



International Day of Families 2019

“Interreligious Cooperation for Peace and Human Development - Creating an Environment for Thriving Families”

Ecumenical Centre - Heiner Handschin - May 14, 2019 - Geneva, Switzerland

Part One



To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the International Day of Families, the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in joint sponsorship with the World Council of Churches (WCC), Women’s Federation for World Peace, Intl. (WFWPI), the Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance (GIIA) and the Fribourg Peace Forum (FPF), convened a special one day program of debate and discussion on the topic “Interreligious Cooperation for Peace and Human Development – Creating an Environment for Thriving Families”.

In this year’s commemorative event, the organizers have decided to focus on the special challenges that families face in an increasingly difficult environment caused by war and conflict, human trafficking and mass-migration, climate change as well as the scourge of widespread substance abuse by youth.

The conference started with a high level opening panel gathering the key organizers, the World Council of Churches and the Universal Peace Federation, but also the Permanent Representative of the Holy See mission to the UN in Geneva, as well as a representative of the Academia, the Fribourg Peace Forum.

1. Opening panel:



Mr. Heiner W. Handschin, Director of the UPF liaison office, opened the session with greetings and some welcoming remarks, explaining briefly the reasoning for this conference and the strong bond between faith and family. He introduced the first speaker, **Rev. Dr. Peniel Rajkumar**, Executive Director of the Interfaith Program of the World Council of Churches. Dr. Rajkumar extended the warmest greetings of the General Secretary of the WCC, **Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit** who wasn’t able to join the event due to other engagements. Dr. Rajkumar highlighted the key role of families in educating children, with a particular focus on faith formation of children that families provide. Despite the flux of notion, this fact is self-evident. He added a quote of Peter C. Phan, “ to be religious in this time - is to be interreligious!”, emphasizing the importance of interreligious cooperation for solving problems and addressing urgent issues of the current time.



The next speaker, **Dr. Katsumi Otsuka**, chair of the Universal Peace Federation Europe, Eurasia and Middle East, emphasized that the family in the current time faces unprecedented challenges on a global scale. No single government can solve these troubling issues and political solutions alone will not make a difference. He stressed the need to include the religious communities and faith based organizations like some of the organizing partners into the current strive to solve some of the most serious issues. He then was followed by **H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovich**, Head of the mission of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva who pointed out the crucial importance of the Family as the school of humanity and its essential function in the society, expressed in the statement of the recent Vatican Synod on the Family. “The Family is the cell of human society and the primary place of education and a special formative environment for youth.” He mentioned also that this year there are two important commemorations, first the 25th anniversary of the Year of the Family and second the 30th anniversary of the convention of the rights of the child. He pointed out that there are many challenges confronting the contemporary family, making it very difficult to fulfill its crucial role towards society. The desire to marry and create a family is still a very vibrant tendency in our current society, despite the creeping in of selfish individualism that seems to penetrate more and more our contemporary world. It seems alarming that in the current time there is too little understanding of the importance of the family’s role as the first cell for people to learn to be human. He therefore called out for the defense of the family as a key factor for a sustainable civilization of human compassion and love.



Rev. Dr. Peniel Rajkumar

Dr. Katsumi Otsuka

H. E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic

Prof. em Dr. Adrian Holderegger

In closing, **Prof. Dr. Adrian Holderegger**, President of the Fribourg Peace Forum and Prof. em. of Moral Theology at the University of Fribourg, offered a more academic perspective on the role and function of the family and the current challenges with changing norms and values. He described the efforts of the Fribourg Peace Forum as an attempt to transcend social divisions and to contribute to a global effort for the establishment of peace and the respect of human rights and human dignity. He emphasized that if there is no understanding between religions, there won’t be any understanding within societies. He furthermore mentioned the fact that political conflicts are in most cases interconnected to religious convictions, which on the one hand may contribute to appease conflicts, but may on the other hand also contribute to escalate conflicts. He ended his

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presentation by stating that more than ever before, there is a need for core values in today's society. The Family as the sociologically defined key unit in our society is probably most affected by the presence or lacking of those fundamental core values.

Session I:

13th Youth Interfaith Council (GIIA) Session: What can families contribute to faith, social stability and human development?

The session of the 13th Model-UN Youth Interfaith Council, was opened by the current President of the council, **Rabby Kevin De-Carli** of the Jewish community of Baden (AG). He welcomed that audience and the panelists and gave the floor to the spokes person of the Secretariat of the Council, **Mrs. Carolyn Handschin** who gave a brief introduction of the past decade of activities.



Rabby Kevin De-Carli



GIIA Model UN Interfaith Youth Council delegates

Mrs. Carolyn Handschin first read a short message of encouragement and support from the founding President of GIIA, **H.E. Amb. Makarim Wibisono**, the former Ambassador of Indonesia to the UN in Geneva and former President of the General Assembly, the Human Rights Commission and holder of other high ranking international positions. She then gave an overview over the past 12 years of activities and 10 Model – UN Interfaith Youth Council sessions. Also she introduced the UPF Founders vision for an Interreligious council at the United Nations, as a possible upper house body that could bring in core values and the tools that a faith based approach could provide to contribute constructively to solutions in current world affairs. Following this, the panelists were introduced and the topic of their debates announced.

