

2017 Interreligious Leadership Conference forms association of religious leaders

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Seoul, Korea -- The 2017 Interreligious Leadership Conference closed with the formation of a new international association of religious leaders dedicated to bringing world peace.

The fourth day of the conference, November 13, 2017, was the occasion for the inauguration of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development.

UPF International and the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC), an affiliated organization, have held the conference since November 10 at the Lotte Hotel World. Approximately 400 people have attended the conference, including leaders of religions and faith-based groups, parliamentarians, academics and other leaders.



Session VII: Launch of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development

Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, the chair of UPF International, served as the moderator. **Dr. Michael Jenkins**, the national co-chair of ACLC, read the statement made by UPF co-founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon on August 18, 2000, in which he called for the establishment of an interreligious council at the United Nations.

Interfaith prayers were offered by **Bishop Jesse Edwards**, a member of the executive board of ACLC; **Ven. Pramahaboonthin Taosiri**, the president of the Thai Buddhist Society of Sweden; and **Dr. Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi**, the chief imam of the All India Imam Organization, India.

Rev. Hjoertur Magni Johannsen, the head minister of the Free Lutheran Church of Reykjavik, Iceland (Protestant Christianity), wholeheartedly endorsed the resolution establishing the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development. There must be a way to peacefully unify the Korean Peninsula and end the threat of nuclear war, he said. He focused his remarks on climate change and the environment. "We have alienated ourselves from Mother Earth. The problem of pollution is destroying the oceans and land," he said.



Hon. Manjinder Singh Sirsa, a member of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, India (Sikhism), thanked the organization for its efforts to bring peace on earth. Too many religions consider their religion as the only one, he said, but "we all believe in peace and harmony." Assemblyman Singh said he appreciates the efforts of Rev. Moon and Dr. Moon to "save this earth and humankind." He said, "It is not a coincidence that we are here. It is God's desire that we are here. It is for peace. ... You are messengers of God."

Rabbi Yaakov Luft of the International Rabbinical Court in Talpiot, Israel (Judaism), referred to an important Jewish philosopher who lived 100 years ago. The wise man said the right approach to life is to find ways to come together in love and peace despite differences of race and culture. Avoid xenophobia (fear and distrust of what is perceived as foreign or strange), he said, and teach the religious communities not only about their own beliefs but about other faiths and cultures as well.

Dr. Fumiya Sakow, the head minister of Shinshoji Temple, Japan (Japanese Religion), spoke about his late uncle who fought in the Korean and Vietnam wars. "I believe his soul is working with me," he said. When the Vietnam War ended, his uncle sent him a new year's greeting with the words "I wish for you and humankind peace." Though Dr. Sakow was still in high school, it set the pattern for his search for the meaning of life and stimulated him to study different faiths. He concluded that the different cultures and all the faiths have beauty and purpose. Dr. Sakow called on the participants to love God and promote life.

Sheikh Mohamad Ali Hajj, the director of the Imam As-Sajjad Seminary in Lebanon (Shia Islam), said working for humanity is the most important form of worship. He said he was grateful for the gathering and believes that "we have gone to a different dimension. ... We are entering a new era." He said he appreciates the diversity of the participants and believes that the different faiths "complete one another," thereby more fully reflecting the image of God.

Brother Agricol Lozano Gomez, the vice president of the Interreligious Council of Mexico (Mormon), said he feels a greater sense of spirituality through the gathering. He called for the spreading of these interreligious ideas. It is important, he said, to be tolerant and understanding toward others. As Jesus said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone." Brother Gomez said he believes the way to build an ideal and righteous society is to listen to our hearts. He quoted UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, who said, "Let's change the logic of power for the logic of true love."

Ven. So Bhita Sobhita, the principal of the International Buddhist Educational Center in Myanmar (Buddhism), said it's important that religious leaders respect other faiths, cultures and beliefs. "We see violence every day," he said, but "violence begins in the minds of men and women, so that's where the way to peace begins."

Rev. Suamalie Tafaki Josefa Naisali, an elder minister and the chair of the United Reformed Christian

Church of Tuvalu, Kiribati and New Zealand (Reformed Churches), gave the example of paddling a canoe. In his home nation of Tuvalu, this is an expression that encourages cooperation and partnership, he said. "When we are paddling our canoe in the Pacific, we make sure that no one is left behind." Rev. Naisali described this as the strategy that we should adopt, so he asked: "Are you willing to paddle with me? Are you willing to go all the way?"



