

International Leadership Conference Discusses Freedom of Conscience

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Washington, D.C., United States -- In its first full day, the International Leadership Conference (ILC) on November 29 discussed freedom of conscience, marriage and family, protecting the environment, and freedom and responsibility of the press.

The conference was held from November 28 to December 1, 2016, at the J.W. Marriott hotel under the theme “Addressing the Critical Challenges of Our Time: The Role of Government, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations.”

More than 200 leaders from 54 nations attended the assembly, which was organized jointly by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and The Washington Times Foundation (TWTF).

A theme resonating throughout the conference was the importance of engaging respectful dialogue across political and religious lines. “An overarching theme I’m hearing today is that it’s time we come together,” said **Hon. Bill Delahunt**, a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Massachusetts, “and I think it’s particularly meaningful in the aftermath of the American election. We are at a moment when the country is divided. That’s not healthy for democracy, and if America is divided, it’s not healthy for the world. What we all realized during the course of the [recent U.S. election] campaign is that there are multiple Americas and large segments of the American population that have profound anger. We need to meet that challenge as well.”

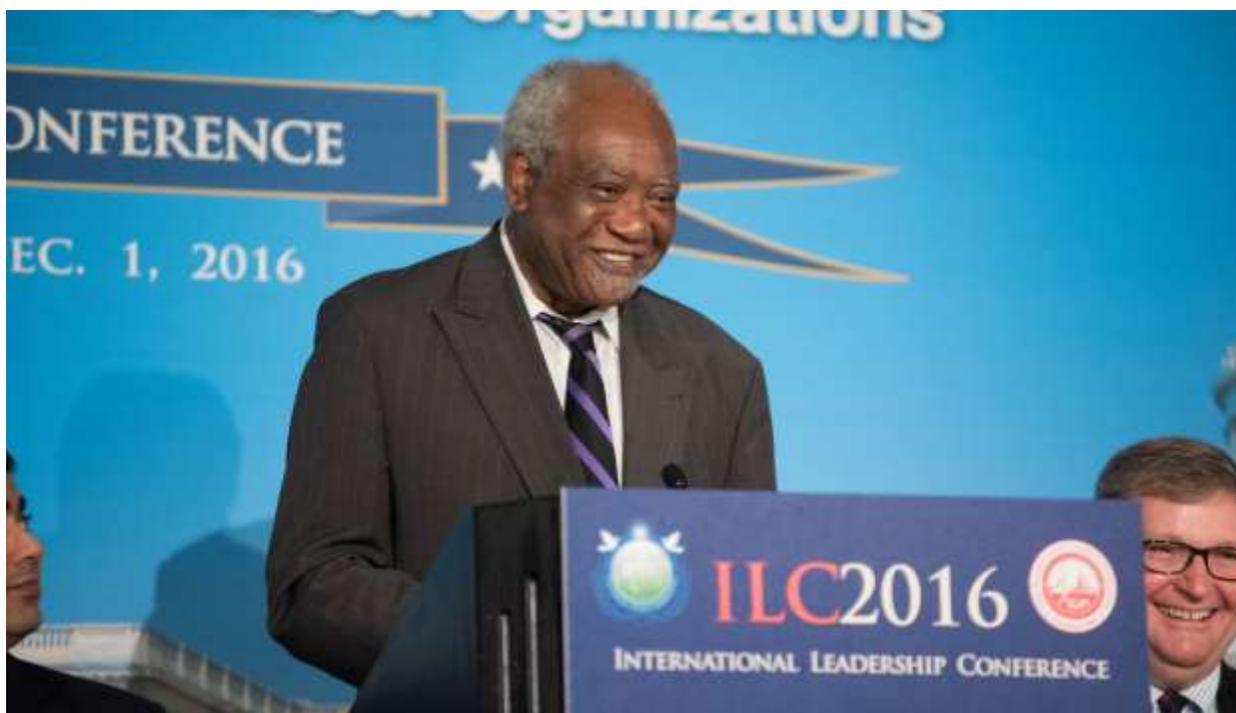
Another theme, highlighted by **Ambassador R. James Woolsey Jr.**, a former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was the need for action and the courage to face difficult issues despite how uncomfortable or insurmountable they may seem. During lunch he gave a talk in which he invited participants to educate themselves on the threat of nuclear war. He delineated the severe consequences of such an event and expressed his hope for people to “wake up” to this issue because “we can’t duck hard problems” and “think it’s so unpleasant to work on because the consequences are so bad.” According to Ambassador Woolsey, addressing this issue in a fruitful way “requires a certain spirit of rejection of the way this has been dealt with for decades.”

Participants also took part in a much-anticipated highlight of the conference: the announcement of the winner of the 2017 Sunhak Peace Prize, awarded to the person or persons who best contribute to human development in the spheres of stewardship of the environment and sustainable peace.

