

UPF Stadtschlaining, Austria Co-Sponsors Burgenland Peace Castle Conference

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Stadtschlaining, Austria -- UPF, in cooperation with the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations, commemorated the UN International Day of Peace by organizing a peace conference at the Schlaining Peace Castle in the Austrian province of Burgenland.

The event, titled "Contributions to a Global Culture of Peace," was held on September 10, 2023.



Johann Rechberger, the president of UPF-Burgenland, moderated the one-day conference. In his opening remarks he said: "The year 2000 was declared the International Year of the Culture of Peace in a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly. The General Assembly, recalling the aims and principles of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], states that peace does not only mean the absence of conflict, but that it also requires a positive dynamic and participatory process, within which dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are to be resolved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation."

Professor Dr. Titus Leber, the creator of numerous large-scale interactive-cultural multimedia

productions, stated that peace arises from finding common ground while transcending boundaries.

During the last 25 years he has been involved in multimedia presentations with cultural and religious contents. Some of his projects were documentaries about World Heritage Sites under the protection of UNESCO, such as Indonesia's Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist temple.



Dr. Leber's latest project is "Africa Interactive," which uses state-of-the-art technology to make information about Africa's vast cultural heritage accessible to young Africans via smart media, thus enabling them to appreciate Africa's contribution to the world's cultural legacy.

We should be concerned about the spiritual and mental pollution of our environment through the media, Dr. Leber said. The display of violence leads to excesses. He suggested that the European Cultural Parliament should heavily tax media producers who propagate violence for the sake of violence.

Tatjana Christelbauer, the founder of the Agency for Cultural Diplomacy Austria, said that UNESCO understands the culture of peace as the everyday way of thinking, behaving and living of individuals and society. The culture of peace is based on respect for human rights, participation, dialogue and cooperation, she said. The culture of peace fundamentally excludes violence as a means of conflict resolution.

She spoke about feminist approaches to the culture of peace, quoting Rosa Mayreder (1858-1938), an Austrian musician, composer, cultural philosopher and gender and peace researcher, who said, "Humanity can achieve lasting peace only when 'feminine qualities' are actively incorporated into the political and social order of society."

After her talk Ms. Christelbauer presented a dance meditation, "I Did Not Let Go of My Angel for a Long Time" (based on the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke's "Angels' Songs"). The performance combined her expressive dance forms with the *tai chi* sword art of Ursula Wagner. Her presentation ended with a "feather meditation" as a sensory experience that invites attentive movement in leading and following, as well as the ability to send a gift and receive it again, to hold the gift mindfully and to let it go again.

Professor Dr. Elmar Kuhn, president for Austria and Central Europe of the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations, emphasized that it is high time to finally develop narratives of peace that are based on truth. Religious institutions, in particular, could develop such narratives and implement them in education, he said.

To achieve this, religions and ultimately each of us would have to become more visible again in society, Dr. Kuhn said. There will be no peace in the world without the contribution of faith-based organizations, he said, even if our secularized Europe tries to banish God from politics and society as much as possible.

Anela Čindrak, an accordion player and music teacher from Montenegro who studied in Slovakia, spoke about her journey in life, using the word for "peace" in many languages. Coming from an Islamic background, she started with *salaam*, but because she was born in Montenegro, which is on the way to becoming a member of the European Union, she continued with *mir*.

In 1992 the Bosnian War started and Yugoslavia was destroyed. She was born in a Serbian town which

was completely destroyed in 1999. Still she said *mir*.

Her family has an Albanian background, and so she used the word *paqe*, which has Latin roots. As an Albanian she also used *shalom*, as Albanians during their history have saved many Jewish lives. Now she has an address in Vienna, so she says, *Frieden*.

In Vienna's Second District one hears *shalom*, and in the 10th District one hears *salaam*. You can hear *Frieden* and also *mir* or *paqe*, and she asks herself, "Am I at home here?" She likes to live in Vienna, which is so colorful.



Even when she speaks "peace, peace, peace," she feels anger and sadness, as this world has become a much more difficult place to live in during the last year – new wars, new crises. She announced that within 24 hours she would perform in three events dedicated to peace. After her speech she surprised the audience by playing two musical pieces on the accordion.

Dr. Leo Gabriel, a social anthropologist, journalist and documentary filmmaker, reminded the audience of the nuclear threat, which has become even greater as a result of the war in Ukraine.

"Peace is the most important issue in the world today," Dr. Gabriel said. He spoke about discussions in the World Social Forum, in which he has been active for decades. The peace movement must learn and connect the issue of peace with the climate and environmental topics as well as social justice, he said. We need a convergence of movements, he said, because together we are strong.

Peter Haider, the president of UPF-Austria, started by quoting Paramahansa Prajnanananda, an Indian yoga master, who in a recent UPF conference said, "Peace is the absence of ruthlessness, hatred, jealousy, conflict, contradiction, and chaos, and the prevalence of cooperation, serenity, mutual understanding, and the manifestation of help and care for one another."

Mr. Haider said that the family is the only institution that God has created, and it is sustaining humanity. It is the school of love in which people can learn how to love each other and live together in peace. It is like a base camp for world peace.

He read the words of UPF founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon: "The problem is how to end the troubled conflict within ourselves. My first motto when I started this path was 'Control yourself before you try to control the universe.' If you can't control yourself, you can't control the world.

"Why must we continue this path that is causing so much suffering, wasting countless dollars on wars that in the end will never lead to reconciliation between enemies? The time has come for all countries in this world to use their resources to build a world of peace."

The conference concluded with lunch in the gardens inside the castle, where everyone enjoyed the sunny weather of a very warm late-summer day.

The Schlaining Peace Castle houses a tiny paper origami crane made by schoolgirl Sadako Sasaki, a victim of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945. The 2-year-old

survived the bomb blast, but 10 years later she fell ill from the long-term effects of radiation exposure. Clinging to an old Japanese belief that anyone who folds 1,000 origami cranes would recover and be healthy again, she accomplished her goal, but still felt ill. She tried harder and folded even smaller and more elaborate cranes. By the time she died on October 25, 1955, there were around 1,700 origami cranes. After her death, her last five cranes were carried into the world by her surviving brother as a sign of peace.



The Crane for Europe has been kept in the Schlaining Peace Castle since 2009 and is considered one of its greatest treasures. Visitors from all over the world come to see this symbol of peace. The crane also can be found in the castle's emblem.

Ruiko Friesacher, a Japanese-born UPF supporter living in Vienna, folded 2,400 cranes during the pandemic as a symbol of healing the world and of world peace.

All the conference participants were invited to take one of these cranes home with them.

