

UPH Tirana, Albania holds its first Conference on the Family

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November 19, 2022



Tirana, Albania -- UPF and an affiliated organization held the 1st Conference on the Family under the theme "Family, Society and Universal Values."

The Europe-Middle East branch of UPF presented the one-day conference on November 19, 2022, together with Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA).

Leaders of the co-sponsoring organizations joined experts on the family and society as speakers in the event, which drew an audience of about 100 to the UPF Peace Embassy in Albania's capital.



Opening Ceremony

Jacques Marion, the UPF co-chair for Europe and the Middle East, welcomed the participants, introducing Professors World Peace Academy as an organization that for 50 years has held scholarly conferences to address some of the world's most pressing challenges.

Mr. Marion mentioned such challenges to the family as the unprecedented growth of the world population, the constant progress of technology, the market economy, and widespread conflicts and wars. He welcomed the scholars, saying he hoped they would shed some light on this important issue.

Dr. Katsumi Otsuka, the UPF co-chair for Europe and the Middle East, extended his welcome to the scholars, friends and Ambassadors for Peace who had come from far and wide to participate in this conference.

He explained that UPF and its partner organization the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) had jointly constructed the Peace Embassy for the sake of peace in the Balkans, and that it is totally open to any country, any people of the Western Balkan countries.

Dr. Otsuka recalled that he was involved in the founding of PWWA some 50 years ago and therefore was very happy to organize a PWWA meeting in this city. He stressed that scholars play a very important role in peacebuilding and that, therefore, this conference concerns not only the family but also the society, nation and world.



Dr. Thomas Selover, the president of PWWA International, gave the opening remarks, touching on the history as well as the vision of PWWA:

"PWWA was founded by Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon in South Korea in 1973, so next year marks our 50th anniversary. PWWA expanded in its early years to Japan and then to countries around the world. In 1983, the 1st International Congress of PWWA, involving professors from 70 countries, was held in Korea."

Dr. Selover quoted an excerpt from Dr. Sun Myung Moon's proclamation on the occasion of that international congress:

I founded the PWWA to be a trail-blazing organization at this critical moment in human history, able to mobilize those intellectuals who have devoted their lives to the advancement of human wisdom, and enable them to play a leading role in overcoming the dangers of the age and open new pathways to world peace. The ultimate goal of PWWA is to help create a just and harmonious world by encouraging scholars to search for new ideas and methods of achieving peace and prosperity.

Session I: The Family – Facing the Challenges of Today's World, Regional and Local Developments

UPF Europe-Middle East Co-Chair **Jacques Marion** moderated the first session.

Dr. Saemira Pino, former Albanian deputy minister of education and health and the chair of the Albanian chapter of UPF's International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP), emphasized the importance of the family, describing how it has evolved especially within this century.

"What has changed rapidly during these two decades is the population. The world counts nearly 8 billion inhabitants, compared to the 6.1 billion at the beginning of our century. This unprecedented growth is being accompanied by a deeper polarization of world society on the one hand and by an unstoppable technological advancement on the other.

"One thing is clear so far. Society can and will advance with the family. History has seen that the modern family has gone back and forth. Like the economy, which undergoes crises and rises again, the family faces difficulties, adapting to societal shifts. In this process, it has preserved an unchanging substance; it is the institution in which the precondition of society's existence is fulfilled – the birth of children and their socialization. Society cannot destroy the premise upon which it itself is based."

Professor Dr. Edmond Hajrizi, the president of the University of Business and Technology, Kosovo, gave a comparative analysis of the demographic trends in Albania and Kosovo. As a member of the board of directors of the Kosovo statistics agency for more than five years, he observes many similarities in the demographic trends of Albania and Kosovo because of their similar culture, language, etc., and because both nations are moving from a traditional to a modern type of family. The population is decreasing and aging in both countries, and the majority live in the cities. The number of registered families is decreasing in both Kosovo and Albania, as is the number of children, as women become more focused on their professional life.



One positive indicator is that the marriage rate is still higher than the European average. Kosovo has the highest marriage rate in the European Union, at 9.8 per 1,000 inhabitants, while in Albania it is 7.9, demonstrating that the family retains its importance.

The urban population is growing every year, following the general trend in Europe, and it is estimated that in 2050, 70 percent of the population will live in urban areas, which also has implications for the family. The divorce rate is similar in the two countries at about 100 per 1,000 inhabitants.

Emigration is very high, as is the case in other countries, particularly those in the Western Balkans, with many young and professional people seeking a better life in the European Union. However, the quality of life is improving in both Albania and Kosovo, which may attract more development here and encourage more people to stay.