They closed the day with a performance at the National Theatre by the world-renowned Little Angels Children’s Folk Ballet of Korea, a breathtaking and heartwarming spectacle that conveyed the peace-loving spirit of the Korean people and the beautiful culture and arts produced throughout Korea’s 5,000-year history. Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, co-founder of the Little Angels troupe, was present at the performance, as well as Dr. Sun Jin Moon, the chair of UPF International.

The Little Angels’ 2016 U.S. tour is a benefit performance for the Children’s National Hospital, and at the end of their performance Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, the regional chair of UPF for North America, presented a

check for \$25,000 on behalf of the founders of the Little Angels to the hospital.



Session II: Securing Freedom of Conscience -- A Universal Concern

Hon. Charles “Woody” Burton, a member of the Indiana House of Representatives and the driving force behind the “In God We Trust” state license plate, opened the second session of the ILC, which was about securing freedom of conscience, by describing his experience of standing with resolve to protect freedom of speech and religion, specifically the right to practice prayer in government.

Professor Viktor Yelenskyi, a member of the Ukrainian Parliament, presented historical facts and statistics demonstrating the gradual exile of religion in government and society juxtaposed with a rising consensus that religion must be free to manifest itself in all social spheres. He summarized the state of religious freedom and peace among religions: “Historians estimate that 200 million people in the last two millennia have been killed because of religious affiliation. Religious affiliation plays a role in 65 percent of all armed conflict today, and in only 20 percent of countries are all religious groups treated the same.”

Dr. Sam Zakhem, a former U.S. ambassador to Bahrain, expressed both positive experiences with and continued hopes for religious freedom and peace among religions. “I served as ambassador for the United States under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and served in the Colorado State Senate and House, but I’m most proud to be a UPF Ambassador for Peace,” he said.

Hon. Jose de Venecia Jr., a former speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines and chair emeritus of UPF, addressed the theme of interfaith reconciliation. He described his campaign to create an interfaith council in the United Nations that can generate ideas for ending violence in the Muslim world, as well as uniting civilizations that encompass multiple religions. “Territorial, geopolitical, and religious problems intertwine and remain a constant problem in many parts of the world,” he said, adding, “All too often, atrocities are committed in the name of religion. However, violence in the name of religion is contrary to reason and God’s nature, for there can be no religious motivation for violence.”

The session closed with a question-and-answer session. Conference participants presented thought-provoking questions to the panel, such as “What will it take to solve these problems peacefully?” “How do we talk about religion in America and highlight its role as a key source of love?” and “How do we bring religion back?” Among solutions discussed were bringing people together and encouraging a focus on similarities as well as dialogues toward reaching understanding and unity.

Session III: Why Marriage and Family Are Important for a Healthy and Stable Society

The third ILC session spoke to the sacredness of marriage and the role of the family as the cornerstone of society. **Hon. John Doolittle**, a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives from California, moderated the session, stating in his introduction that “we tend to idealize families, but they’re often less than ideal; however, the resilience of the family is important, even if the family is not ideal.”

Hon. Danny K. Davis, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Illinois, gave an insightful and anecdotal talk about the value of family, speaking of his own family with great reverence. Married for 47 years, Hon. Davis said he sometimes imagines “how different life would have been” if he did not have his wife by his side. “I wouldn’t have the peace of mind, companionship, or a shoulder to lean on,” he

said. He supplemented his address with thought-provoking quotes from English poet William Blake (“I sought my soul, but my soul I could not see. I sought my God, but my God eluded me. I sought my brother, and I found all three.”) and other astute thinkers. He concluded that “the concept of family begins to grow as you have greater experiences, and rather than thinking of just the immediate group in the household or even extended relatives, family becomes part of what you believe, dream about, and hope for.” In his call to action he stated, “I’m hoping to convince people to spend more time together as opposed to being apart.”

Hon. Victoria Kalima, a member of the Zambian Parliament and the newly appointed minister of gender, talked about the state of Zambian society, laws, issues, and programs, drawing a parallel between signs of cultural instability and resulting national instability. She insisted that “relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, and brothers and sisters should be characterized by a profound and enduring love.” She also spoke about the recent ILC in Lusaka, Zambia, and its focus on alleviating social ills currently faced by the nation, including gender-based violence, child marriage, teen pregnancy, single parenthood, and divorce. She stressed the importance of programs that empower women, so that “society can look at a girl child as someone who can receive an education, not just get married young” for the family’s financial gain. “My appeal,” she said, “is that we work together to have a healthy and stable society. I invite you to partner with us through UPF to end gender-based violence and child marriage.”

Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, former minister for peace and reconstruction in Nepal, boldly stated that “family education determines the future destiny of the entire nation.” Hon. Dhakal presented news of the marriage rededication and Marriage Blessing movements in Nepal, which are becoming national festivals of marriage and families attended by tens of thousands of people. The former prime minister of Nepal, H.E. Madhav Kumar Nepal, officiated a recent marriage rededication ceremony that was attended by 70,000 people, and also expressed the sentiment at the time that “if the family is strong, our nation is strong.”

