

Washington DC Forum Considers “The Role of Religion in Peace-Building”

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Washington, D.C., USA—On July 14, 2015, the UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs held a forum at The Washington Times on “The Role of Religion in Peace-Building.”

The role of religion in peace building in international affairs has been a source of meaningful discussion, particularly in the post-9/11 world in which we live, where religious extremism and the threat of conflict between religious communities exists. Too often traditional diplomacy has rejected the religious component in favor of political and military solutions. Panelists at the forum agreed that the religious approach to peace-building should complement the conventional secular approach.

The attendees included participants of a four-day Religious Youth Service (RYS) project in Washington, D.C. Among them were students or graduates from the University of Maryland, Rutgers University, University of Bridgeport, Towson University, West Virginia University, George Mason University, and Montgomery College.

Forum moderator, Dr. Antonio Betancourt, director of the UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs, gave welcoming remarks. “When the topic of peacemaking is raised, most people immediately think of the more traditional paths—political, diplomatic, military, or economic--[for it]. However, I have found firsthand, in my grassroots experiences, that religion and faith-based organizations have an important role to play as the neutral peacemaker. Non-governmental organizations like UPF, RYS and the ICRD [the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy] provide what is called ‘track two diplomacy’ or ‘soft power’ solutions. Religion cannot replace traditional governmental diplomacy, but it can definitely supplement and support it.”

Dr. Betancourt encouraged the young people in attendance to study the teachings of different faiths and to learn to appreciate the religious and spiritual dimension of life. Understanding their own faith and the ways in which faith is expressed will affirm, enrich and challenge them to grow. He spoke about the teachings of UPF founders Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon and said that Rev. Moon taught that peace comes through dialogue and cooperation, and that service to others is the foundation for reconciliation. His lifelong motto was “to live for the sake of others.”

Among the speakers were Dr. Zainab Chaudry, outreach manager of the Maryland chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization; Dr. Zulfigar Kazmi, executive director of The Commongrounds USA, an organization network dedicated to the promotion of interfaith dialogue and inter-religious cooperation; Mr. Ralph E. Winnie, Jr., director of the Eurasian Business Coalition’s China Program at the Eurasian Center, a nonprofit organization that promotes positive relations between America and Eurasia; and Mr. Ricardo de Sena, president of UPF-USA.



Points made by the speakers, include:

Non-governmental organizations like UPF, RYS and the ICRD provide what is called “track two diplomacy” or “soft power” solutions.

Religion and faith can build bridges and deconstruct some of the divisive factors that pit human beings against one another.

Many peace activists—including Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi, were religious leaders who leveraged their teachings to spread peace in the world.

Religious leaders and institutions can serve as mediators and communicators between opposing sides.

A summary of the remarks and full bio of each speaker follows:

Dr. Zainab Chaudry is the outreach manager of the Maryland chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. Dr. Chaudry is a board member of the Interfaith Action for Human Rights, and serves as the liaison to the Shoulder-to-Shoulder Campaign, an interfaith program of the Islamic Society of North America.

Dr. Chaudry: I will hopefully dismantle some of the stereotypes and misconceptions that many of us might have about Islam, especially about women in Islam. It's hard to turn on the news and not see headlines about conflicts in multiple parts of the world, and unfortunately, religion seems to be tied to it in some shape or form. It's easy to see how misconceptions and ideas [might be] formed that perpetuate the [notion] that religion is the root of many of these conflicts. I'm here to tell you that religion is also the solution to resolving many of these conflicts...I speak not only as an American Muslim woman and as an activist, but also as someone who has witnessed firsthand the impact that faith can have in building bridges and really deconstructing some of the divisive factors that pit human beings against one another.

Religious communities have directly opposed repression and promoted reconciliation. This cannot be underscored enough, especially during times when we are increasingly challenged to show that religion can be a force for peace in the world. This has never been more relevant. We know that there are many peace activists who have also been religious leaders who have leveraged their religious [teachings] to promote peace in the world. One example is [Archbishop] Desmond Tutu in South Africa. He worked there to break the bonds of apartheid, and he did it by drawing on his religious background and knowledge. He not only helped to bring more attention to the injustices through civil disobedience, [but also] supported international sanctions against South Africa. He also helped Christians in South Africa recognize that [their justifications for] apartheid were actually [in] contradiction [to] biblical traditions.

