

UPF Argentina: Buenos Aires Panel Decries Criminalization of Religion

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Buenos Aires, Argentina – An expert panel discussed the misuse of law to penalize religious beliefs and practices at an event organized by UPF-Argentina on July 19, 2024. The forum, "Discrimination and Criminalization for Religious and Spiritual Matters in Argentina: Legal Challenges in a Diverse Democratic Context," took place at San Martín Hall in the Buenos Aires City Legislature.



Outstanding Italian sociologist **Mr. Massimo Introvigne**, founder and director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), was the keynote speaker. He condemned the "abusive, instrumental" use of the legal concepts "human trafficking" and "pseudoscientific theories" under which members of various religious communities are persecuted. "Proving these theories are false, no more respectable than other pseudoscientific theories such as flat earth, will decisively contribute to the fight for religious freedom, which includes those who live differently from the majority and propose alternative ideas and values, but commit no crimes," he concluded.

Following his talk, Mr. Introvigne was presented with a certificate of recognition: "For his valuable and extensive work around the world, upholding human rights, dignity, and honor of individuals and institutions, particularly freedom of conscience and religion, threatened in many countries."

The certificate was presented by **Mr. Miguel Werner**, UPF-Argentina president; **Prof. Inderveer Kaur**, IAPD-Argentina representative; **Mr. Gustavo Guillerme**, president of the World Congress for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue, A Pathway to Peace; and **Mr. Gustavo Libardi**, president of Scientology in Argentina. The Buenos Aires chapter of the International Lawyers Association J. Reuben Clark Law Society (JRCLS) also supported the recognition.

The other international specialist on the panel was Lithuanian **Ms. Rosita Šorytė**, from the European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB). She gave examples of religious communities that are persecuted in different regions, including the Family Federation under threat of dissolution in Japan. She claimed there is not only one "hidden hand" guiding the anti-cult movements worldwide; there are levels of international coordination "that promote them, and whose role should not be underestimated."



She pointed out that anti-cult groups join forces with atheists, communist activists, and big pharmaceutical executives, who overcome their different ideologies to unite against a common enemy. She recommended that "good women and men should learn and cooperate, overcoming their theological differences and claiming religious freedom as a universal value."

Additional speakers included academic **Ms. Cecilia Varela**, who described the expansion of the legal concept of "human trafficking," which is being applied to religious and spiritual communities; and **Ms. María Vardé**, who has been studying the application of these abusive criteria to members of the Buenos Aires Yoga School (EYBA) and other communities. Also, a representative of the new Christian community, How to Live by Faith, who goes by the name **Felipe**, exposed his personal suffering due to these legal and conceptual distortions.

Researcher **Mr. Alejandro Frigerio**, from the Social Sciences Faculty's Research Institute (UCA-CONICET), condemned the little progress that has been made in rectifying these cases, and the continued harassment of various groups, even at the state level in some areas.

UPF-International's lines of action include interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace, with a range of initiatives in various countries and regions. UPF considers religious freedom a basic human right, as established in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."