Mr. Kenneth Muhammed El, the commissioner of the Rowan County Housing Authority in North Carolina, like Hon. Davis, spoke about his marriage and family, and then asked forward-thinking questions such as “How do we raise expectations of marriage?” and “How do we address the issue that ruin begins in the home?” He noted that our challenge as a nation is to elevate the woman and acknowledge women as the “key to life.” He said that “marriage needs to be dissociated from trends and fashions, and reinstated as a sacred extension of the Creator.”

Mrs. Cheryl Wetzstein, the manager of special sections for The Washington Times, closed the session with statistics and facts about family issues faced by the United States, including falling marriage rates, the “tsunami of pornography causing problems between men and women in their romantic relationships,” and alternative family forms. She provided evidence for why traditional marriage is the best family structure for children, adults, and society.



Session IV: Protecting Our Environment -- Public and Private Sector Solutions

Hon. Rob Wittman, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Virginia, opened the fourth session, which was about protecting the environment, with a talk on the responsibility of both the public and private sectors to protect the environment for future generations. He expressed his interest in seeking opportunities for these two sectors to join in partnership in this joint mission.

Hon. Kessai Note, a former president of the Marshall Islands, described the fragile environment of his Pacific island nation and its susceptibility to sea level rises caused by climate change. Environmental negligence is “already creating insurmountable challenges to our environment, economy, and way of life,” he said. “The entire Marshall Islands could become submerged in water in less than 100 years, and neighboring countries in the Pacific have similar conditions.”

Dr. Richard Lindzen, a professor of meteorology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, took a different approach to the issue of climate change. He presented thorough scientific evidence toward debunking extremism in today’s campaigns on the greenhouse effect and global warming, and relayed the perspective that the issue of global warming is “almost an entirely political one.”

“The most important and useful measure for both the public and private sphere will be the ending of anti-carbon-dioxide climate alarmism,” he said. “The fact that the alarm shifted from global cooling to global warming in the 1980s provides ample evidence that the issue was not with climate per se, but market control of the energy sector.”

Hon. Richard T. Schulze, a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Pennsylvania, told anecdotes about his lifetime of “pride, enjoyment, and love of the outdoors” and how he came to be involved in wildlife conservation. “In America, the conservation attitude is that the user pays and the public profits,” he said. “The amount of money that the hunter, fisher, and outdoorsman pay into the funds for outdoor conservation is enormous.” On a more emotional level, he told the story of a friend who came closer to his daughter in three hours of hunting together than he had in his entire life. “It’s not about the hunting,” he said. “It’s about the personal relationship that such things build, the kind of relationship that overarches politics and religious differences.” He closed by saying that the “most effective and sensible approach to good stewardship of the earth and its inhabitants is to continue the work we’ve done in conservation, not only for sports and the outdoors but for all people of the earth.”

Session V: The Role of Media -- Freedom and Responsibility of the Press

Mr. Guy Taylor, a senior writer on national security issues with The Washington Times, moderated the final session of the day, about the freedom and responsibility of the press in the present-day atmosphere of the media as the “absolute intersection of technological change and the human ability to speak truth to power.” He challenged participants to deliberate whether the media are having “a positive or a corrosive effect on our collective ability to provide honest journalism.”

Hon. Tim Huelskamp, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Kansas, gave his perspective on the U.S. media and the evolution of the Internet. He invited participants to practice an active awareness of the biases that exist in the mainstream media, and to be mindful of the nature of the media in terms of their geographic concentration and motivations, and how those factors affect the distribution of information.

Hon. Biman Prasad, a member of Parliament of Fiji, enlightened participants on the reality of freedom of the press around the world. In many regions, he said, the media serve primarily to “amplify the voices of elected representatives in government.” He stressed that “democracy cannot flourish in an environment where media freedom is restricted.”

Mr. Humphrey Hawksley, a foreign correspondent with the British Broadcasting Corporation as well as an author, spoke about Europe and the role of the media there, particularly the effects of uninformed popular sentiment promulgated through social media. He also spoke of “the post-truth era,” in which “political campaigns are based on facts that are untrue and policies that are unachievable, yet they garner votes in the millions.” He brought up the concept of an echo chamber, defined as “a newspaper or TV [station] that agrees with or bolsters your point of view.” He explained that “voters prefer the certainty of the echo chamber to the muddle of both extremities,” and he challenged the audience to “find a Tweet or somebody on Facebook whose views you totally abhor. Find out where they’re coming from and what their weakness is” to attempt to move beyond the safety of your own standpoint.

Mr. Charles Hurt, a political columnist for The Washington Times, closed the session by speaking to the role of the media, mainstream and non-mainstream, including everyone who is participating in this age of social media. He brought up thought-provoking ideas, such as the fact that the U.S. president-elect is very active on social media. “I have faith that people have a voice and greater access to shaping the media than ever before,” he said.