In addition to Archbishop Tutu, there have been many other figures in history who have [played] a pivotal role in [shaping] the perceptions, ideas and thoughts of individuals, and who drew on their religious beliefs to help move their points across. Examples include: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who drew

heavily on his religious teachings. This is a common denominator that can be found in many of the peace activists in Pakistan. There is a very famous philanthropist, Mr. Abdul Sattar Edhi, who because of his religious beliefs, promotes humanitarianism as one of his main philosophies. One thing that sets him apart from other humanitarians is [that] he doesn't differentiate [to whom] he provides services based on religion. This is an example of how religion has helped [to] bring about positive change in a country [where] different levels of the government have [differed on how to promote] peace and reconciliation.



Religion offers [the] unique opportunity to leverage and promote reconciliation between conflicting parties and groups. Religious leaders and institutions can also serve as mediators and communicators between opposing sides. One example [of] this—and I can talk about this from a personal perspective—is through my organization, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). Last fall, [our organization] drafted a letter in cooperation [with] the Fiqh Council of North America, which provides legal counsel to the majority of Muslims who reside in the US and Muslims all across the globe, that refute[s] ISIS' extreme ideology. It point-by-point deconstructed the religious references that ISIS uses to justify its brutality. It was very effective and helpful to distance the actions of this terrorist organization from the world's second-largest religion. [The letter] clearly [conveyed] that Islam forbids many of the actions [in which] this group is engaged. This is just one example of how a religious mediator can help to communicate between two different groups. The effort to delegitimize ISIS and to distance it from the religion of Islam is an ongoing process and something Muslims all across the world are working daily to continue.

Dialogue is another form of religious peacemaking to diffuse interfaith tensions. A specific example would be in the aftermath of the horrific attacks of 9/11 that changed the course of life for American Muslims. It forced Muslims to reach out beyond their communities and form ties and build bridges with diverse communities.

We need to be able to communicate effectively, and religion plays an important role in helping to establish the bridges that we need to build for us to be able to bring about peace and stability in the world.

Dr. Zulfiqar Kazmi serves as executive director of The Commongrounds USA, an organizational network dedicated to the promotion of interfaith dialogue and inter-religious cooperation through educational programs, workshops, conferences, and research. Dr. Kazmi received his education in Pakistan and the U.S., and earned his doctorate degree in international relations.

Dr. Kazmi: This is the holiday of Ramadan, which is very important in Muslim life. During Ramadan, Muslims fast to commemorate the first revelation of the Koran to Muhammad. It is regarded as one of the Five Pillars of Islam. We are a people who believe in faith and so we love faithful people. We are living in a special time in history. My faith tells me there is a greater power that is working to bring this world closer together. This morning, a spacecraft launched by the United States flew by Pluto. Launched in 2006, it has traveled more than 3 billion miles. There will be many benefits from this scientific accomplishment. This week, Cuba and the US will restore diplomatic relations, which were broken 54

years ago during the Cold War. This will also contribute to peace to the Americas. Lastly, the US (and five other world powers) signed a nuclear agreement with Iran. This historic agreement with Iran will have a major impact for peace for all the Arab countries.



Politics, science and religion are making a difference in the lives of people for a higher purpose. Religion is a driving force for humankind. The Koran says to hold fast to the rope of love. To create unity among ourselves, we must hold fast to the rope of God and do not disunite among ourselves. Each religion's fundamental beliefs are the guiding force for the unity of humankind. It is a fundamental belief of all religions, including Islam, Judaism and Christianity that the believer should live for the sake of others. If an individual is not practicing liv[ing] for the sake of others, it means that he is not practicing his religion. When we live for the sake of others, we actively striv[e] for peace and mak[e] [the world] a better place for us all to live.

We have seen religious extremism and conflict between religious communities, but why it is happening is the question, and the answer is very clear: because we do not understand the meaning of religion and its divine principles. If we do not understand them, then we cannot practice them. We need to enhance our understanding, then we can practice. Every religion must prayerfully think, "How can we live together for peace?"