Dr. Sheikh Hojjat Ramzy, the director of the Oxford Islamic Information Centre in the United Kingdom (Sunni Islam), described some of the world's problems, including pollution and war. "Humans are killing each other on a scale never seen before," Dr. Ramzy said. "It is time to go back to the Scripture and discover the verses of peace that have been ignored." He called for the participants and all religious leaders to work together to protect life, because all life is sacred.

Rev. T.L. Barrett, a member of the executive board of ACLC, USA (Pentecostal), said the two most important days of our life are the day we are born and the day we discover why we were born. Rev. Barrett expressed his gratitude to God that he was "born for a divine reason and to be a representative of the almighty God." In His wisdom, God also understood that an example of how to represent God was needed on this earth. Twenty years ago, Rev. Barrett was introduced to Rev. Moon and Dr. Moon, and he said he was pleased "to learn from he and his wife how to represent God. They are the divine example." He expressed joy that Dr. Moon "will lead us to the land of Jesus."

Rev. Richard Buessing, the president of Family Federation for World Peace-USA (FFWPU), said that during this conference and especially at the November 11 Peace Rally he truly felt the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. "We broke down so many barriers and walls," he said. "When I saw the testimony of the doctor and woman who won the Sunhak Peace Prize who gave up everything for peace, I think Dr. Moon deserves a medal for peace, a Nobel Peace Prize. No one has worked for peace as much as Father and Mother Moon."

Minister Amar Gupta, the minister of the Capitol Hindu Temple, United States (Hinduism), said peace begins in our hearts and minds. Jesus told John to be *just and careful in all his dealings and faithful to his duties*, he said. *Minister Gupta said we should open our hearts to God, who is the supreme power.* He thanked Dr. Moon and said, "She gives us real love, a mother's love." He called on everyone to proclaim, "We are one family under God."

Archbishop George A. Stallings Jr., the national co-chair of ACLC, USA (African-American Catholicism), described the gathering as a "cross-section of the world's religions." He noted that "true religion unites us; false religion divides." He quoted Paul in Ephesians: "We are to preserve the unity of the Spirit." He also quoted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "In a real sense all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. ... This is the interrelated structure of reality." Archbishop Stallings called on the participants to "fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit, and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth."

Presentation and Signing of the Resolution

The following Resolution was read and unanimously affirmed to launch the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development:

**Interreligious Leadership Conference
November 10-14, 2017
Seoul, Korea**

**Interreligious Association for Peace and Development
Resolution**



As participants in the Interreligious Leadership Conference sponsored by the Universal Peace Federation and the American Clergy Leadership Conference on November 10-14, 2017, focused on the theme "Addressing the Critical Challenges of Our Time: The Role and Responsibility of Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Organizations," we affirm the unique and essential role that religions are called to play in bringing about a world of lasting peace, a world in which people of all nationalities, ethnicities, races, cultures, and worldviews live together in mutual respect, harmony and cooperation, as one family under God.

Throughout the ages religion has served as a guide to humanity, leading us from darkness to the light, establishing the foundations of morality, and providing a vision of the good society. The teachings and scriptures of the great religious traditions are humanity's greatest treasures. We dishonor them at our peril.

We also recognize that persons within each of our religions have fallen short and failed to embody those universal ideals that are espoused within our traditions. Religion, too often, has given rise to conflict.

We resolve to overcome the divisive tendencies that may emerge within religion, and to work to promote dialogue, mutual respect and cooperation so that we may more effectively work to solve the critical challenges of our time, including poverty, hunger, injustice, environmental degradation, family breakdown, corruption, conflict and violence.

Not only should religions cooperate with one another -- Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, and others -- they should also work together with the leaders of governments and civil society and the private sector, as partners, for the sake of building the world envisioned by our founders, our ancestors, and, indeed, all people.

We applaud the leadership of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, and her late husband, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, for their vision and work over many decades to create one family under God.

On this day, November 13, 2017, we endorse the proposal to establish a new interreligious association, known provisionally as the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development.

Closing Session

Mrs. Genie Kagawa, the director of the Executive Office of UPF International, serving as moderator, asked each speaker to present their ideas and reflections on the theme "Addressing the Critical Challenges of Our Time: The Responsibility of Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Organizations."

Pastor John Dick Tabilepo, apostle pastor, City Prayer Evangelism and Harvest Ministries, Vanuatu, opened the session with a prayer.

