

International Day of Peace Observed in New Zealand

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Parnell, New Zealand—UPF-New Zealand observed the 2015 International Day of Peace by holding a special forum on the current global issue of refugees.

“Refugee Influx – A Crisis or an Opportunity” was the topic deliberated on September 27 at the UPF Peace Embassy in the Auckland suburb of Parnell.

Approximately 60 Ambassadors for Peace, distinguished guests and UPF staff attended the afternoon forum.

Mr. Qemajl Murati, an officer from Immigration New Zealand, and Rev. Dr. Frank Smith from the College of St. John the Evangelist, an Ambassador for Peace, were on the Panel of Speakers, along with UPF-NZ Secretary General Geoffrey Fyers. The program also included presentations by two New Zealand Ambassadors for Peace who had visited Korea to attend an International Leadership Conference and the World Summit: Mr. Kieran Trass and Rev. Diane Winder, respectively.

The forum was hosted by Rev. Geoffrey Prentice, the chair of UPF-New Zealand, who made the call for the first order of the afternoon: an interfaith prayer by several religious leaders: Rev. Suamalie Iosefa representing Christianity, Imam Zahoor Rahman representing Islam, Mr. Peter Holdem representing Unificationism, Mrs. Shanti Singh representing Hinduism, and Mrs. Farah Kothare representing the Zoroastrian faith.

This was followed by welcoming remarks by UPF-NZ Public Relations Coordinator Dame Jane Secombe, who highlighted the importance of the gathering in commemoration of the International Day of Peace. Next, Mr. Gul Zaman, the president of Auckland City Multi-Ethnic Council and an Ambassador for Peace, read the official statements of the United Nations and UPF on the International Day of Peace, to emphasize the cause and the need for a continual devotion for peace.

Rev. Diane Winder spoke about her experiences of attending the recent World Summit in South Korea. She expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to meet with proponents of peace from the religious, political and service sectors. The World Summit speakers, she said, addressed various threats to peace, including climate change, poverty and inequality, geopolitical ambitions, and the rise of religious fundamentalism or terrorism; and they also recommended reformative works that the world needs to undertake, centering upon God as the source of goodness. There’s an underlying need for dialogue between religious faiths, Rev. Winder said, and we need to continue the good work we’ve been carrying out in order for a stronger platform for world peace to be established.

Mr. Kieran Trass echoed the call for action as he summarized his experience attending an International Leadership Conference earlier this year in South Korea. He said he felt that the ones who are responsible and can make a difference were the very ones who gathered that afternoon in Parnell. Unless there are people who are willing to step up and embody the ideal of a peaceful world, it will never come to fruition, he said. In fact, at that very time and place, as we gathered and cared for one another, we were creating a microcosm of that utopia we envision for the world to substantially manifest in the future.



Brimming with positivity, the event moved on to the forum itself as the speakers imparted their experiences and knowledge with regard to the current global issue of refugees. Mr. Geoffrey Fyers, who was exposed to a variety of cultures and situations while spending time as a missionary in Palau and Zambia, gave his insight upon the challenges faced by refugees who are forced to migrate away from their respective countries. Given a choice, these refugees would rather stay in their homeland despite the hardships they have to endure. Still, he finds that as people of different cultures start to live together, there is always an opportunity for greater integration allowing positive aspects of humanity to develop. This was personally felt as he went through a mixed cultural marriage initiated by UPF Founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, through which he married his Japanese wife.

The next speaker, Rev. Dr. Frank Smith, explained the injustice experienced by the refugees from a religious context. He emphasized the need for human compassion and for focusing on one's caring heart in dealing with the refugee situation.

Lastly, Mr. Qemajl Murati explained New Zealand's continual efforts from the 1960s to accept refugees from various parts of the world. New Zealand has always been in communication with the UN in order to allow an influx of refugees within a preset quota. Although the number of Syrian refugees that New Zealand is accepting is currently small, there's a plan for the number to be increased in the near future; along with the completion of planned infrastructure development to sustain it.

The floor was then opened to discussion, which was enriching to everyone present. Afterward, a short break enabled everyone to converse freely in a harmonious environment befitting a peace-loving global community.

The participants enjoyed a light supper together in the spirit of sharing and togetherness. There is little that could replace the beauty and bonds formed through the sharing of love, in something as easily taken for granted as a family dinner.

The last segment of the event was the apt recognition of hard-working individuals, who had forsaken a portion of their time, efforts and resources for their community, through the new Ambassador for Peace Awards that were presented by UPF-NZ Director Rev. Julius Gicole and his wife, Jasmin Gicole. The new Ambassadors for Peace are Ms. Rosemine Mutamuliza, Rev. Sofala Lafita, Mr. Daud Azimullah, Mr. Ibrar Sheikh and Mrs. Farah Kothare. UPF-New Zealand is truly honored and grateful for their willingness to connect with the Ambassador for Peace Network in order to work hand in hand in creating a better world for everyone.

In his closing remarks Rev. Julius Gicole reminded the participants of the familial atmosphere they had forged with one another that will enable them to create an ideal world together. He invited the participants to maintain a strong connection in this network that is filled with abundant hope and said he was looking forward to their next meeting. Rev. Rob McKay of the Maori Anglican Church in New Zealand then closed the evening with a prayer, and the participants resumed their heartfelt interaction in appreciation of the beautiful opportunity to commemorate this year's International Day of Peace.