

## UPF Vienna, Austria's conference: Family as the Basis of a Sustainable Future

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Vienna, Austria -- Fifty guests attended a conference titled "Family as the Basis of a Sustainable Future," held to commemorate International Day of Families.

The Austrian chapters of UPF and its affiliated organizations Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) and Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) jointly held the conference on May 17, 2019.

In his introductory statement Mr. Peter Haider, president of UPF-Austria, spoke about UPF's view on the importance of families:

"The Universal Peace Federation affirms the value of the family as the core unit of society. The family has formed the basis for communities, societies and civilizations throughout the ages. Virtually all the world's religions teach the sacred value of marriage and family.

"The family is the school of love. It is also the school of virtue, ethics and citizenship. By strengthening the family, we can build a stronger base of social capital that will enhance the overall quality of life for everyone. The natural family is grounded in marriage, the cornerstone of the family. Children benefit from having loving parents, a mother and father who are committed to the well-being of their sons and daughters."

Mr. Haider explained that UPF is an active supporter of various UN initiatives that support the family, including International Day of Families and Global Day of Parents. UPF also partners with NGOs and faith-based organizations that affirm the social significance of marriage, family and parenting.

Altogether there were eight speakers, each of whom expressed insights on the topic of the family.

Mr. Norbert Sieber, a Conservative Party member who heads the Parliament's Family Committee, explained the government's efforts and measures to support families during the past two years. Families now have more support from the government side, he said. Mr. Sieber explained that the average household income has increased by 2.4 percent. Also, the government ended a budget deficit, which will increase opportunities of future generations.

The second speaker, Dr. Elisabeth Preimesberger-Riehl, a young mother and medical doctor, spoke about what family means to her: a safe place for parents and children, a place of honesty and acceptance. It also means a lasting relationship, which young adults long for after having experienced single life. Before having children, Dr. Riehl did a course about the essentials of being a parent, a "parents' license." She learned about the importance of guiding the children through difficult phases and suffering as well as happy times.

Dr. Afsar Rathor, a former project manager in the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and other UN organizations, was the next speaker. Originally from Pakistan, he grew up in Iran, studied in the United States and finally moved to Vienna, where he works for the UN. In his talk he spoke about his experiences of having lived in different countries and having seen tragedies in Rwanda, Bosnia, etc., while working for several organizations of the UN.

Besides many other activities with NGOs and universities, Dr. Rathor said he also has counseled couples and has saved many marriages. He sees two main reasons for marital problems: lack of communication and lack of respect for each other. According to his experience, religion has to play an important role in conveying values to the young generation, and marriage is a divine relationship in which both man and woman have equal responsibilities.



Dr. Sofija Bajektarevic, an ethnomusicologist and designer born in the former Yugoslavia, spoke about wedding customs and marriage in the Balkan area, on which she did her academic studies. She described the wedding as the richest and most essential ritual in human culture, through which participants undergo a fundamental change in their social status. To close her presentation, she sang a Bosnian wedding song for the audience.

Abdul Kadir Hamdan, a representative of the Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the UN in Vienna, has lived in Germany for more than 40 years and has been married to a German Catholic for 43 years. Being Muslim, he said his education in a Catholic school in Eritrea helped him to live together with people of other faiths or cultures. His wife has three sisters who all divorced. So his mother-in-law used to say, "The African is better than three Germans!" Mr. Hamdan was one of the founders of the Horn of Africa News Agency.

Mrs. Claudia Cordie, president of the Vienna Family Network, reported about her association, which has 2,500 members. The network started as a group of foreign women in Austria who were full-time mothers. Through the association they connected to each other and developed a support network. The members are mainly from the United States and the United Kingdom, but also from the Philippines, from Africa and other continents, reflecting the diversity of the international community in Vienna.

Dr. Titus Leber, the creator of numerous large-scale multimedia productions and a writer and director of several award-winning films, reported about a UPF seminar that he and his wife had attended recently in the Netherlands. He learned that UPF founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon introduced the relationship patterns within the family as the healing principle for humankind, a principle which can be found in a similar way also in Taoism and Confucianism, for example in the Book of Changes. At the seminar he also came to understand the principle of restoration of conflict, which made him understand why UPF is striving for reconciliation between Christianity and Islam.

The contributions of all the speakers were greatly appreciated by the participants.

The second part of the program started with the Loving-Kindness Meditation led by Mr. Triloki Ahuja, a senior representative of the Hindu religion in Austria. This meditation focuses on being well, healthy and strong, abiding in peace and living with ease and dignity, feeling safe and secure and feeling loved and cared for. He finished with a Vedic Prayer for Universal Well-Being: May all be happy, may all be free from diseases, may all see auspiciousness, may none be subjected to misery, may peace prevail everywhere -- in me, in all beings, in nature and in divine forces.

This was a very appropriate preparation for a World Peace Blessing conducted by Tony and Elisabeth Cook, the leaders of FFWPU-Austria. A beautiful cultural program with the Gipsy Swing Band and a buffet with Korean food concluded the event.