

International Day of Families Observed in New Zealand

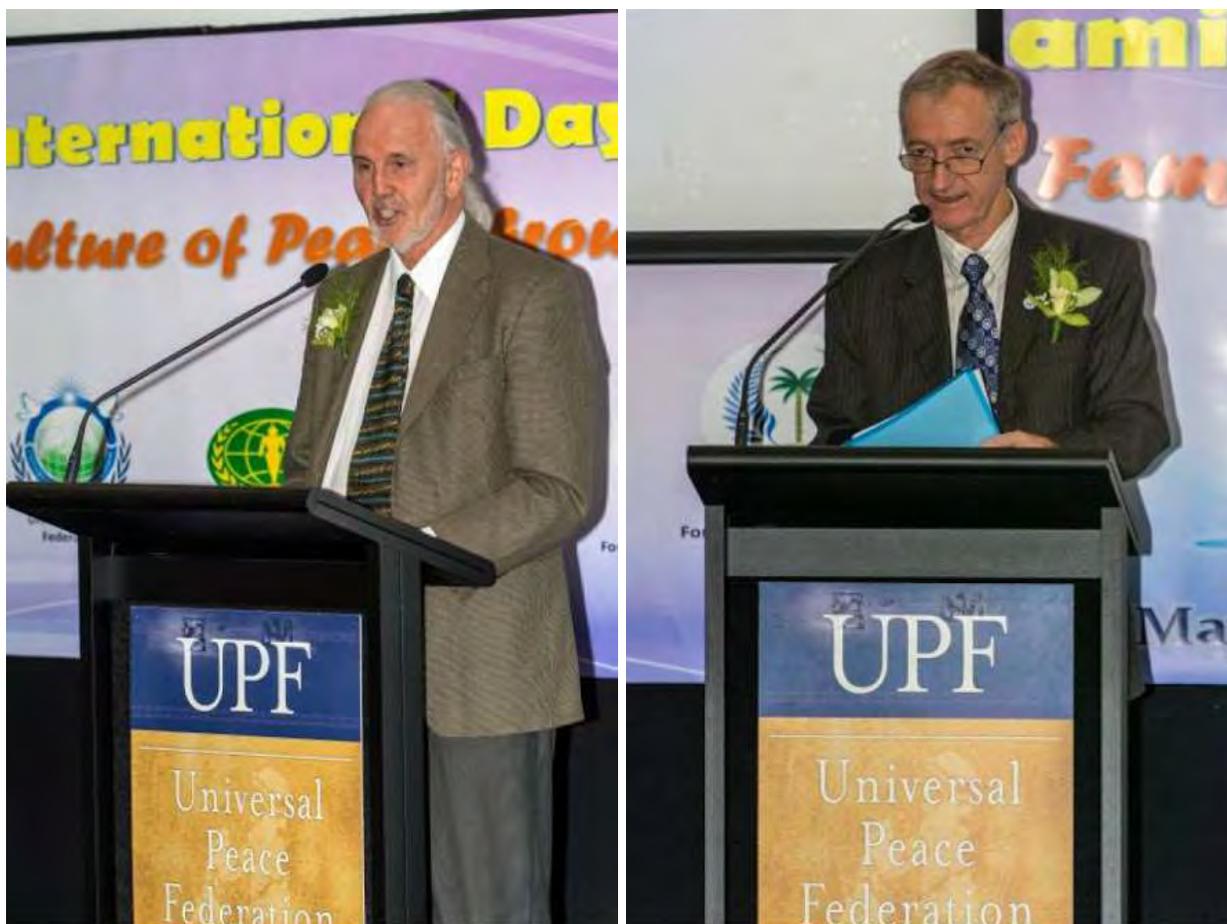
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Parnell, New Zealand—UPF-New Zealand marked the UN International Day of Families by holding a family forum with two distinguished guests from Qatar.

The forum, entitled “Creating a Culture of Peace through the Family,” took place on May 16, 2015, at the Quality Hotel in the Auckland suburb of Parnell.

The distinguished representatives of the government of Qatar were Ambassador Dr. Mutlaq Majed Al-Qahtani, director of his nation’s Department of International Organizations and Conferences, and Counselor Ali Al-Khater, former ambassador of Qatar to Croatia.