To start, the President of the Council, **Rabby Kevin De-Carli**, opened the official council session and presented the mandate to the council members. The mandate of the Interfaith Youth delegates was described as follows: Youth representatives should argue for positive social outcomes rooted in the core family values of their traditions and their own life experiences. It was meant to build on the GIIA “Model UN Youth Interfaith Council” programs held over the last decade.

Then as wished for by unanimous decision of the council members **Rabby Kevin De-Carli**, representing Judaism, was the first speaker of the panel. He painted vividly the image of his very diverse Jewish community in Baden which was due to the influx from Jewish migrants from various parts of the Europe and even the world. Some Jewish members are even from Africa. In Judaism, the mother in the family plays a very crucial role. In Jewish textbooks, one speaks of a marriage contract which is a catalogue of commitments that the husband has to make towards his wife.

The Jewish community is very family centred to a point that you can only be a member as a family, not as an individual. Between the individual and the government, there is always the family. In light of

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that consequence, there is a very extensive care for the wellbeing of widows, orphans and people without direct family. They will be well taken care of as part of the extended family in the community. He ended his presentation and invited the next panelist to take the floor.



Interfaith delegates presenting from their faith perspectives

Ms. Atefeh Sadeghi, representing Islam, is holding a masters degree in Peace and Conflict transformation. She has been putting her expertise in peacebuilding and mediation at the disposal of the East-West institute. She expressed that she would want to change the question to: “What can faith contribute to family and human development.” Family is uniting voices together, allowing the individual to feel safe, stable and secure. The multilateral structure of the family has currently been interrupted. In a world where faith is many times misused for political purposes, it is important to start from the basics. For her, faith is helping her to keep a strong connection to higher core values necessary to live together with our neighbors. She called out to all to take faith as an element that unites families together, so that the individual can grow and develop. We should speak together in way that unites us and not that separates us!

Mr. Olivier Gravrand, representing Unificationism, is engineer, working for some engineering company in Geneva. He introduced the audience to the 3 basic life goals (Genesis 3 blessings) as expressed in his faith. First fundamental life goal: “Be fruitful”, meaning mind and body should unite centred on a higher purpose. Second life goal:” multiply and fill the earth”, meaning that we should create our own family and based on stable families create a peaceful community, society and world. The third basic life goals is to “reign over creation” which describes the goal of good stewardship over the environment and achieving a certain level of mastery, finding our place with the living environment. He expressed that faith can give a very positive impact in our strive to accomplish these 3 life goals, setting up a moral compass, a higher ideal. With a faith based approach young people can be oriented towards worthy life goals and a dignified life style. The amount of broken families gives us a mandate that the faith based support network for families, especially young families, needs to be improved. Mr. Gravrand reported from his community building project work in Africa, Zimbabwe, Senegal and other places in Africa. He sees the golden rule of “living for the sake of others” based on mind body unity, as a great way to impact the society and future world.



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Mr. Radnajt Zama, representing Hinduism, has been working in banking for 10 years and is married, and has a little daughter. He expressed that growing up in India, helped him to understand the need for respect for diverse religions. He mentioned that from very early he learnt that living with humility and great gratitude were values and principles instilled by his parents. The real joy of living a good life is that it does provide self-esteem. The training through various Yoga programs can help us to be disciplined and reach God. We are taught in our family to take care of the poor and the weak. There were different projects that his parents were involved in mainly in service of the poor, the weak, organizing medical seminars, support group, providing food. Hinduism aims to be a religion of perpetuity. It believes that after this earthly life, there is another life to come. When thinking of day to day challenges, a Hindu must go beyond the self and try to reach out to other people. It is important to consider the whole world as one family. From the traditions in India, everyone is part of the great human family. All religions have something very positive to offer, but religion should involve the family and this way things can improve.



Ms. Jamie Morgan, representing the protestant faith, is of Methodist background and serves as an assistant to the Interfaith executive office of the WCC. She stated that for her, family is the place in time of need, providing economic stability, care, allowing young people to live valuable lives and acquire important life skills. For young people it is vital to have the backing of a family, so that we can become more socially involved. Family provides a great contribution and reduces the number of homeless people. There are countless situations of familial disfunction in the current reality, but those situations have always existed. There are also many examples from the bible demonstrating the fact that families are not only a stabilizing factor in general, but in case of problems, the family can heal, forgive and help to make a restart.

Ms. Kamaljit Kaur, representing the Sikh faith felt that belonging to a strong family had a great influence on her life. Family is such an incredible backing. Her example: she went through a divorce. Without her family's support, it would have been so difficult. The Family gives us the experience of a healthy and rewarding social life. Reconciliation and solidarity are learnt naturally. In families children learn to act responsibly and live harmoniously with each other and for each other. A life of value in the family is supported by faith. Finally we can say that the family plays the main role in faith and human development and as such it is so essential to have a strong family. Following the presentations, the floor was opened to Q&As and comments from the audience. The panel concluded with a resolution to be proposed to the conference plenary at the end of the meeting.



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