

International Day of Peace Observed in Denmark's Parliament in Copenhagen

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Copenhagen, Denmark -- The 2016 International Day of Peace was observed at a program in Denmark's Parliament.

It was the second year in a row that UPF-Denmark held its International Day of Peace celebration in the Common Room at Christiansborg Palace

The event, which took place on Sunday, September 18, was hosted by Member of Parliament Yildiz Akdogan. The 150-seat room was filled with Ambassadors for Peace, representatives of NGOs, civil leaders, religious leaders, artists and enthusiasts for peace.



The theme was "The Sustainable Development Goals: Building Blocks for Peace." The event was moderated by UPF Ambassador for Peace and former MP Marion Pedersen.

She first introduced Katja Iversen, the president of the international NGO Women Deliver, who sent a video greeting from New York. Women Deliver is a leading global advocate for girls' and women's health, rights, and well-being. Ms. Iversen mentioned that when women are present around the negotiating table, the chances for peace are greater. Women's role is so important, and we need more women around the table, she said.

The first speaker present was Professor Dr. Steen Hildebrandt, one of the most respected speakers in Denmark about management, organization and society. He currently has a new book about the SDGs. He spoke about the “The Goals of the World -- a Present and a Necessity” and explained that in Denmark we decided to call the SDGs “goals of the world.”

Apart from religious teachings, the SDGs are the most ambitious plan for development ever set up, Professor Hildebrandt said. Religious visions and teachings are important, but the SDGs are above religions, because they are for all people and they prompt us to leave no one behind, as all people have equal value. Therefore it is also a demanding principle to comply with. The SDGs are a necessity and a matter of urgency. He mentioned two important questions: What can Denmark contribute to the implementation of the SDGs in the world? And what can we learn from other countries? He quoted former Bhutan Prime Minister Jigme Thinley, who said that sustainability is a question about joy and humanity more than about economic development and getting richer. Thus we need a paradigm shift from focusing on material wealth to focusing on people. Professor Hildebrandt’s presentation was like a sermon with deep insights.

The third speaker was a popular talk show and radio host, Lotte Heise. She spoke very animatedly about sustainability in daily life, in the way we move around, eat, use resources, etc. She emphasized the importance of the way parents bring up and educate their children, the importance of close human relationships. We do not exist for ourselves, but we are associated with others, she said. Therefore we are responsible for the way we express and behave ourselves and we need to include and reach out to others in the way we express ourselves rather than create distance and build barriers.



The fourth speaker was Simi Jan, a journalist and world affairs correspondent on the national TV station. She spoke very empathetically about people she has met in the hotspots of the world. She witnessed horrible situations around the world and saw people pleading for help. Although she couldn’t help in the situation as a correspondent, she hopes through her reports to show that those people have dreams and hopes like all of us and that there is more that binds us together than divides us. The sorrow of a mother who loses her son is the same whether she is from Afghanistan or from Denmark; we must never forget the sorrow of other people, she said.

During the break there were happy and lively discussions among the participants.

The fifth speaker was entrepreneur and lecturer Gry Ravn. Only one week earlier she was the initiator and director of probably Europe’s largest integration event, a big “welcome party” for refugees with more than 10,000 people in a large concert hall in Copenhagen. Here she gathered representatives of large companies, municipalities, organizations, NGOs, artists, experts, media, etc., to meet and welcome refugees, to network, find solutions to good integration, learn from “best practices” and so on.

One year ago, after deploring the world’s problems on social media, she was challenged by her friend who asked, “Why don’t you do something yourself?” From feeling powerless as a single mother, she started to think what she could do. She posted on social media asking who had “something to put in a suitcase” and got 200 tons of emergency aid in five days! In the media she was criticized by the Red

Cross for not knowing what she was doing. That challenged her to develop partnerships with Red Cross and freight forwarders, and she managed to get nine containers and two trucks of emergency aid to the Greek island of Lesbos, where in recent months many thousands of refugees have landed by boat on their way from Asia to Europe.

Now she is doing projects not only to help other people but also to show the importance of working together, to create partnerships and make people believe in and experience their own power, that each one can do something and make a difference.

The last speaker was lecturer and firebrand Tommy Krabbe, who said our greatest challenge is to work and unite across borders. We live in “silos,” he said. We identify ourselves in communities, associations, clubs, etc., but we need to reach out to others in other “silos.”

We human beings are adjusted to each other, he stated, giving the example that when one feeds a baby, the baby automatically opens its mouth. Science also proves that knowledge begets friendship. We need to seek others, try to understand each other and build things together.

That can be challenging, but Mr. Krabbe gave the following three pieces of advice which he said might help us: First, we need a new slogan: “Ignoramus.” Mr. Krabbe stressed that we do not know what other people think, feel, wish, etc., and we should not delude ourselves that we know everything. All knowledge starts with “not knowing.” Second, he said, we are all great human beings and there are no reasons to blow ourselves up; then we can start sharing deeply with each other. Third, there is no reason to demote other people; they are also great people. We need confidence and trust to build relationships, he said.

Then the audience rose to sing along with “What a Wonderful World,” led by opera singer Ingeborg Børch, who was accompanied by Sibeal Hill.

Dr. Thorkil Christensen from UPF introduced the Peace Ceremony and the vision of UPF. He said that UPF advocates for religious representatives to be included in the work of the United Nations. Religions exist in order to create peace. It is essential that religions use their wisdom to educate their followers to become true world citizens, he said.

On the stage there was a small tree decorated with the “17 Goals of the World,” symbolizing all the nations and peoples of the world and the “Goals of the World” as its fruit. The tree needs water in order to become fruitful, and thus nine religious leaders took the first step to water it. UPF is convinced that the UN will be strengthened if religions become involved as respected partners in its peace work. In a solemn atmosphere with the peaceful music of J.S. Bach “Sheep May Safely Graze,” the religious leaders passed one by one and poured their water onto the tree’s roots.

This was followed by several professional cultural performances.

The first was by classical guitarist Kaare Norge, one of Denmark’s finest instrumentalists. On the occasion of the 150th birthday of Danish composer Carl Nielsen, Mr. Norge made a tribute by releasing his 23rd album in his series of excellent guitar art with music of Carl Nielsen. At the program in the Parliament Mr. Norge played three pieces from this album. The audience was awestruck by the mesmerizing beauty.

This was followed by mezzo-soprano Ingeborg Børch with pianist Rune Skov Thomassen. She had her debut on the Danish Royal Theater in 2010. Her first song, Händel’s “Ombra Mai Fu” -- about a tree giving shade and peace -- was followed by the Seguidilla from the opera Carmen and the songs “Over the Rainbow” and “La Vie en Rose,” all related to the process of creating peace.

The participants felt inspired by the speeches and were emotionally uplifted by the beautiful music and songs. At the end UPF-Denmark Chair Dr. Thorkil Christensen briefly introduced the Peace Road event that was scheduled to take place in Copenhagen the following Sunday and invited the audience to take part.