

## Service Project in Georgia Brings Together Youth Peace Activists in the Nation of Georgia

Jin Hwa Chong  
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Zugdidi, Georgia - The Religious Youth Service held its 2014 project in western Georgia's historic province of Samegrelo, from July 13 to 20. Zugdidi, the center of the region, is located 318 kilometers west of the capital city of Tbilisi and 30 km from the Black Sea coast.

The South Caucasus still cannot be considered one of the stable and prosperous regions in the world. To find a solution to the existing complicated socioeconomic problems, the states in the region need to move from rivalry and confrontation to cooperation. As a part of UPF's ongoing South Caucasus Peace Initiative, RYS was a significant event to bring together young people from South Caucasus nations and abroad to contribute to peacebuilding efforts in a variety of contexts.



This fourth Religious Youth Service in Georgia since 2011 aimed at uniting young people and helping them to resolve conflicts through grassroots diplomacy and interreligious dialogue, promoting dialogue between cultures and rapprochement of the peoples of the South Caucasus. This year's event was attended by 22 volunteers from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Great Britain, USA and Russia, representing the Armenian and the Georgian Orthodox Church, Islam and the Unification Church. The project was

sponsored by UPF and the NGO “Save the Future Generations.” An Austrian participant in the RYS project in Georgia in 2012, Aurelia Sengseis, sent a donation to support the project goals.



During orientation, the participants gained an understanding of the unique nature of the program and the specific role of each volunteer as a representative of their nation and culture. The youth came together with the purpose of living for the well-being of others in a close-knit community, overcoming difficulties of communication and differences of nationality and religion.

During the project they had many opportunities to develop leadership skills, communication and conflict resolution skills, altruism in practice, acquaintance with the local natural and cultural sights, as well as participate in educational, entertainment and sports programs.

The participants visited places of worship of different religions. Everyone came to the joint realization that all religions are led by one driving force — God, who loves human beings and helps them to embrace His loving heart and learn to live as members of “One Family under God.”



Volunteers participated in restoration work in the vast Zugdidi Botanical Garden surrounding the museum complex — the Dadiani Palace, the residence of the Megrelian rulers, the Dadiani family, in Zugdidi. In the middle of the nineteenth century, famous European gardeners were invited to help create the gardens, and they brought rare species of plants. The total area of the Dadiani Garden is 26.4 hectares. Some of the

trees are about 200 years old and are rare species in Eurasia. Picturesque ruins, a pond, majestic sequoias, royal magnolias and huge sycamore trees make the park a very special place. Volunteers were helping to beautify the park, which is one of the main attractions of the city and provides the citizens a cool shelter on hot summer days.



During evening programs, volunteers presented unique aspects of their cultures: folk dances, songs and national dishes. Each country had one day to present the most interesting features of their nations, cultures and cuisine.

Lectures on tolerance, value-oriented volunteering, a culture of peace, causes of conflicts and the ways of their resolution, peacemaking and value of the family as the school of love and peace, as well as trainings, talks, films and discussions helped participants explore their peacemaking potential and make another step to becoming true Young Ambassadors for Peace.



On July 18, “The 2014 One Korea, Peace Bicycle World Tour” took place in Batumi, Georgia to promote the reunification of Korea and peace in South Caucasus. Volunteers and locals signed the banner and cycled along the beach.

On the last day, the participants analyzed their experiences gained during the project, shared their impressions and expressed their determination to continue serving on an international scale and support each other. As a mixed group of people from different backgrounds, participants were able to learn from each other and senior advisers how to make a positive difference in the world. The seeds of love and service that were planted In Zugdidi, will ultimately transform both participants and the local community.