UPF-New Zealand had arranged a formal dinner in honor of the two diplomats a day earlier at the Parnell Peace Embassy in Auckland. On this occasion UPF-Oceania Secretary General Rev. Gregory Stone gave a presentation about UPF’s core principles and areas of focus.

At the International Day of Families commemoration, the importance of family, in particular the family’s role in promoting global peace and harmony, was discussed. UPF-New Zealand Secretary General Geoffrey Fyers was the MC for the event, which began with the singing of the national anthems of New Zealand and Qatar.

Rev. Jon Winder then offered an interfaith prayer, followed by the meaningful Maori welcome by Pastor Bill Tangariki, along with the reading of the UN and UPF Statements for the International Day of Families by Mr. Geoffrey Fyers. An atmosphere of solemnity filled the room during these moments.



An introductory video presentation about UPF was shown, after which Rev. Stone explained about the core principles of UPF with regard to the family. The family is the school of love, he said, in which we are meant to grow in our capacity to love through the four stages or spheres of love that can be found only within the family: children's love toward their parents, siblings' love toward one another, conjugal love between husband and wife, and finally parental love for children, with its increasing level of selflessness and responsibility. Family members serve one another and form a culture of living for the sake of others, which is crucial in creating peace and harmony.

Rev. Stone read from the teachings of various Holy Scriptures on the importance of family as the common ideal that we all share despite differences in our beliefs and backgrounds.

The next speaker was Dr. James Prescott, a board member of the Families Commission of New Zealand. He said he believes that the well-being of the family acts as the backbone and provides the stability of a country. It is through family that an individual's physical, material, social and emotional needs are met, and it is only when this happens that the community as a whole is stabilized. The Families Commission exists to help New Zealand families overcome various problems, he said.



In between the speakers, the audience was treated to entertainment by several performers. Mr. Jeffery Nathan, an Ambassador for Peace, sang a traditional Maori song, accompanying himself on the guitar. The second performance was a duet by Ms. Lisa Chung on cello and Mr. Petr Tomek on piano, both of whom have reaped prestigious individual awards in their career as musicians.

Next Dr. Mutlaq Majed Al-Qahtani was presented with an Ambassador for Peace certificate in recognition of his efforts toward global peace and security. An exchange of gifts also took place between representatives of UPF and the Qatari government.

Dr. Mutlaq was also the last speaker of the day. He was introduced formally by Mr. Al-Sharif Fadhil, an Ambassador for Peace who is the president of the Arabic Centre for International Relations in New Zealand. He listed Dr. Mutlaq's qualifications, which include a doctorate in public international law in the United Kingdom and a master's degree in law in the United States; and his professional experiences,

which include serving as chef de cabinet at the presidency of the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly from September 2011 to September 2012.

Dr. Mutlaq addressed the importance of family in promoting healthy relationships and teaching open-mindedness, interfaith dialogue and a culture of democracy in which people understand and accept differences. This acts as a foundation for national stability and international coexistence.

Peace and stability need to be addressed through dialogue, compliance with international law and respect for human rights, he said. Families cannot thrive in the face of human-created problems such as poverty, violence or environmental problems. As the director of Department of International Organizations and Conferences for Qatar, Dr. Mutlaq said dialogue can create the supportive environment that everyone hopes to achieve and live in with one another.

Mr. Fyers opened the floor for any questions that the audience might have for the speakers. There followed an engaging two-way exchange of ideas and explanations.



In his closing remarks UPF-New Zealand Director Rev. Julius Gicole said that the reason why everyone there had come to attend the forum was because of the intrinsic bond that everyone has as one family under God. This invisible bond constantly draws people closer to one another, sometimes beyond their own understanding; and it is powerful enough to bring special delegates all the way from Qatar to participate and share this connection that people long to make with one another. Whenever people meet, they feel the undeniable sense of belonging and familiarity that cannot be explained with simple words or thinking.

Rev. Gicole also spoke about love, life and lineage, all of which can be realized fully only within the family. On this International Day of Families, he said he hoped that people would never underestimate its importance, and urged everyone to work together to bring about a united front of ideal families, wherever they may be.

Mr. Joon Ki Kim and Ms. Shim Gicole then sang “Where Peace Begins.” Before the session closed officially, Mr. Fyers invited everyone to stand and hold hands, as he read meaningful words about the family from UPF Founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon.

For a news brief in the Gulf Times about the appointment of Dr. Mutlaq Majed Al-Qahtani as an Ambassador for Peace.