

UPF roundtable in the Czech Parliament - roles of leaders in bringing peace

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Prague, Czech Republic—UPF held a roundtable in the Czech Parliament to discuss the roles of religious and secular leaders in bringing peace.

More than 30 participants, including three members of Parliament, attended the roundtable discussion on April 11, 2016, which was titled “The Role of Politicians and Religious Leaders in Providing a Constructive and Wise Response to Critical Contemporary Challenges.” The discussion focused on ways that parliamentarians as well as leaders of religions, civil society and NGOs could contribute to lasting peace.



The meeting, hosted by Member of Parliament Mrs. Nina Nováková, was a follow-up to the International Leadership Conference held by UPF in Seoul, Korea, in February 2016, during which the International

Parliamentarians Peace Association was launched on February 15 at the Seoul National Assembly, in the presence of 150 parliamentarians from all over the world.

In her opening speech, Mrs. Nováková, who also had spoken at the Seoul meeting, stressed the role of parliamentarians and their responsibility in the decision-making process. Maintaining peace is a demanding task requiring a total and sincere investment as well as a moral perspective, she said, reaffirming her commitment to peace as a parliamentarian.

Dr. Thomas Walsh, president of UPF International, outlined UPF's peace strategies and activities worldwide. He then elaborated on the International Parliamentarians Peace Association, which was created to bring together parliamentarians, beyond national, religious or political affiliations, to address current issues of conflict from a value-centered perspective, in collaboration with civil society leaders and faith-based organizations.

Dr. Aaron Rhodes, president of the Forum for Religious Freedom and former president of the International Helsinki Committee, emphasized that the struggle for human rights should not shy away from confrontation. He recommended that parliamentarians take on the fight for human rights on the national level, and recognized that in the name of human rights democracies sometimes adopt freedom-threatening policies, for example, some hate speech legislation. Human rights are rooted in natural law, he said, and we need to distinguish between natural human rights such as freedom of speech or religious freedom, and political human rights such as the right to have a job, shelter, etc.

Mr. Jacques Marion, regional secretary general of UPF-Europe, then outlined the plans and perspectives for UPF activities in Europe in 2016. One of the main points of focus of UPF in Europe, he said, is the strengthening of the family, suggesting that the family structure was a fitting framework for a balanced view of human rights in our pluralistic world. He introduced UPF representatives from Switzerland, Austria and the Czech Republic, who gave short overviews of their national and international activities.

A special welcome was given to H.E. Karel Schwarzenberg, a former Czech Republic foreign minister, a member of Parliament and the honorary chairman of the TOP 09 political party, who in brief remarks pointed out that human rights should not be applied at the cost of others in the peacebuilding process. Human rights should not be stolen by those who violate them, he concluded.

Also present at the roundtable were Mr. Jack Corley, regional chair of UPF-Europe, and Dr. No Hi Pak and Dr. Lan Young Moon, special advisors to UPF-Europe.

The discussion continued with participants bringing up various issues of human rights, peacebuilding, and freedom of speech. It was a significant step toward establishing and developing the International Parliamentarians Peace Association in the Czech Republic and in Europe.

