medal for her international humanitarian development work in Afghanistan. Through her NGO Mahboba's Promise, which supports Afghan women and children, she has established schools, Hope Houses and health clinics across the country while also running a variety of sustainable development projects.

Mrs. Rawi began by describing what initially led her to pursue her mission. Her belief in God and prayer she felt were the cornerstones for her to build peace.

Although she has faced several traumatic experiences, she decided to deal with her suffering by looking for peace within herself. Once on the journey of self-discovery, she recognized that by helping others, she could transform her grief into something good. Using Mother Teresa as a model, she raised money and established several schools in war-torn Afghanistan, for education, she realized, is the "best tool" to build peace.

One of the several projects she spoke about is Initiatives for Change, which sponsors students from her schools in Afghanistan to travel to India for six months to participate in a course on dealing with conflict. When these students return home, they are encouraged to share what they learned with other students at their school, thus providing a platform to build harmony and understanding.

Mrs. Rawi concluded her presentation by encouraging the audience to work towards peace by doing just a little bit. It is by doing a little bit on the grassroots level that great change can take place, she said.

Rachel Shields is the director of indigenous programs and a cultural awareness facilitator at Indigicate. She is a Weilwan and Gamilaray woman and is also the founder of Knowing In Nature.

Ms. Shields gave her address against the backdrop of a natural landscape, which helped to emphasize the message she had for procuring peace. Nature, she explained, is the "greatest teacher;" innumerable examples of connection and cooperation can be found within nature. Using these examples and building a connection with the land and with nature as Indigenous people have done for centuries could be the perfect platform for generating peace.

The indigenous way of life creates balance, which underpins the acquisition of peace. If we were all able to recognize our own personal responsibilities for building peace and showed respect in our actions towards others and to the land, could and will peace be generated.

Dr. Sandy Chong is a Harvard University alumna where she earned a PhD in 2003 specializing in digital commerce and global business communication. She is the founder of Verity Consulting, and president of the United Nations Association of Western Australia.

Dr. Chong opened her address by asking the participants in the webinar to consider what peace means to them. While most people in the West, she explained, would define peace as justice and fairness, those in the East consider peace to be harmony and the avoidance of conflict at all costs. This difference in

perceptions of peace would determine how people sought peace.

While there have been many schemes aimed at promoting peace, Dr. Chong proposed that peace was only obtainable when social justice prevailed. Inequities in the distribution of resources, racial tension, gender inequity and rising poverty are all examples of injustice, and unless these issues are resolved, universal peace cannot exist.

One of the few positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic is the rise of the mantra "we are all in this together." Giving this statement precedence, she believes, may be the saving grace. Besides seeking a vaccine to fight against the virus, governments may have to exert more efforts towards global solutions of ending inequities and poverty.

She believes that the only solution to universal peace lies in following the principle presented by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres: "In an interconnected world none of us are safe, until all of us are safe." Using the framework established by the UN to develop the SDGs to "leave no one behind" would be the ultimate pathway to follow. Peace is not just the work of governments; when ordinary people in each community take responsibility to resist differences, build understanding and show compassion to others can a culture of peace prevail.

Reflections from Participants

"Brilliant presentation! Love is the pervasive value. ... Acts of altruism need to be a central focus driving human love! We need to be accountable to each other on the basis of love. Love for each other, our country and our environment! Foundational First Nations values!" – Louise

"Congratulations to New Zealand for truly leading the way on global issues starting with what happens in the family. Bless you and the First Nations People who are leading the way! Absolutely love the definition of peace that was articulated. ... Brilliant." – Louise

"Thank you for reminding us of the amazing compassionate heart of Jesus and the miracles achieved, Florence Nightingale's acts of extraordinary love and kindness and Mother Teresa's work of grace! The power of one person acting with God's love and grace! A massive thank you for sharing these stories of true saints, courageous leaders! Magnificent." – Douglas

"Thank you for highlighting the value of the individual, and when people work together, everything can be accomplished. Building from the bottom up is safer than from the top down." -Douglas

"Thank you to all the wonderful speakers and moderator, and those behind the scene, too." – Tracy

"What a great line up of speakers! Pretty amazing heroes were here among us. While listening to today's speakers, I felt I was travelling many kilometres through fascinating lands. It began with John Bellavance carefully setting the tone and parameters of peacebuilding. Dame Annette King explored the recent history of achievements in peacebuilding in New Zealand and Australia, and Professor Fethi Mansouri gave a scholarly analysis of the challenges that multicultural countries are facing in bridging diverse groups.

Tua Manase-Ale was a gracious emcee, and she managed to keep everything moving along smoothly. Dr. Kanagaraj Noel held up the highest traditions laid down in history by saints and sages who demonstrated through their life how to give love. Sydney-based Mahboba Rawi, originally from Afghanistan, spoke eloquently of her life and the personal tragedy that gave birth to an amazing association to educate young people in Afghanistan.

Rachel Shields, Indigenous Australian naturalist spoke disarmingly of nature's presence all around us. She urged us to tune into the lessons and examples of nature, and expressed that so many of us are too much in our heads and forget the heart response to human problems.

The final speaker, Dr. Sandy Chong, exhorted us all to practice fairness, altruism and global awareness when making relationships. It was very upbeat and inspiring, and a good way to finish this virtual conference. Good job to all those who were involved and thank you!" – Jacinta