

UPF Invited to Swiss Roundtable on Religion and Violence

Michel Reymond
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Geneva, Switzerland—UPF-Switzerland took part in an interfaith roundtable to discuss the association of religion and violence.

The meeting took place on Monday, October 26, 2015, in honor of the Islamic Day of Ashura. This is the second year that UPF was invited by Dialog-Institut, a Zurich-based NGO, to take part in the roundtable, which was co-hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) and the Dialog-Institut.

Forty attendees participated in the roundtable, which explored first the phenomenon of violence committed in the name of religion and then the occurrence of violence against religion or religious adherents.

Moderating the first session, WCC Associate General Secretary Hielke Wolters noted that the undeniably positive aspects of religion in history and society have been overshadowed by its negative aspects. “A powerful source, religion speaks to the hearts of people,” he said, and informs political and personal morality. “Yet it is also a source of violence and devastation.”

Evoking the biblical story of Noah, Ahmet Muharren Athiğ, secretary general of JWF, noted that our globalized situation, with its many challenges and conflicts, “is also like a boat.” Humanity can overcome differences and conflicts and achieve peace only through simple practices, such as eating together, traveling together, staying together and working together.

Addressing the first question, participants discussed whether religion is a source of love or violence, how to deal with religious extremism, and how to address difficult yet authoritative texts in religious traditions.

In a second session, focused on hostility or violence against religions, the discussion centered on how to engender respect for the positive influence of religion and the sacred, whether religion is compatible with pluralism, and how to achieve the harmony and understanding captured in the ideal of Ashura.

Michel Reymond, vice president of UPF-Switzerland, proposed, as a means to avoid extremism, that all believers should study the scriptures of other faiths and compare them with their own scriptures. He reminded the audience that one of UPF’s founding goals is to create an Interreligious Peace Council to reform the United Nations, even more today at the time of its 70-year anniversary.

He read a quote from a speech given in 1999 by UPF Co-Founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon: “It is now the time for religion to exert genuine leadership in the world. I believe that religious people should feel responsible for the situation of humankind, and for resolving various inequities of this age. ... We should work together to implement a system through which the highest expressions of religious wisdom are brought to the table at which the world’s most serious and urgent problems are being addressed.”