Harry Benson, the research director of Marriage Foundation, speaking by video connection from the United Kingdom, gave a detailed presentation, with statistics on a European scale, as to how the family has been evolving in different regions across Europe, as well as the correlations between marriage, cohabitation, divorce rates, co-parenting, etc.

"There's a very clear North-South [of Europe] divide between the liberal North, which has fewer marriages, more cohabitation, a higher divorce rate, more family breakdown, and then the more conservative South, which has relatively high levels of marriage [and] relatively low levels of family breakdown and lone parenthood. There is a clear link between less marriages and more lone parenthood. If you cohabit, cohabiting couples across Europe are more likely to split up than their married counterparts in the rest of Europe."

Dr. Jelena Tanasijević, a professor at the Department for Social Work at Singidunum University in

Belgrade, Serbia, remarked on the influence of the state on the welfare of families and social structures:

"Among the basic dilemmas is the question of whether and how much of education, protection and security should be provided with the help of state and/or social institutions? This is *par excellence* an ideological issue, linked to general beliefs about the excessive or insufficient role of the state.

"One of the potential strategic options is for the welfare states of the Balkans to (re)orient themselves in the direction of relatively small spending on social protection, but with a significant share of benefits and services intended for the poorest part of the population."



The first session concluded with comments on the session from **Dr. Eva Allushi**, the deputy rector of Aleksandër Moisiu University in Durrës, Albania.

"Each epoch champions its own unique debates," she said. "In this new millennium, one of them centers on the future of the family.

"Public opinion, the media and even reputed scholars often claim that the family is an eroding and increasingly endangered species. Citizens increasingly prioritize individualism, autonomy, and self-realization.

"According to many studies, the scenario of family erosion was indeed a valid depiction of trends in the latter part of the 20th century. But increasingly, it is no longer the case. In some societies, we are now witnessing reversals that even seasoned demographers did not anticipate.

"Families have changed over the past thirty years. We are observing the changes in family formation, household structure, work-life balance, and child well-being. However, fertility rates, poverty, the labor market, migration are real challenges in our society."

Session II: Family – as the Bearer of Cultural Values

Dr. Eva Çipi, the chair of UPF-Albania and a professor at Vlora University, Albania, was the moderator.

The session began with **Dr. Thomas Selover**, the president of Professors World Peace Academy International, and his wife, **Dr. Grace Selover**, the executive secretary of PWPA International, jointly presenting a speech titled "Complementarity: Family as the School of Love."

Giving the first part of their joint talk, Dr. Thomas Selover said: "Love in the context of the family as the school of love is not simply a feeling. Rather, love signifies an interpersonal bond, below the level of surface feelings of pleasure, sadness, anger or any of those easily changeable feelings.

"If we take the analogy of the ocean, feelings are like the waves, but the ocean contains many deep currents that are not obvious on the surface and do not change with the weather. Bonds of love often

operate below the level of ordinary consciousness, but when challenged by any kind of perceived threat, these bonds appear to our awareness with great force.

"There is tremendous strength in such bonds of love, though they are subtle and not always perceptible in our daily interactions with those whom we love.

"The loving person is a center of real relationships, among which family relationships can be considered as primordial ties. That is why the family is a training ground or matrix for the development of love."

In the second part of their joint talk, Dr. Grace Selover said: "Based on the biblical teaching about man and woman in the creation, we come to understand that (a) man and woman are different by nature, (b) man and woman depend on each other to fulfill the purpose of the creation, which is God's original intent. They are designed by God to personally relate to each other in a reciprocal, functional, and harmonious relationship. This relationship is founded on the fact that man and woman receive the equal Love of God (equality of God's Love) and they are the co-bearers of God's image, so that they can relate to each other maturely.

"However, they are interdependent at the same time. The man and woman stay side by side harmoniously interdependent, and relationally complementary."



Dr. Frank Kaufmann, president of PWPA-USA, said: "Does holding lofty values guarantee that these will make you a good person? The answer is quite simply: no. It does not. We know this from our own lives. I frequently fail to live up to my personal values.

"There are many people who hold lofty values who do great harm, or do little or no good. So are we committed to describing and disseminating values because we are hoping to make people good, or hoping to make society good? If so, then we picked the wrong path. Values do not make people good; they merely serve as a guide for behavior.

"If our hope is to make people good, we need to concentrate on different matters, not the mere introduction, description, and dissemination of values -- no matter how great we think they are, or no matter how wonderfully or we think we patch them together.