Religions give humankind the discipline to understand how we can live together as one world under God. Just after the 9/11 attacks, Rev. Moon convened a summit in New York City of religious and political leaders. The theme was "Global Violence: Crisis and Hope." I attended [it] with several high-level contacts from Pakistan. It was not only an event, but a moment to think about the meaning of peace—how can we attain it, how can we sustain it, how can we talk about peace? As I prayed and pondered, the answer came to me. Out of this gathering, I was inspired to found The Commongrounds USA as an organization [that would] promote interfaith dialogue and call on religious leadership to work together for world peace. I hosted an interfaith symposium with the support of UPF's Tomiko Duggan. My position is that education is the key. If people are educated, they [can begin to] understand [and] then can...actualize those divine principles.

My wife, Tanvir, and I have been working with seminaries in Pakistan and with the Muslim leaders in South Africa, who are closely associated [with] Nelson Mandela and his association. I spent time there to learn from this great leader how his faith helped strengthen him and how religion can play a role in building peace, especially between Islam and the other faiths.

I received a letter from President Barack Obama. The President wrote, "As a Christian, I appreciate your perspective. I believe that faith can play a positive role. Faith helps us find the vision to see the world. It reminds us to love and understand one another and to treat with dignity and respect those with whom we share a brief moment on this earth. The particular faith that motivates each of us can bring us together to feed the hungry, comfort the afflicted, make peace where there is strife, and lift up those who have fallen on hard times. We may have different opinions about the issues but with honest disagreement this should not divide us."

We have to go back to the basics of religions—love and peace.



Ralph E. Winnie, Jr. is the director of the Eurasian Business Coalition's China Program at the Eurasian Center, a nonprofit organization that promotes positive relations between America and Eurasia. He received a Master of Laws in Taxation from Georgetown University Law Center and graduated from Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center. He is a member of the bar of the District of Columbia and New York and is admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Mr. Winnie: I first got involved in China working for a trade law firm in [Washington], D.C. that had an office in China. I would go there periodically and reach out to companies that wanted to do business with America. In order to do effective business, it's important to understand the Chinese mentality. The Chinese are taught to be wary of foreigners, particularly based on the experience of missionaries who came and tried to convert them, looked down on them, and treated them as second-class citizens—not all of them, but that is the perception that the Chinese community has about Westerners and Western religions. When you're engaging with the Chinese, they really want to make sure that you have a good moral compass. They want to make sure that you are really loyal [and] dedicated to your family, your community, and your faith.

I was grounded in my faith in my family, going way back to my great-grandfather, who was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. In his time, he was tasked to engage with the Africans, as well as try to bridge the divide between the Dutch and the British in South Africa shortly after the Boer Wars (1880-81 and 1899-1902). The British were trying to take over land that belonged to the Dutch in the north of South Africa. The Dutch knew the terrain and engaged in effective guerilla warfare. They kept the British at a stalemate. The only way that the British were able to stop the Boers and win, was to burn the home and the farm of every family. The Boers fought in the guerrilla style, meaning they would fight then go home to recuperate, and then rejoin their unit.

Once the British realized this was happening, they went to every home and farm and burned them to the ground and carted off all the women and children and put them into what we would consider concentration camps, which were terrible areas where there was dysentery, disease and pestilence. Women and children started dying off like flies. It was so great that the Boers finally surrendered. Obviously they had so much ill will towards the British that they were never able to really come together. My great, great grandfather was tasked to work with the church and try to guide these communities to understand how everyone could work together, find some sort of common ground in religion, without trying to convert, [and] bring healing. He was so loved that he was nominated to be [a] presidential candidate. He decided to turn it down because he was a deeply religious person. He felt he could not separate his religion from the work that needed to be done as president. The nomination went to Paul Kruger who served as president from 1883 to 1900.



I find this so fascinating that he put his principles above his own personal ambition. This is something that we should all consider—stick to what you believe; don't sell yourself for anything, and stand up for what you believe in.

A seminal moment in my life was going to Germany and going to the concentration camp in Dachau and recognizing the suffering [and] brutality a country could do to another race of people because they were considered undesirable. Unfortunately, the majority of people turned a blind eye.

