

UPF Jerusalem, Israel: Interfaith Group in Israel Persists in Quest for Peace

Hod Ben-Zvi
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Chair, UPF-Israel



Jerusalem, Israel – During the festive week of Sukkot, on October 2, 2023, UPF-Israel joined Har-El Reform Synagogue to hold an interfaith event. We invited representatives of different faith traditions to share joyful moments, pray, and recite from various scriptures. A Peace Sukkah – a traditional, temporary structure where community members gather for fellowship and prayer – was built in a beautiful garden in front of the synagogue. The event brought together Israelis and Palestinians, Christians, Jews and Muslims.



The horrific events of October 7, just a few days later, left us in a state of shock and deep agony. The vivid dream of peace we shared that day was shattered in an abrupt, deadly blow. The rapid escalation of war in the Middle East region challenged our core beliefs. It felt as if fear and anxiety were determined to drive away our hopes for peace and reconciliation.

One year later, we decided to resume the "Peace Sukkah" project after months of raging war. Following the vision of UPF founders, Father and Mother Moon, we felt that we must pursue the cause of peace, no matter what the circumstances. Many people received our invitation, but unfortunately, some of our ambassadors of peace from the north were unable to join us, due to intense rocket and drone attacks.



Finally, on October 21, 2024, the Sukkah was set up and **Mrs. Tali Ben Dor**, our MC, greeted everyone, inviting our host **Rabbi Ada Zavidov** to give the opening remarks. Welcoming all of us, the rabbi said that the tradition of this high holiday is to embrace all people in the Peace Sukkah, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality or culture.

The talented cantor, **Mr. Even Cohen**, played the guitar and led us with a series of touching songs in Hebrew and Arabic. **Mrs. Adi Sasaki**, secretary general of UPF-Israel, read a few excerpts from "Mother of Peace," the memoir of Mother Moon, emphasizing the core values of living for the sake of others, the family as the school of love, and becoming one family under God.



Pastor Andreas, coming from a small community in northwest Germany, spoke next. He had arrived in Jerusalem after an 87-day bicycle pilgrimage through Europe, Turkey and Cyprus, covering some 5,000 kilometers. He shared that God had provided him with all he needed on his journey to meet with his long-time Israeli friends.

Rabbi Yaakov Luft, president of the Jerusalem Forum for Interfaith and Cooperation among Religions, expressed the need for humility and open-mindedness to forge the path to peace.

Mr. Baruch Shalev, a Thich Nhat Hanh disciple, shared about mindfulness in peace walks. He noted that the appreciation of the beautiful nature created by God can lead us to peace.

Long after the event had formally ended, people lingered to engage in lively conversations and make new friends.