

UPF-New Zealand's UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2015 program: What should our response to ISIS be?

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February 7, 2015



Auckland, New Zealand—UPF-New Zealand observed the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week 2015 by asking “What should our response to ISIS be?”

The government of New Zealand currently is debating whether to send military advisers to Iraq, so ISIS (the rebel group Islamic State) is on many people’s minds.



The forum, which took place on February 7, was moderated by Robert Shelley, a UPF representative who spent time in the Cook Islands. It began with a water ceremony symbolizing the coming together of different religions as one.

Presentations were made by the Rev. Jenny Chalmers, the Christian co-chair of the Wellington Council of Christians and Jews, and Mr. Shafiq ur Rehman, spokesman for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, the third-largest branch of Islam. Then the floor was opened for discussion. Many questions and comments came from the audience.



There was widespread condemnation of violence as a means to achieving religious goals. Rev. Chalmers highlighted some peacebuilding aspects of Christianity. Mr. Shafiq Ur Rehman stressed that Islam is a religion of peace, and said it is distressing to see it used to gain political ends.

During a break UPF representative Leon Pogoni gave a presentation on Soccer for Peace, one of the projects started by UPF Founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon, which seeks to bring diverse peoples together through sport. Closing remarks were given by UPF-New Zealand Director Julius Gicole.

In New Zealand, which has many ethnic groups living together peacefully, practicing their chosen faith, the forum participants felt very fortunate to have such a meaningful and respectful conversation about such a sensitive issue.

In conclusion, the participants decided to write a letter to the New Zealand government, voicing their concerns about ISIS.