

UPF UN: Can early childhood development advance The Culture of Peace?

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New Haven, United States -- A conference held by the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC), together with the Yale Child Study Center, UNICEF, and Queen's University Belfast, asked the question, "Can early childhood development advance 'The Culture of Peace?'"

The one-day conference took place on November 29, 2018, in the Omni New Haven Hotel at Yale, located in New Haven in the state of Connecticut.

A longtime friend of UPF, Rima Salah, PhD, the chair of ECPC and an assistant clinical professor at the Child Study Center, was one of the speakers. She stated, "The goal of the ECPC is to shed light on the contribution of the science of early childhood development to creating a path to peace. ... Working toward a common goal of reducing and preventing violence against children, the unified group that makes up the ECPC recognizes the power of investing in the early years to build peaceful societies."

Remarking on the benefits of collaboration, Dr. James F. Leckman, ECPC executive committee member and professor at the Yale Child Study Center, said ECPC has "brought together a multidisciplinary, multisectoral, and multidimensional range of experts who have worked in the fields of early childhood development and peacebuilding initiatives around the globe that, up to this point, have been working in silos." He asserted that "the science of early childhood development can facilitate the development of a more peaceful world."

Keynote speakers for the program included Pia Rebello Britto, PhD, chief and senior adviser of early childhood development at UNICEF; Sherrie Rollins Westin, president of global impact and philanthropy at Sesame Workshop; and H.E. Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, founder of the Global Movement for a Culture of Peace, a former undersecretary-general and high representative of the United Nations.

Two panels of speakers presented recent research and advocacy efforts related to the advancement of early childhood development, care, and education by building peace and fostering social cohesion among individuals, groups, communities, and nations. Presenters from six low- and middle-income countries spoke of their unique strategies in early childhood-focused peacebuilding.

These approaches varied, as their communities have different cultural issues and have been facing contrasting conflicts or traumas. However, each program was operated according to the central belief that families and children, even in war-torn areas or refugee camps, can be agents of change for peace through using early childhood development strategies.

Several of these programs bring together parents from different and often conflicted ethnic, religious or cultural backgrounds to learn and discuss together in a parenting education program. The parenting approaches encourage relationship-building among the children and between the parents of these different communities as they address peacebuilding strategies together.

The excitement of several presenters was visible as they described the positive and sustained changes in attitude and behavior leading to social cohesion in previously conflicted communities.