

Australian Peace Council Has Second Meeting of Ambassadors for Peace

John Bellavance
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The world needs a model for an ideal society where people can peacefully coexist, embracing all nations, cultures and religions -- a community of mutual prosperity and universally shared values.

-- Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, founder, Universal Peace Federation

Melbourne, Australia -- The Australian National Peace Council had its second meeting, attended by 19 participants from the states of Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia.

The Australian Peace Council is made up of Ambassadors for Peace from the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Unificationist faiths, as well as professionals and academics in the fields of education, health, social services, engineering, economics, business and community development. This national council was inaugurated in Sydney in November 2015 during a summit meeting of leaders from across Australia and Oceania. The Melbourne meeting on November 19, 2016, was the second time the council has met.

Executive Summary

The council decided that further research is needed regarding reasons for the Australian government action in Norfolk Island, an Australian territory, before the council could fully support the concerns of the people of the island.

The council decided that the Peace Council was not equipped or ready to tackle the issue of domestic violence.

The council agreed that UPF should continue to work with the South Sudanese diaspora to support peacebuilding in South Sudan.

The council agreed that members should join government commissions that deal with social issues, both on the state and federal levels.

The council deliberated about the need to revive the Federation of Island Nations. The council asked the UPF-Australia vice president to contact the secretary general for the Oceania region and the president of UPF International about how this could be best achieved.

The council agreed to support values education in Oceania.

The next Australian National Peace Council meeting was set for January 21, 2017.

Bill Pontikis, founder of Cafe Care, introduced the values he felt could underpin the work of the council: respect, humility, honesty, living a moral life, generosity with one's financial resources and time, and forgiveness. He testified how these values come from his Christian faith.

UPF-Australia Vice President John Bellavance introduced the purpose of the Australian Peace Council and objectives for the conference.



Justice in Norfolk Island

Dr. David Buckley, who is active in a diverse range of charities, spoke about the social injustices perpetrated by Australia with respect to the self-determination of the peoples of Norfolk Island, an Australian territory. He suggested that peace is not just the absence of conflict but also the presence of justice. He encouraged UPF-Australia and the Australian Peace Council to support the people of Norfolk Island by mobilizing the Australian public to pressure the government. He said that the Australian government had provided no explanations for dismantling the local government in Norfolk Island. The council decided that further information was needed regarding the reasons for the government taking this action before the council could fully support any actions. The council hoped that Dr. Buckley could help with this. Bill Pontikis said he also would pursue further information from his federal member of parliament.

Values That Underpin Peace

Dr. Stephen Rametse, the president of Africa Day Australia, chaired the first roundtable discussion. In his opening remarks, he said, “A culture of peace is based on a set of values that reject violence and remove the root cause of conflict. Peace needs to be constructed. We need peace markers.” He encouraged members to identify and frame issues that undermine peace as social, political or economic. Council members appeared to be in close agreement when it came to the values that can foster peace.

Anne Bellavance, president of the Australian chapter of Women’s Federation for World Peace, an affiliated organization, said that peace starts with the individual and expands to the family and society. This view was echoed by many of the council members. Shillar Sibanda, vice president of Africa Day Australia, said that societal change starts with the individual acting within the family and local community. Peter Pal, the president of the Union of Greater Upper Nile States, said, “Transformation within ourselves is key; based on this we can lead others to do the same.” Dr. Rametse of Africa Day Australia added that individuals need to reconstruct themselves in order to avoid performing selfish actions. Individuals and governments must live for the sake of others, he said.

Dr. Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe, a lecturer in business management, echoed this view, saying that values education was critical in order to foster the right attitudes in individuals. Values education needs to lead to substantial change in the individual, he said. For this to occur, values need to be supported by skill sets. Dr. Nsubuga-Kyobe went on to say that our legal system and administration of justice form an adversarial, winner-takes-all system that needs to change in order for true justice to occur.

Domestic Violence

The second issue raised during this session dealt with domestic violence. Dr. Joseph Masika OAM (Order of Australia medal), representing the state of South Australia, recommended that all UPF members in Australia apply to become “White Ribbon Ambassadors.” John Bellavance volunteered to provide [the link to apply online](#) and encouraged UPF members to apply. Dr. Masika said that the billions of dollars needed to deal with domestic violence could be used elsewhere once this problem was solved. Council

members expressed their heartfelt concern for this issue and agreed that a restorative approach was needed.

Irene Anania, the UPF-Australia director of values education, suggested that to resolve family violence we should not judge but rather educate the abuser, since each one is a product of society. Adel Gaballa, a former planner for economic policies in Egypt, stated that the values he was raised on as a Muslim taught him to respect each woman as a wife, a mother, a daughter or a sister. Dr. Nsubuga-Kyobe suggested that a new tool kit could be produced to deal with the issue of domestic violence. Bill Pontikis and Rev. Austin Sanderson (representing the state of Western Australia) both imparted their knowledge on this subject. However, after much deliberation it was concluded that the Peace Council was not equipped or ready to tackle this problem.

Economic Values and Peace

Stephen Sibanda, former president of Africa Day Australia, added that the values adopted by individuals, organizations and governments impact the social, economic and political realms. As an example of government economic policies that society must be mindful of, he said that some prisons in the United States are now sources of cheap labor and in Australia domestic violence offenders are starting to be outsourced to private companies. Adel Gaballa provided an example of Muslim values that drove Egyptian economic planning. Policies of employment for all and infrastructure planning based on population growth were some examples of ways to plan a fairer and more just economic system. He suggested that Australia should learn from this approach. Dr. Nsubuga-Kyobe argued that the richness of a nation is not based solely on economic values.

Australian Peace Council Actions

The final session was chaired by Irene Anania of UPF. The focus of this discussion was to determine the issues that would be the focus of the work of the Peace Council for 2017-18. The session began with a presentation from Khalid Osman, the CEO of Victorian Vocational Volunteering, on the political repression of political figures in Sudan. He stated that the issue is not one of Christians versus Muslims but rather is driven by opportunism, power and wealth. He recommended that UPF work with the African Union to support peace in Sudan. Peter Pal spoke about the importance of respecting the self-determination of the people of South Sudan and likened this to respecting the identity of individuals. The council agreed that UPF should continue to work with the South Sudanese diaspora to support peace in South Sudan and to look further into the human rights situation in that nation.

Anne Bellavance suggested that council members join government commissions that deal with social issues, both on the state and federal levels. This proposal was adopted by the council. The council also deliberated about the need to revive the Federation of Island Nations. John Bellavance reported that Dr. David Buckley was willing to look at how this could be achieved. The council asked Vice President Bellavance to contact Greg Stone, the UPF-Oceania regional secretary general, and Dr. Thomas Walsh, the president of UPF International, about how this could be best achieved.

Values Education

John Bellavance recommended that a national conversation occur about the values that could sustain Australia in the future. No decision was reached. Irene Anania reported on the values education undertaken by herself and UPF in Palau and in Fiji. She explained that the model she had developed for her master's degree was very well received by these governments and effective in fostering values in children. The model focuses on the head, heart and hand. She said that it was not possible to truly reach the head without first touching the heart. Community service (the hand) undertaken by the students after values education reinforces the learning that occurs in the classroom. The council agreed to support this initiative. Mrs. Anania invited council members to communicate with her if they wanted to support this initiative.

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