

Human Rights: How Far Have We Progressed?

Yong Cheon Song - UPF - Europe

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London, UK - UPF Europe organized an International Leadership Conference in London December 8-10 on the theme 'Commemorating Human Rights Day 2011: How Far Have We Progressed?'

The last of the series of European Leadership Conferences in 2011, 'Commemorating Human Rights Day 2011: How Far Have We Progressed?' examined the Universal Peace Federation and the Women's Federation for World Peace's benchmark of human rights, that humanity is an inclusive global family under a loving God, contrasting it with the global problems we face and discussing strategies, initiatives and policies to reach to that ideal.

Dr. Yong Cheon Song, Chairman of UPF-Europe in his keynote address expressed, "The advancement of the Human Rights of all peoples is an essential part of the core mission of both organizations, and a key element in building lasting world peace. ...We meet against the backdrop of unfolding events in the Arab world that demonstrate in unprecedented ways a growing awareness of our shared humanity and of our destiny to become one global family in which the Human Rights of all, regardless of race, religion, nationality or ethnicity are respected. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaims that there must be what it calls a "common standard of achievement for all people."

UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon's statement for 2011 Human Rights Day: *Human rights belong to every one of us without exception. Across the globe, people mobilized to demand justice, dignity, equality, participation - the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration. Many of these peaceful demonstrators persevered despite being met with violence and further repression. As we look to the challenges ahead, let us take inspiration from the example of human rights activists and the timeless power of the Universal Declaration, and do our utmost to uphold the ideals and aspirations that speak for every culture and every person.*

Plenary Session

Lord Tarsem King of West Bromwich (Patron of UPF-UK) and the host of the plenary session on "Human rights Around Europe" Rt. Hon. Tom Brake MP welcomed the international conference participants to the historic Committee Room 14 in the House of Commons.

Mrs. Carolyn Handschin (President of Women's Federation for World Peace-Europe) said that a commemoration of human rights is also a celebration of human dignity. Prof. Lord Bhiku Parekh stated that human rights must include socio-economic rights. He expressed his concern that "rights are being chipped away" by budget cuts, "the war on immigration" and the practice of "stop and search" by British police.

Rt. Hon. Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC, Britain's first black female Attorney General (2007-2010), shared her experiences in combating domestic violence in Britain. "Peace at home is a fundamental human right, which must be protected unconditionally" she stated, and reminded that "one in four women in the UK was a victim of domestic violence." In recent years this figure could be improved to one in six. Baroness Scotland encouraged those present to be involved in the 'For the Women in My Life' campaign she is promoting in her capacity as Patron of Eliminate Domestic Violence – Global Foundation.

The former Human Rights Ambassador for Spain, Silvia Escobar, pointed out the role that institutions like the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe play in securing human rights in Europe. She highlighted that the different articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are closely interconnected and "the failure of one is abuse of another." Escobar emphasised that at the core of the matter is dignity, which is the foundation for peace, security, and freedom. She remarked "dignity even comes before equality."

Rt. Hon. Tom Brake MP, Liberal Democrat spokesman for Home Affairs issues, took a human rights angle on the recent riots in the United Kingdom. He expressed his concern that human rights are experiencing a backlash in the UK at the moment. They had not restricted the police in dealing with the looting. "The police do not want or need new weapons, curfew powers, or the power to shut down social networks," he stated and expressed his concern about misleading language in the media, when it comes to "so-called human rights."

Dr. Song gave the final address, '*New Vision for Human Rights*', highlighting human rights as a key element in

building world peace. He reminded the audience that UPF's founder, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, had suffered more than many from human rights abuses. He put forward the question of where human rights come from and asked how they could be protected. He located the wellspring as the human heart and emphasized the need to search within the areas of spirituality, family, and education.

Session II: Human Rights Around the World

The first panel of speakers included Prof. Akiko Yamanaka, Vice Foreign Minister of Japan (2005-06), speaking on 'Responsibility to Protect from a Human Security Perspective'; Austrian Ambassador (Rtd.) Dr. Walther Lichem explaining the role of '*Human Rights Cities*,' and Willy Fautre, Director of Human Rights without Frontiers International in a speech entitled '*Human Rights in North Korea*'. The session was chaired by Robin Marsh, Secretary General, Universal Peace Federation – UK.

Prof. Yamanaka discussed how global political dynamics have changed since the end of the Cold War. There is a need to establish a new security framework. After the Cold War problems such as drugs, terrorism, disease, weapons of mass destruction, financial crisis, natural disasters and resource shortages have dominated the headlines. She stated that the international community need to establish a new framework, a new world order. The challenge now facing all countries was to consolidate their identity and policies, military and non-military, and to focus on conflict resolution and prevention. Yamanaka suggested there were three elements which define where we are and where we should be going. First, countries are moving from traditional to non - traditional identities and policies. Second, regarding security, there is a need for a change of policy from countries seeing themselves set against some other countries to their sharing common cause with every nation. Third it is important to ensure cooperation beyond national borders. Preventative diplomacy is necessary to ensure peace and promote human rights.

Amb. Lichem shared his passion for "Human Rights Cities". He explained that the human rights agenda has three phases: norms setting, the adjudicative phase where violations are denounced and the developmental and operational phase, where Human Rights are made a reality. He talked about examples of this in 14 cities around the world that have declared themselves human rights cities where human rights are taught in schools and become the basis of civic life. By doing so the cities had successfully transformed themselves and, as a result, had also become more prosperous.

Mr. Fautre emphasized the importance of primary research he described the work he had done with North Korean refugees. North Korea ranks on every survey of human rights as one of the worst countries. It is a perfect totalitarian system in which there is no independent civil society. There are at least 200,000 people in political prison camps in bestial living conditions where they are often tortured. Many prisoners are victims of 'guilt by association' because in North Korea three generations can be punished for a person's crime. Up until now the international community has been silent on this issue but now there is no excuse for this as the facts are very clear.

Lord Tarsem King of West Bromwich and Margaret Ali (Director UPF – UK) chaired a second panel on the topic. The first speaker was **Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham** who addressed the topic *Universal Human Rights for Humanity* passionately asserting that all people have rights regardless of their background, religion, or colour given to us by 'God Almighty' and that December 10th is a day to remember that we are very fortunate that we have such rights. He highlighted the double standards of those who only speak out about issues of human rights when it is in their national interest.

The second speaker, **Keith Best**, gave his insight into torture, posing the question, *Why Do We Still Tolerate Torture?* Mr. Best, having had much experience as CEO of Torture Care, gave a short history of torture practices, and opposed any justification for torture, calling it 'morally repugnant'. He expressed his optimism that torture practices across the globe can finally be eradicated.

Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid JP (Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony UK) was the third speaker of the session, speaking on the topic of *Islam and Human Rights* emphasising Islam's perspective on human rights with support from the Qu'ran, and the power of education as a tool that not only promotes human rights but also combats issues such as poverty.

The final speaker of the session, **Prof. Unni Wikan** (University of Oslo), began by telling the moving story of Fadima,

a 26 year old woman killed by her father in 2002 in what is known as '*Honor-Based Violence*.' Prof. Wikan described it as a practice that cuts across religions and societies, with one solution being to identify the signs that could lead to violence before that violence occurs.

Session III: Women's Empowerment and Human Rights

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