"My efforts to share values and create harmony with young people from the next generation have the same challenges as would face a Munich family when dealing with a rural Afghani family. When I try to communicate values to people from younger generations, I must be aware that they have cultures that are different, and even if I myself cannot see it, they believe their ways reflect lofty values. They are like a nation with a culture that is strange to me. To make any progress, I must be in dialogue. This is the way essential values can be transmitted and unity pursued.

"If elders think they hold the whole truth, they have no capacity to transmit values and promote the dream of harmony. A myopic or parochial posture that our culture alone carries all truth prevents us from

building respectful relationships that allow us to move closer and have our valuable knowledge and experience be received and appreciated. We lose our children just like we would lose relations horizontally with friends from different cultures."

Professor Dr. Afet Mamuti, a professor of family law at the Faculty of Law of the University of Tetovo in North Macedonia, remarked on the origins and solutions to conflicts within the family:

"For a just solution to conflicts, we must stand in the shoes of the other partner, asking ourselves the same requests and seeing the possible expectations. We must also be guided by such wisdoms as 'we must treat others the same way we would want to be treated by them.'



"We must also be ready for compromises, because family relationships are not static and, as such, cannot be built based upon initial ideas we preliminarily create within our own minds.

"This is achieved by avoiding prejudices and minimizing all previous conflictual situations."

Professor Dr. Përparim Kabo, the dean of the Faculty of Psychological, Social and Political Sciences at the Mediterranean University of Albania, after a thorough analysis on the traditional and re-distributed roles in the family, concluded: "As Ambassadors for Peace, we must get out of our self-congratulatory situations and instead transform into an active social power, starting from the nourishing of emotional intelligence into our own families and societies, to the taking of historical responsibilities, as dedicated activists of building democratic families in our social reality.

"Peace is a cultural and social investment. Peace is a voluntary dedication and learning.

"Peace and its representatives are those who create a history of change. This is our mission!"

To conclude the second session, two commentators offered their views on the presentations of the panel:

Dr. Aneta Filiposka, the coordinator of the Initiative for Civic Integration in North Macedonia, said: "Families are very important components of society and people's lives. They teach us a lot about life and relationships. They boost our self-confidence and make us feel valued.

"A family's love psychologically grounds you and provides a framework for future relationships. It enables you to form secure attachments. Securely attached children feel safe and cared for. If you had secure bonds, your parents were likely responsive and fulfilled your needs when you were young.

"Family is the first and foundational 'yes' to society, because it is the first and foundational 'yes' to our nature. No school, no boarding school, no day-care center, no government institution can replace or improve upon the family.

"A very important factor for interpersonal relationships in the family is the distribution of family roles.

Family roles are socially determined. Throughout history they have changed, as well as their distribution between the members, depending on how a particular society and culture determined the place of the family and its tasks.

"The traditional roles in which the woman gave birth and raised children, managed the household, and the husband was the owner, owner of property, economically provided for the family, were replaced by roles in which the woman began to play an equal or higher role with the man. This has changed the way the family functions, with positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it contributed to the establishment of equality between women and men; on the other hand, it aggravated conflict situations.

"I think that we will all agree that without the family and family values, neither we nor society would exist."



Yoshihiro Yamazaki, the Europe-Middle East coordinator of UPF's International Association of Academicians for Peace, concluded the main part of the second session with his comments:

"The issues over family values are becoming increasingly contentious in the European Union. Its West European members, in general, are critical to a couple of East European members, in particular Poland and Hungary, for their attitudes based on their ethical attachment to traditional family values. When your countries one day join in the EU, the family issues could be a serious challenge. This is indeed a civilizational dilemma of Europe today, I believe.

"Therefore, as one of UPF's projects called International Association of Academicians for Peace in Europe, we plan to organize a series of conferences on issues such as 'democratic values vs. family values.' Its European dichotomy, hopefully not a contradiction nor a conflict, looked corresponding to West and East, but we may add another North and South dichotomy. Someone needs to raise clear voices for family -- its significance, functions and merits. In this regard, scholars of Albania and the Balkans are encouraged to speak out of your own life's real experiences. The rest of Europe needs to listen to you."

As in the first session, the concluding part of the second session was a question-and-answer session in which the participants interacted with the panelists, asking more specific questions as well as going into the finer points derived from the presentations.

The conference concluded with the presentation of the winners of a youth essay competition on the theme of family. The two prize winners were Gjylsiana Veli from Numani School in Fieri and Xhoel Thomai from Elita school in Vlora city.