

Sri Lanka celebrated International Youth Day 2016 in Ampara, Sri Lanka

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Ampara, Sri Lanka -- UPF together with the UN and the government of Sri Lanka celebrated International Youth Day 2016 on August 13 in Ampara, Sri Lanka. The event was part of Religious Youth Service (RYS)-Sri Lanka's annual project that took place from August 12 to 19, 2016. The project, whose theme for this year was "Youth for Eradicating Poverty and Achieving Sustainable Development" -- which relates to the theme of this year's International Youth Day, "The Road to 2030: Eradicating Poverty and Achieving Sustainable Consumption and Production" -- was the completion of the construction of a partially built and abandoned community center in Vijayapura in Ampara district.

The program began with prayers, which were offered by representatives of five faith traditions -- Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Unificationism. Distinguished guests included the Minister for Primary Industry of Sri Lanka, Hon. Daya Gamage, and his wife, Deputy Minister for Petroleum Resources Development, Hon. Dr. Anoma Gamage.

UPF-Sri Lanka's secretary general, Dr. Chula Senaratne, welcomed the guests. He spoke about the importance of International Youth Day, the history of RYS' youth leadership development programs and the national tour UPF-Sri Lanka held last year. Over nine days, representatives of UPF and the UN visited

all of Sri Lanka's nine provinces to educate over 3,000 students about family-centered "micro-peace" as well as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for this year's Day was read by RYS-Sri Lanka's secretary general, Ms. Dinesha Liyansuriya.

Afterwards, Dr. Robert Kittel, director of education of UPF-Asia, spoke about the importance of "living for the sake of others," the guiding principle of UPF. It is a principle found in the teachings of all religions and is essential to creating harmonious and happy relationships within the family, as well as healthy societies, prosperous nations and world peace. In honor of International Youth Day, the young participants all made a pledge to remain pure until marriage.

Hon. Gamage spoke at length to the 200 youth who were in attendance about the hardships he faced while growing up. At a very young age he lost both of his parents and came under the care of his uncle. A few years later his uncle passed away. Through determination he managed to build a leading and internationally recognized business. The life story of Hon. Gamage inspired and encouraged the young participants from 10 nations to overcome life's challenges to achieve their goals.