

Canada's program: Encouraging Social Engagement & Loyal Citizenship

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October 27, 2016



Encouraging Social Engagement and Loyal Citizenship among Disaffected Youth was the theme of the joint annual conference of Universal Peace Federation and the Women's Federation for World Peace held in the Ontario Legislature Building at Queen's Park in Toronto, Canada on October 27, 2016. Ontario is Canada's largest province and Toronto the country's largest metropolis.

The conference consisted of two panels with the following focus:

Exploring Root Causes of Youth Radicalization.

In a Family Context, do mothers play a pivotal role in preventing youth radicalization?

Members of provincial parliament were in session and some took time from their busy parliamentary schedule to participate in the conference, most significantly the Attorney General, Hon. Yasir Naqvi.



The gathering began with introductory remarks by Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Daniel Stringer, and an Indigenous Welcome to Sacred Land conducted by two Indigenous advocates and mothers – both leading representatives of their communities in Ottawa and panelists. A stirring rendition of the national anthem was sung by well-known Juno Award winning singer, Ms. Liberty Silver.

In his welcoming remarks UPF Canada Chair, Dr. Moonshik Kim shared about the founders' vision and efforts for peace and succinctly clarified the guiding principles of the Universal Peace Federation. A brief video presentation of UPF's global activities followed.



The first panel entitled “Exploring the Root Causes of Youth Radicalization” was moderated by UPF Canada’s Secretary General, Mr. Franco Famularo and included four panelists. Mr. Paul Tamale, who assisted two former Attorney Generals of Ontario with a report on the Roots of Youth Violence, reported that, poverty, attitudes of people in authority such as teachers and law enforcement officials were all factors, but that family instability is at the root of much of the disillusionment leading to violence in Canadian society.

Meriem Rebbani-Gosselin of the “Center for Prevention for the Prevention of Radicalization leading to Violence” in Montreal was the next speaker. In 2015, Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General of the UN visited their center and recognized the organization’s efforts as a model for other nations to follow. Ms. Rebbani-Gosselin provided insightful research that clearly shows that youth radicalization is not limited to a certain economic class or gender. She provided concrete examples of one particular cell uncovered in Montreal who committed themselves to travel to Syria to join ISIL.

Each panel consisted of representatives from the Black, Indigenous and Muslim community. The Indigenous perspective in the first panel was presented by Ms. Jocelyn Wabano-Iahtail, a PhD. Candidate at Carleton University who has personal experience on First Nation territory with the abuse of her people. Her mother recently received an apology from the Canadian Parliament due to systemic abuse experienced through the residential school system. She shared how indigenous spirituality contributes to the healing process and through an interactive exercise with the audience put emphasis on the sacredness of each person.

Dr. Jooyoung Lee of the University of Toronto, an expert on youth gangs and gun violence emphasized the role of the promotion of the arts, music and culture as a way for prevention of youth engaging in violence. He explained about the pitfalls of punitive policing and suggested a public health approach to gang violence.

The second panel on the pivotal role of mothers in the prevention of youth radicalization consisted of a teacher, minister, indigenous lawyer and representatives of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police’s Integrated National Security Enforcement.

Moderated by Mrs. Lilly Tadin, President of the Women’s Federation for World Peace in Canada, the session started with an insightful presentation by Ms. Sameen Affaf a teacher with a graduate

specialization in social exclusion and marginalization. Affaf referred to six areas that mothers help prevent radicalization by providing recognition in providing a sense of identity, connection through a sense of belonging, intervention by their nurture, through education in creating a culture of love, through validation by giving voice to disaffection and finally by providing a sense of awareness through taking notice.

Rev. Sky Starr, a trauma specialist and grief counselor share about her experience in with victims of youth violence and their mothers. Mothers have the added burden of continuing to nurture their families in spite of their grief.

Deniseanne Boissoneau, a representative of the Indigenous Anishinaabe and Ojibway community and a practicing lawyer explained that in her view a mother builds a child and that the criminal justice system requires reform to incorporate restorative justice.

Sergeant Mia Poscente and Inspector Don Halina of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Integrated National Security Enforcement Team provided the perspective of the National Police force through being proactive in dealing with youth radicalization. Both Mr. Halina and Ms. Poscente explained that the police is willing to collaborate with every community in preventing youth violence and radicalization.

Mufti Aasim Rashid a distinguished Islamic scholar and educator from Vancouver explained the challenges of radicalization for the Muslim community in Canada. Rashid is also founder of “Al-Ihsan Educational Foundation” and just launched “Islam Unraveled” which is committed to educating Canadian institutions about Islam. He declared that radicalization cannot only be defeated from within the Muslim community. He stated Muslims must find their place within Canadian society and at the same time retain their identity. Rashid expressed his frustration with the media for offering very limited perspective in their reporting. Devoted Muslims are not extremists and that through education stereotypes and misunderstandings can be dispelled.

Each panel included a lively question and answer session and the meeting concluded with an explanation and commissioning of Ambassadors for Peace.