

## Exploring Ways of Improving and Extending Peace Building Networks

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'Exploring Ways of Improving and Extending Peace Building Networks' was the theme which UPF chose and hosted on January 17th, 2019. The aim of this meeting was to bring peace partners together with the hope of collaborating on common issues to help deal with community cohesion with peace and security at the center of all the talks.

We were honoured to have a number of key ambassadors for peace speakers who shared their perspectives on peace-building and the vital role of networking for further developments. We questioned how can we partner up together so as to have the greatest impact on our society. The discussions ranged from a spiritual insights and practical hands on perspectives.

This event allowed me to gain a deeper understanding on how peace can be approached in different ways which can be combined to help us all reach to a happier place. I observed that there was a genuine desire for real collaboration, a sincere wish from all to be listened and seek to create an effective communication base.

I believe this is the first step which will help to expand everyone's realms of understanding and the importance in strengthening networking together for prosperity for all. I admire the effort from everyone to create harmony also how each person conveyed their real life practises of what they preach.

Our first guest speaker, Sheikh Dr Ramzy, shared a deep message about the vital role of interfaith dialogue as a tool for expanding peace amongst all the different faiths through his experience. He brought to our attention the most fundamental teachings of the three Abrahamic faith, is the tenants of 'love God and to love the neighbour'. Even though some people may say they don't have faith or don't believe but still the practice of love thy neighbour is universal and beyond any faith. We all root from the same place, same community, yet we end up fighting with each other and creating wars instead of peace. He emphasised the importance of the countless wars that are occurring right now and how we think when we see what's going on in the world we feel helpless at times just watching, but we are actually contributing towards it by not helping or acting for peace by loving each other and practicing love your neighbours and everyone around you to dissolve the hate. Dr Ramzy expressed there is hope for change, this is around us, he says peace is alive and underneath the pain, it is waiting for you.

Our next speaker Ms Philippa McDonald touched upon the importance of using technology for peace and its availability worldwide for networking and all the possibilities it can provide the message can be shared to everyone. She worked in different schools including one in Cape Town through LAL language centres. I learnt that through her time there, technology gave everyone the opportunity to learn about the crucial value of it especially to youth and students. She also addressed the other side of the internet spectrum, on how it can be for us as the majority situations that happen on the internet can easily create hate and negativity. Sometimes we can forget the power of words. Yet, 'technology isn't the answer, it's an opportunity', and if we use it well we can create something amazing and innovative.

Our third speaker Ms Maisha Sumah is a 20 year old psychology student she spoke about building

communities by helping Peace Networks groups. She promotes awareness of the well being of our youth in different government institutions. She has spoke. at the parliament urging the members of parliament to look at the issues of mental health towards the youth. She shared that many young people have extremely low self esteem and self worth. How are we tackling this crisis with our youth? She's asking the question how will we make that shift to address these sensitive issues. Maisha said we have our own lives but we need to make time for others. We cannot be blind to what's happening in our society we need to take ownership and responsibility. We can start from the people who are the closest to us and reach out in our area to others. She emphasised how we should be committed to achieve peace instead of acting on emotions and your own feelings. I really enjoyed her point about how 'a single life is an impact' and was very heartwarming as I believe this is so needed. The power I felt through her speech inspired me and I saw her raw potential of conveying the message completely, targeting the audience of young people.

Our next speaker Sheikh Rahman from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. He asked us to focus on solutions instead of the problems. There is a lot of people he emphasised we need to develop a consensus in order to create a peaceful community. Through our network we teach to our younger generation and teach about the UN human rights. He raised a very important point about the fact we need to learn ourselves and developed deeper understanding within ourselves and listen to others. We always need to provide a platform for each other and share our views towards peace.

Dr Yehoeshahfaht Ben Israel said that to really achieve peace it stems from education which is taught to our children and the younger generation. We really need to prepare them with the basic principles of peace so that they can equip and manage conflict effectively. We ourselves also need to be able to understand enough as to not 'judge other people' and to be empathetic enough so it can be easier to help sort out problems which will occur. He said we must be able to uplift people to bring a real feeling of hope and be optimistic because sometimes without this, people won't get the message. Dr Yehoeshahfaht Ben Israel mentioned to us 'Energize the things we agree on not on the stuff we don't' and come to a mutual understanding. He urged us to begin now, not tomorrow.

Our final speaker, Kirstin Sharp gave a clear and straightforward practical way of finding routes to create peace and building your peace network. She said that we need to create a clear personal mission statement that is vivid and achievable. We should seize all opportunities towards creating peace. She mentioned that it's important to be business like and have a strategy toward fulfilling the aim. But to also not be too fixed on that one plan and be open just in case the circumstances changes, dont loose hope, find another path. She stated that it will be hard to reach a multimillionaire franchise level but if you have integrity within your organisation, people will perceive you as a much bigger organisation than you are. This practical way of looking at spreading peace is useful and a good way to start things going.

Overall, I felt very inspired and motivated after listening to all the talks from the speakers. I could agree that the audience felt the same way.

One of the main points I gained is that actions speak louder then words. We are the ones who will create peace by being open and willing to learn from others. I understood something of the significance of listening and encouraging cohesion amongst different faiths and communities to the health of our national dialogue.

Peace really has to start with me and then expand to my family society and the the world. What we think is what we express, so it's very important to have a positive and hopeful mindset. We can only do this through lots of deep thought and self-reflection on our actions and impacts on others to correct ourselves to the best to help other people. Thank you for giving me this chance to learn some precious lessons.