Hon. Netani B. Rika, a member of Parliament, Fiji, noted that service projects are often the driving force behind interreligious projects as they allow groups, both religious and non-religious, to come together to solve some of the world's problems. "All faith groups have a common ground that transcends all religious bodies," he said, and that is that "God loves this world." Religious leaders are like the shepherds who take care of the sheep, he said. A shepherd's responsibilities are: first, to guide and protect; second, to nourish followers with God's words; third, to cultivate feelings of love and compassion; and fourth, to promote unity and a positive attitude toward others.



Swami Hari Chaitanya Puri Ji Maharaj, a world-renowned spiritual leader to more than 180 million Hindu followers in India and around the world, recalled India as a place of peace, harmony and love, as shown through its history and culture. Though God may have different names, the swami said, "The way to happiness is through love, compassion and good conduct. The names may be different, but the Supreme One is always one." He called on the participants to follow the beliefs of their traditions after returning to their home countries, but, most fundamentally, "people must be taught how to be a human." He prayed for the nations to come together and eliminate evil. "Live in peace, not in pieces," he said.

Dr. Robert Lewis, a professor at the University of the West Indies Open Campus in St. Lucia, said, "It's an honor to see people come together and forget about the barriers." One of the purposes of education is to enhance our understanding, appreciation and tolerance of others' beliefs and to treat others with respect, he said. Dr. Lewis congratulated the organizers of the conference and encouraged UPF and ACLC to continue to press for peace in our world. "We cannot enjoy life as long as there are people suffering in this world." Dr. Lewis wished blessings, prosperity and good health to the participants.

Dr. Emad Abu Alrub, the head of the Ukrainian Center for Dialogue and Communication, Ukraine, offered some ideas on the conference topic. First, the world today is in dire need of cooperation between political and religious leaders; second, the best place to consider as an example of peaceful coexistence between us is the airport; third, the Ukrainian Center for Dialogue and Communication considers that it is its duty to protect the human community; fourth, it is important to start working with children; fifth, religious leaders must work with the media; sixth, there is a need to resolve religious conflicts; seventh, there is a need to work out a common ethics code for religious leaders; eighth, the Ukrainian Center seeks to promote peaceful coexistence and the rejection of hatred.

Rev. Jesse Dompreeh, a chaplain of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, United States, said most days people let little things become mammoth, "but the word of God sends us a beam which guides us to safety. God gives us hope." A cosmic foundation found in the pillars of faith, hope and love is what's needed, he said. "You can't have peace unless we love one another. We need hope centered on God and the vision of true parents," he said. Like the story in Luke in which the friends bring their sick friend to Jesus with the faith that just being in his presence will bring healing, similarly, he said, when religious leaders and faith-based organizations come together in faith, then likewise, "healing is at hand."

Ms. Nadia Hassan, the founder and executive director, Young Leaders Institute, United States, asked everyone when they go home to pray for one another and "keep our hearts connected as one and empower us to serve humanity and do the right work." She described a vision she had two years ago that was her

inspiration to initiate the Young Leaders Institute. She felt it would be a movement "where compassion and equity are the driving force and one billion youth will rise up to protect our planet and honor and protect humanity." She quoted the Prophet Muhammad, "*None of you will believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself*" and "You will not enter heaven until you believe, and you shall not believe until you love one another." Ms. Hassan said she believes that Rev. and Dr. Moon are the embodiment of these prophetic teachings.



To conclude the session, a special presentation was made by **Mr. Ishimaru Shinobu**, the president of the Interreligious Federation for World Peace of Japan. One thousand origami paper cranes, a symbol of peace, were given as a token of friendship and support. Receiving the gifts were Rev. Mark Abernathy and Archbishop Dr. Sulanch Lewis-Rose, the national co-presidents of ACLC; Sheikh Mohamad Ali Hajj; and Rabbi Yaakov Luft.

Cheonwon Complex

After the closing of the conference, the participants traveled to the *Cheonwon* Peace Village, located in Gapyeong county, about 25 miles from Seoul, for a group photo with Dr. Moon, to view exhibitions in the museum, and to attend a special banquet for 1,000 with Dr. Moon and other dignitaries.

As the participants made their way back to the hotel and prepared for the long trips to their nations, there was a sense that something very special had happened over the past three days. Participants said they felt "transformed. ... We're not the same people from that opening night." One minister described the experience as "being part of something very important. At the closing banquet, [UPF International Chair] Dr. [Thomas] Walsh said the past year has been like a big puzzle, and the coming together of the faith leaders is the final piece. Now we are complete. Now we can begin to transform the world!"

