

Global Interfaith Harmony Week 2014 in the United Kingdom

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February 20, 2014



Global Interfaith Harmony Week was commemorated in the House of Lords by Youth Universal Peace Federation (UPF) - UK with an evening of music and presentations on interfaith harmony from the perspectives of young adults of different faiths. There were musical offerings by musicians of various faith backgrounds. Rt. Hon. Baroness Sandip Verma, the Under Secretary for Energy and Climate Change said she was inspired and energised by the various contributions during the evening.

Christa Kamga, the Youth UPF Director, said 'Many of our youth have things to say about what we can do in this world. UPF tries to break down barriers and bring people together to allow communication.'

Ameera Al-Houderi explained, 'I want to focus on why youth participation in interfaith dialogue is important. Young people have opportunities that older generations did not have and can socialise with people all over the world. Still, a global village can make young people more vulnerable to extremism and prejudice. Young people must work hard to cultivate the concept of peaceful coexistence in society. Young people should take part in interfaith dialogue. Youth UPF is an excellent example of this. We can achieve a lot in empowering young people and building interfaith harmony in our communities.'



Baroness Verma commented, 'The Internet connects people but we also lose the connection with each other. Before social media we had the art of conversation, music and respect for time and space. We have lost such respect. Listening to everyone, you are all very focussed and know what needs to be done but many today don't know. When I grew up my father was racially discriminated but he never lost hope. I went to a very bad school but had amazing teachers who gave the students a vision. Travelling in Africa I get so much hope and faith from those that I meet. Universal Peace Federation meetings bring together people of all creeds, colours and religions. We do need to rattle the status quo. Remember that there are pockets in this country that share this vision. Don't keep it to yourself, and most important is to share it with those who don't want to listen.'

One of the older contributions came from Keith Best, CEO of 'Freedom from Torture'. 'From religions we see the very best and the worst of humanity. What I got in Jerusalem was the sense of all these juxtaposed religions. If all the young people had the same sensitivities as you, what a wonderful world it would be. Humanity is extremely complex; inside us is the capacity to do great good and horrendous evil. Meeting torturers and victims, we try to help victims rebuild their personalities and self-respect.'

Michael Schroeder, a Youth UPF delegate on a recent Middle East Peace Initiative visit to Jerusalem, commented on something he had learned from this experience. 'I had an interesting conversation with a Muslim man in Jerusalem. One thing I asked: do you get along with the orthodox catholic man over there? He responded that, of course he gets along with everyone because everyone is UPF. The problem is after the meeting when we have to go to those who disagree. By loving them they cannot but love us back. Lastly, he quoted his grandfather, passing the wisdom on to me: our responsibility as human beings is to find the wrong in ourselves and correct it and to see the good in others. If you try to live according to this you can't go so wrong.'

Victoria Marsh added that, 'Gandhi said, be the change you want to see in the world. Everyone has different cultures and everyone wants to change different things and have ideas of peace. Seeing all these people who have a common goal, I believe it can change the world. We need this confidence that we can

change the world through our thoughts. We can impact the world in our own way through what we love to do as individuals.'



Another Youth UPF volunteer from a Hindu background, Anita Chandel, shared that, 'Youth are the future leaders and I believe corruption takes place during the young years. Children are born as bundles of love and it is all about what we chose to do with the babies. We are responsible for how our youth carry on in life. God created so many different religions and colours yet we want to go against God and say that 'I don't want to love him or her'. Who are we to say that? In schools it is not important to get a degree, when you miss the finer things in life: loving and respecting each other, living under the umbrella of harmony. This is the beauty of the UPF. Thank you God for introducing me to the UPF where people respect each other and our different colours. We are different, yet the same because we are human. We agree to disagree and respect each other for who they are. This is probably God's challenge to us. The youth should be given a voice for they are our future.'

