

Tenth Anniversary MEPI Pilgrimage for Peace

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May 16, 2014



Jerusalem, Israel - More than 160 international delegates representing some 20 nations and a wide range of religious backgrounds joined a special Middle East Peace Initiative program in Jerusalem May 12-16, 2014. Delegations representing UPF and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) engaged in conference sessions, field trips and fact-finding tours throughout the duration of their stay. Their visits covered the Upper Galilee in the northern part of Israel, East and West Jerusalem and the Old City, the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) and Yad Vashem, the National Holocaust Memorial Museum.

This program marked the tenth anniversary of the first "Mother's Heart for Peace" MEPI program convened in 2004, which brought hundreds of women leaders from around the world to Israel. They came following the visionary call of UPF and WFWP co-founders Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon to play a vital role in building a world of peace. The 2004 campaign demonstrated the women leaders' ability to work together for peace, going beyond historical barriers of religion, culture, language and ethnicity.



On May 13, the delegations visited the Sea of Galilee and the site of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as well as Safed, a beautiful, traditional Jewish city in the upper Galilee. Earlier that morning, the delegation visited Ziv Hospital,* which is located in Safed, close to the border of Israel with Syria. In the past three years of the civil war in Syria, the hospital has offered medical care to severely wounded Syrian citizens

who were left by their families on the border with Israel in desperate hope for life-saving treatment. The delegation members met with hospital doctors and social workers and heard them describe their work and the severe situation of the Syrian war victims. Representatives of the delegation offered a symbolic donation to the hospital, in acknowledgment of the staff's practicing the noble virtue of "loving the enemy."



The official opening session took place that evening. Mrs. Adi Sasaki, president of WFWP-Israel, warmly welcomed the guests and invited for welcoming remarks Dr. Lan Yang Moon, president of WFWP International; Dr. Charles S. Yang, chairman of UPF International; and Dr. Thomas Walsh, UPF International president. Each in turn gave an overview of the past ten years activity of WFWP and UPF promoting peace in the Middle East.



The next day started with a visit to the "Apak" Palestinian high school at Tsur Baher. The delegates were very impressed by the unique way in which this school supports children with learning disabilities through environmental awareness and ecological projects. The moderator, Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, director of the Jerusalem Interfaith Forum, introduced Mrs. Rana Khalaf, the school principal, who impressed the audience with her warm and hope-filled personality. She expressed her commitment and dedication to education as the key foundation for a better future for society at large and the youth in particular. An added inspiration came from the second speaker, Mr. Amin Khalaf, founder of the bilingual school for Arabs and Jews, who is also Mrs. Rana's husband. Motivated by his belief in education as a long-term agent for change, Mr. Khalaf is developing new educational projects. The model of Mr. and Mrs. Khalaf, a husband and wife who are working together to promote peace, was highly appreciated by all the guests. The third speaker was Mrs. Naomi Tsur, the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, who shared with the

audience her vision for a green pilgrimage. Mrs. Khalaf and Mrs. Tsur have been working together in the fields of ecology and environmental preservation. Their friendship and cooperation beyond the differences of culture, religion or political concepts serves as an inspiring model. Donations were offered to Mrs. Khalaf and Mrs. Tsur to support and encourage their cooperation and activities for the betterment of both society and the environment.



A large contingent delegates was invited to the Israeli Knesset for a special panel presentation. Mrs. Miri Kamar, secretary general of UPF-Israel, opened the session pointing out the significant role of women in peacebuilding. After a short greeting by Dr. Moon and Dr. Yang, Hon. Tamar Zandberg, MK (member of the Knesset), discussed the political impediments in the pursuit of peace. Former minister and MK Hon. Ran Cohen emphasized the existence a decisive majority among both Palestinians and Israelis who support peace and are willing to make painful compromises to achieve it. The next speaker, Mrs. Caroline Handschin, vice president of WFPW International and director of the WFPW International office at the United Nations in Geneva, described the activity of the Women's Federation among women in the Middle East during the last 18 years. Dr. Walsh described the vision of UPF, emphasizing the soft power role in the pursuit of peace, giving prominence to the role of religion and spiritual leaders. Adv. Judith Carp, former deputy attorney general and president of the Palestinian History Research Institute, shared her heart and passionate care for children from both sides.



Returning to the Dan Jerusalem Hotel, all participants were invited to join an academic panel on the topic of Towards Peace in the Middle East. Experts and scholars from Israel and Europe discussed the theme from various angles. The moderator, Dr. Walsh, invited the following speakers to offer insights: Dr. Marcel de Hass, a security analyst from the Netherlands; Dr. Arie Geronik, from the Department of

Middle East History at the Open University of Israel; Dr. Shantu Watt, founding director of the Woman's Refuge in the UK; Dr. Eldad Pardo, head of the research department at the IMPACT Institute; and Prof. Eliezer Glaubach, president of the Jerusalem Peace and Security Forum. The experts' deliberations were followed by a short question and answer session.



The last day, May 15, began with a silent peace walk in the Old City of Jerusalem, honoring the holy places of three major religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The peace walk started at the Jaffa Gate and ended by the Western Wall with participants offering prayers for peace. The peace walk was followed by a tour in the Old City.

The next outdoor session was a visit to Yad Vashem. Walking again in silence, participants gained insight into the horrors of the Jewish genocide and were reminded of their commitment never to let anyone around the world ever suffer such fate.

The three-day program concluded with a special closing session moderated by Dr. Zoe Bennet, vice president of WFP International. Druze Sheik Ali Birani greeted the participants and added some unique lessons drawn from the Druze faith and shared some insights about the situation in the Middle East. Dr. Edna Calo-Livne presented a video of her Jewish-Arab youth theater group. Dr. Young Tack Yang, chair of UPF-Middle East, and Mr. Hod Ben Zvi, Chair of UPF-Israel, expressed their gratitude and appreciation to all the leaders and participants for their dedication and investment for peacebuilding in the Middle East and bid farewell.

* Translation of portions of a June 2 net report: "Israeli youth do not remain indifferent to the horrors in Syria: youth movements collaborate with Israeli Flying Aid organization to collect dry food for refugee and displaced Syrian families, mainly children and women. Beginning six months ago, the 'Human Warmth' movement collected more than 30 tons of warm clothing and equipment and is now collecting food for 450,000 meals. In the video clip the interviewer asks one of the youth how he can help enemy people and he replies: 'This operation is about the morality of the Israeli society and youth. We want to show a model of how we should treat our neighbors. They are human beings who deserve to have food, warm clothing, and all the basic necessities of life.'" For a video introduction to Israeli Flying Aid click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjszYo8rpAs>