



Commemorating the Day of Ashura: Noah Celebration - all in the same boat

UPF invited to an interreligious roundtable at the WCC Geneva, Switzerland - October 26, 2015

(WCC link: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/religion-and-violence-relationship-probed>)

This is the 2nd year that UPF is invited by Dialog-Institut, a Zurich based NGO to take part to the “Noah Celebration” commemorating the Day of Ashura, a traditional Muslim feast and celebration of humanity’s survival after the biblical flood. The roundtable discussion was about the perplexing yet perennial association of **religion and violence** and was probed this week in an event co-hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) and the Zurich-based Dialog-Institut.

Forty participants explored first the phenomenon of violence committed in the name of religion, then the occurrence of violence against religion or religious adherents. Moderating the first session, WCC associate general secretary Hielke Wolters noted that the undeniable positive aspects of religion in history and society are shadowed by its negative aspects. “A powerful source, religion speaks to the hearts of people,” he said, and informs political and personal morality. “Yet it is also a source of violence and devastation, too.”

Evoking the story of Noah, Ahmet Muharren Athiğ, secretary general of JWF, noted that our globalized situation, with its many challenges and conflicts, “is also like a boat,” and humanity can only overcome differences and conflicts and achieve peace through simple practices, such as eating together, traveling together, staying together, and working together.

Addressing the first question, participants discussed whether religion is a source of love or violence, how to deal with religious extremism, and how to address difficult yet authoritative texts in religious traditions.



In a second session, focussed on hostility or violence against religion, participant discussion centred on how to engender respect for the positive influence of religion and the sacred, whether religion is compatible with pluralism, and how to achieve the harmony and understanding captured in the ideal of Ashura.



Michel Reymond, Universal Peace Federation (Vice-President UPF Switzerland) proposed that all believers should overcome their own faith scriptures by studying and comparing with other (world) scriptures, as a mean to avoid extremism, and reminded that UPF goal is to create an Interreligious Peace Council to reform the United Nations at the time of it's 70 years anniversary.

« It is now the time for religion to exert genuine leadership in the world. I believe that religious people should feel responsible for the situation of humankind, and for resolving various inequities of this age... we should work together to implement a system through which the highest expression of religious wisdom are brought to the table at which the world's most serious and urgent problems are being addressed. » Rev. Sun Myung Moon, 1999, UPF Co-Founder

The meeting ended at mid-day with a large variety of oriental food and dessert prepared by Dialog-Institut, which was a nice conclusion for networking and sharing among participants.

