

UPF International: Summit 2022 and Leadership Conference: Session V

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Seoul, Republic of Korea -- Session V of UPF's Summit 2022 and Leadership Conference was a special plenary focused on "The Importance of Religious Freedom: Addressing Threats to Religion across the Globe."

Held on August 12 in the Crystal Ballroom of the Lotte Hotel World, the special plenary was co-sponsored by two daily newspapers established by the UPF founders: *The Washington Times* in the United States and *Segye Ilbo* in South Korea.

The Summit 2022 and Leadership Conference was held from August 11 to 15 under the title "Toward Peace on the Korean Peninsula: Toward a World Culture of Peace."

The moderator was **Young-il Shin**, a former Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) announcer.

Opening remarks were offered by **Thomas McDevitt**, the chair of *The Washington Times*, and **Hee-taek Chung**, the president of *Segye Ilbo*, the co-sponsors of the special plenary.

Mr. McDevitt, who is also the global coordinator of UPF's International Media Association for Peace (IMAP), said that religious freedom "is the most essential human right on the earth today, and there is a huge battle going on, driven by opposite worldviews": one that is materialistic and secular, and the other that is based on faith.

He praised Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the co-founder of *The Washington Times*, who says that today's problems are so complex and deeply rooted that they cannot be solved as long as humanity does not accept and affirm the existence of God, our Creator and Heavenly Parent.

The Washington Times, he said, is "proud and fierce about protecting religious freedom." And he expressed his dismay at the current "witch hunt" taking place in Japan, following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Mr. Chung, the president of *Segye Ilbo*, said that the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights should be reasserted, because religious freedom is being suppressed in countries worldwide. Even in democratic countries whose constitution guarantees religious freedom, conflicts may exist between religions.

Hon. Newt Gingrich, the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (1995-1999), offered congratulatory remarks.

"Belief in religious liberty, which I think is the central basis of all freedoms, is now under attack from two very different directions," he said.

One threat is totalitarianism. "If you're the Chinese communist dictatorship, any belief which gives

allegiance outside the Chinese Communist Party is, by definition, treason and a direct mortal threat to the survival of the system."

The other threat, he said, is secular paganism. "Pagans are people who believe that power is centered in themselves," he said. In violation of the Ten Commandments ("Thou shalt have no other god before me"), "Paganism by definition creates an alternative god," Speaker Gingrich said.

"It's a belief system that says, 'My passions, my interests, my concerns matter, and who is this 'God' person to annoy me?'"

This battle between religion and paganism is echoed in the media frenzy now in Japan. "A large element of the news media hates religion, and given any excuse will go all-out to destroy religion," Speaker Gingrich said. Because of that, he said, the Japanese media are making the Unification Church in Japan the scapegoat for former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's assassination.

In conclusion, Speaker Gingrich said that each of us has to decide whether we are with God or against God. "It's not complicated, but it's hard and it's scary, and there's a lot of power on the other side. That's why this meeting and this conversation ... [are] so important."

Hon. Mike Pompeo said that in his position as U.S. secretary of state (2018-2021), he knew that nations that had religious freedom would be stronger and more secure and therefore "would present a little less risk to us in the United States." Therefore the Trump administration promoted the expansion of religious freedom and the protection of persecuted minorities.

Secretary Pompeo said that even though it's not easy to live one's faith in real life, "Your faith is a central part of who you are. You should live it each and every day, and you should do so with the knowledge that there will be those who think that's not the right way to do it. Be strong."

He urged the international audience "to look to your nation's traditions, to ground your heritage in the central understanding of knowing that faith matters in every place. When you do that, you'll get it right. You'll make your nation more secure, you'll make it more prosperous."

Secretary Pompeo also said: "It won't surprise any of you that the nations that most threaten us, the nations that put our lives most at risk and our freedoms most at risk, are the very same nations that deny religious freedom to their own people. ... Nations that have totalitarianism, nations that want to be aggressors around the world, are the same nations that are aggressive toward their own people."

Despite challenges, Secretary Pompeo said, "I just encourage you never to give an inch, to be strong, to defend the things that are most central to your understanding of humanity and basic human dignity."

Pastor Paula White-Cain from the United States, the senior pastor at the City of Destiny Church in the state of Florida, is convinced that every human should have the basic right of religious liberty. As President Donald Trump often has said, this right does not come from government but from God. With this conviction she was appointed as an advisor to the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative, which established faith-based liaisons in every government department.

Unfortunately, she said, the current U.S. administration has reversed the pro-faith trend. However, she said she has hope when seeing Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon's faith and courage, and her great work as a spiritual leader. The Lord has given us a spirit of love and power, not fear, she said. Quoting Mother Moon, Pastor White-Cain concluded by saying: "It is our responsibility to correct things and return the world to its original state. This is true reformation."

Dr. Young-ho Yun from South Korea, director-general of FFWPU International, said that since we all are united by universal values given to us by our Creator, we need to restore our relationship with God, the Creator.

When Rev. Sun Myung Moon founded the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (Unification Church) in 1954, he aimed at bringing harmony and cooperation between the different religions of the world, and interfaith work was emphasized. In 1997 the name was changed to Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) to emphasize the centrality of families in realizing a world of peace. Dr. Yun declared that the Family Federation will continue to promote family values, freedom of religion, and also the realization of a lasting world of peace.