The lesson is that you've got to stand up for what you believe and for your fellow man and woman. Each individual can make a difference. In China, I'm able to make a difference through my relationships with the officials, and the people that I meet there. They respect and trust what I have to say. This helps me and my clients get what they need [to get] done in China. So much of what is done in China and a lot of countries is based on personal relationships, but in order [to have] that, you have to have the right mindset; you have to have a good moral compass.

Mr. Ricardo de Sena serves as the president of UPF-USA. Previously, he was the director of the UPF Office of United Nations Relations. Rev. de Sena served as president of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela. He graduated with honors from UTS-The Interfaith Seminary with a Master of Religious Education and a Master of Divinity.

Mr. de Sena: I was asked to present not only [about] the role of religion in terms of peace-building, but in the context of UPF and its founder, who made a proposal to the UN to establish an Interreligious Council at the UN. I want to take you back 70 years to when the UN was born. It was the end of World War II. Over 60 million people were killed, which was about 3% of the world's population. The leaders of that time, in 1945, decided to create an organization to end war, to end conflict, and to prevent any possibility of more suffering. The first sentence of the preamble of the UN charter states that the UN was founded to prevent and resolve international conflicts and build a culture of peace in the world. This is the ultimate goal of the UN. Fifty-one member states decided "no more war." Every year, [world leaders], including the President of the United States gather [for the UN General Assembly] to discuss this goal. Yet, despite that goal of establishing an organization to have no more war, just five years after the UN was founded, war broke out in Korea, then Vietnam, the Falkland Islands, Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, and so on. This is a very important question that we need to us ask ourselves. Why, despite [having] a clear goal, brilliant minds, experts in conflict resolution, [the UN] have been unable to fulfill this goal?

UPF agrees 100% with the preamble of the Constitution of UNESCO, [the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization]: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." Any conflict between two individuals, families, tribes, societies, nations is an internal decision...Ultimately, it's a battle between selfishness and unselfishness--that's the real battle, and that's where peace and war really begin.

Selfishness is at the core and the beginning of all these conflicts. On the other hand, it is unselfishness and living for the sake of others that can solve our problems. Where do we learn about unselfishness? From

the sacred texts and religion. No matter where we are born, [our] faith traditions carry [us];we learn [it] from our parents and grandparents; [it] is our moral compass.



We believe in the Original Being, by many names—God, Jehovah, Allah, Heavenly Parent—who is the source of light, life and peace. We must educate about the importance of religions. Religious teachings help us understand compassion, love for one another, and consideration for those in need. They have the power to end the cycle of resentments, violence, and bring reconciliation.

Religious leaders bring the heart of a parent. The heart of a parent seeks harmony and that is what's needed at the global level, at the United Nations. This is the reason [why] Rev. and Mrs. Moon, the founders of UPF, said we need to [know] that we have a common creator, and a common source of peace, harmony, love, and respect.

Each faith has teachings about love and service. We also learn [these] core values by studying the lives of selfless leaders such Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gandhi. We read the testimony of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter who said that the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel was possible because Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin were religious. We can also learn from the example of Rev. Moon, who was able to practice true love when he returned to North Korea and embraced the leader of that nation who had imprisoned him during the Korean War. Peace is possible only when one tells the opponent, "I forgive you."

I encourage all of you: when you go back home, continue doing religious youth service. Work with young people in your own cities. Think [of] how you can contribute substantially in making an impact so [that] we can see an interreligious council established at the UN, which would bring the voice of God and His/Her teachings at the global level.

Conclusion: There was a consensus that young people (and all people) should listen to the inner calling that is within [them]. [They can] volunteer in [their] community [and] identify the community's needs and match [them] with [their] own, and get other people involved. RYS, and similar organizations, can work with mosques, synagogues, temples, and churches. [These organizations can also] approach the leaders of youth groups and encourage them to work with other groups—not to convert one another, not to compete to see who knows more religious text or who is more right, but to serve, and to show and practice what religion and spirituality is all about. The best sermon is the one that is practiced, not the one that is preached. The world is marching towards freedom and a world free of judgment. Young people don't want to be condemned; they want to live according to principles. The role of religion is to provide the wisdom of the ages—truths that were true 10,000 years ago, today, and will be true 10,000 years from now—universal truths that give purpose and meaning to life.