

UPF Berlin, Germany celebrates UN Human Rights Day

Gudrun Hassinen
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"Human rights - human dignity: What does our image of God have to do with it?" was the theme of the UPF event in Berlin on Saturday, December 9, 2023, on the occasion of UN Human Rights Day (December 10), held in a hall decorated for Christmas.



Our first speaker, Pastor **Lolowengo Botembe**, Patriarch of the African Church in Berlin, related how God was described in his African tradition before European missionaries introduced their doctrines. God as a spirit could not be defined in words. But His kindness, dignity and trust could be experienced, for example, by the hospitality villagers would show to a stranger from faraway. The stranger would explain about his parents and ancestors and where he lived and would be invited to stay overnight and given provisions for his onwards journey. On his return journey, the stranger would bring gifts and encourage the villagers to stay with him should they travel in his direction.

Elders passed on their wisdom to the younger ones; through the grandparents and parents, younger ones could experience love, security, dignity - and thus God's closeness - in a very simple way.

The second speaker, **Christoph Lindemann**, who holds an MA in Comparative Religious Studies, emphasized two points: Firstly, that one can sense and experience the essence of God in creation, in nature. He, for example could better understand his wife through what was expressed through her

paintings. He also emphasized the insight of the UPF founder, Dr. Sun Myung Moon: that man and woman, as the highest creation, are together the image of God. According to Genesis 1:28, man and woman complement each other and can only be the image of God's love as a couple and as parents. An individual is only one half of God's expression.



That is why human rights should also protect couples and families and not simply focus on the rights and protection of individuals.

The moderator **Gudrun Hassinen** had already pointed out in the introduction that human rights are an outgrowth of human dignity which is inherent i.e. given by the Creator and therefore inviolable. Today, we attach great importance to individual human rights, but we forget the human dignity on which they are based. This leads us to regard other people as less valuable and even in extreme cases to call them vermin or dogs and to deny them their right to exist.



The participants discussed in small groups what they had heard and had to be asked several times to break and enjoy the Christmas buffet, so intense and lively were the discussions! Several participants expressed their thanks for the pleasant and stimulating afternoon.

The next event in February will deepen this theme and call on religions to work together to restore, defend and teach the primacy of human dignity.