Mr. Norishige Kondo, the director of FFWPU-Japan's Legal Affairs Office, gave an extensive report on human rights violations committed against Japanese members of the Unification Church (UC), later called the FFWPU. These violations included abduction, confinement, and forced conversion. Although the Japanese media rarely reported on these violations, the FFWPU has recorded up to 4,300 victims.

The Unification Church in Japan was opposed by a parents group, Christian pastors, and leftist groups. Many Unificationists were forced into mental hospitals or locked up at home and coerced into leaving the movement. By the late 1990s, however, kidnappings and confinements decreased as kidnapped members won civil lawsuits against their abductors.

Following the murder of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the media have painted the FFWPU as the immediate villain, criticizing it from an atheistic perspective. There is indeed a serious crisis of religious freedom in Japan, Mr. Kondo said.

Mr. Toru Goto, the chair of the Japanese Victims' Association against Religious Kidnapping and Forced Conversion, and a Unificationist, gave a detailed description of how he was kidnapped and held in confinement for twelve years and five months.

When visiting his parents in Tokyo in September 1995, he was locked up in an apartment by his relatives. They lived with him to prevent him from escaping. He said that his parents were incited to such a criminal act by two "exit counselors," one of whom was a Christian minister. They tried to brainwash Mr. Goto by saying that he was not able to think independently, and that he would not be freed as long as he did not start functioning "normally."

At one point, Mr. Goto started a hunger strike in protest, but had to stop after 30 days as he felt he was close to death. After that, his diet was cruelly restricted for two years. In February 2008, he was suddenly released by his family. After spending fifty days in hospital due to extreme malnutrition, he charged the perpetrators with a crime. However, the prosecution, unbelievably, dropped all charges.

In a subsequent civil lawsuit he won both the trial and the appeal. Since then no cases of kidnapping or confinement of UC members have been reported. However, Mr. Goto expressed his concern that kidnapping may resume following heated media reports about the murder of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Appearing in a recorded message, **Hon. Ján Figel'** from Slovakia, the European Commission special envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union (2016-2019), said that calling religion a source of problems is a dangerous lie. Religion has always been a part of humanity. Do religions not preach peace, love and dignity, while terrorists abuse religion for their own purposes? Let us not forget that the greatest 20th century dictators were atheists.

Unfortunately, 79 percent of the world's population live in countries where religious freedom is under pressure. Repression may range from intolerance to discrimination, persecution, or even genocide.

The time is ripe now for the millennium initiative of the UN Interreligious Assembly, Hon. Figel' said. A task force needs to bring together in dialogue the major world religions and representatives of states and the UN. The idea of an interreligious platform should be explicitly supported by the religious authorities. Indifference, ignorance and fear should be replaced by active engagement, permanent education and courage, he said.

Dr. Massimo Introvigne from Italy, the managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), said that religious prejudice manifests in three stages: First, unpopular minorities are slandered through the media, which is intolerance. Next, laws are enacted and administrative measures taken against minorities, which is discrimination. Since laws are often no match for the strong will of religious people, the next stage is physical persecution.

Three features of intolerance are important today, Dr. Introvigne said. First, certain groups are slandered by using the word "cults," even though a majority of religious scholars have concluded that cults do not exist. Second, certain religious groups are accused of being excessively interested in money, extravagant donations, and tax evasion. In most cases, either this is not true or not different from mainline religions. Third, and most alarming, when crimes have some connection with religious movements whom the opponents do not like, they will turn the victim into the perpetrator and vice versa.

The most egregious example of this, he said, is the assassination of Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Before the media could be accused of having influenced the weak mind of the killer with their hate campaigns against the Unification Church, they called press conferences and depicted the church as the villain of the story.

To prevent further victims from being vilified, victims should name and shame the perpetrators, Dr. Introvigne said. We should help to change the tide through scholarly articles, conferences, seminars, or, e.g., the daily magazine on religious liberty called *Bitter Winter*.

Bishop Don Meares from the United States, the senior pastor of Evangel Cathedral in the state of Maryland, said that for most people in the world there are few things more precious than freedom.

Religious freedom protects the conscience of all people and allows us to express and act upon what we deeply believe.

Unfortunately, "In the United States and around the world, this freedom is eroding quickly," he said. Churches and religious organizations are facing increasing restrictions as they participate in public life, express their beliefs and serve society.

However, "God's love of all of His children is so much deeper than and prior to any human judgment. ... And that is one of the most important reasons for religious freedom," Bishop Meares said. "As Joshua said, 'As for me and my family, I shall serve the Lord.' And as Newt Gingrich said, it is a choice between a belief in God and being a pagan. "I choose to believe in God -- how about you?"

"And we must take a stand with [persecuted Unificationists in] Japan ... and not just say words. Actions are important," Bishop Meares said. "The Bible says, 'Faith without works is dead.'"

To conclude the session, **Dr. Thomas G. Walsh**, the chair of UPF-International, invited all the speakers to sign a resolution affirming that religious freedom is a basic human right.