

International Day of Families Observed by UPF Central Europe

Heiner Handschin
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Prague, Czech Republic -- UPF of Central Europe held an online conference to celebrate the 2021 International Day of Families.

About 100 participants watched the event via Zoom, with more than 240 views on Facebook.

Dr. Juraj Lajda, president of UPF-Czech Republic, was the moderator of the webinar, which was held on May 21, 2021. He explained that the United Nations established the International Day of Families because the family and good family values are undisputedly at the center of any healthy society.



Dr. Wadih Maalouf, global program coordinator of the prevention of drug use, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), emphasized the importance of the family in preventing violence and crime,

including violence against children, and youth criminality.

The individual is at the center of the UNODC's program, Dr. Maalouf said, but we need to understand that microstructures exist around each individual, in the macro environment -- for example, poor neighborhoods, or young people without the necessary family environment.



Prevention must be seen from a holistic perspective. For the best outcome in terms of the growth and development of the individual, the infrastructure around the child/individual has to be considered, Dr. Maalouf said. Several institutions should work together to have the best possible outcome. "It takes a village to raise a child," he said.

Research organized by the United Nations shows that direct involvement of the family is the most effective prevention for youth criminality, drug abuse, and other social problems, Dr. Maalouf said. This shows that the family is a very important social institution. The family plays a role that can be crucial in terms of prevention by teaching age-appropriate skills.

The universality of this social institution of the family is very effective in this field of prevention, support for children and preventing children from sliding into all kinds of troubles.



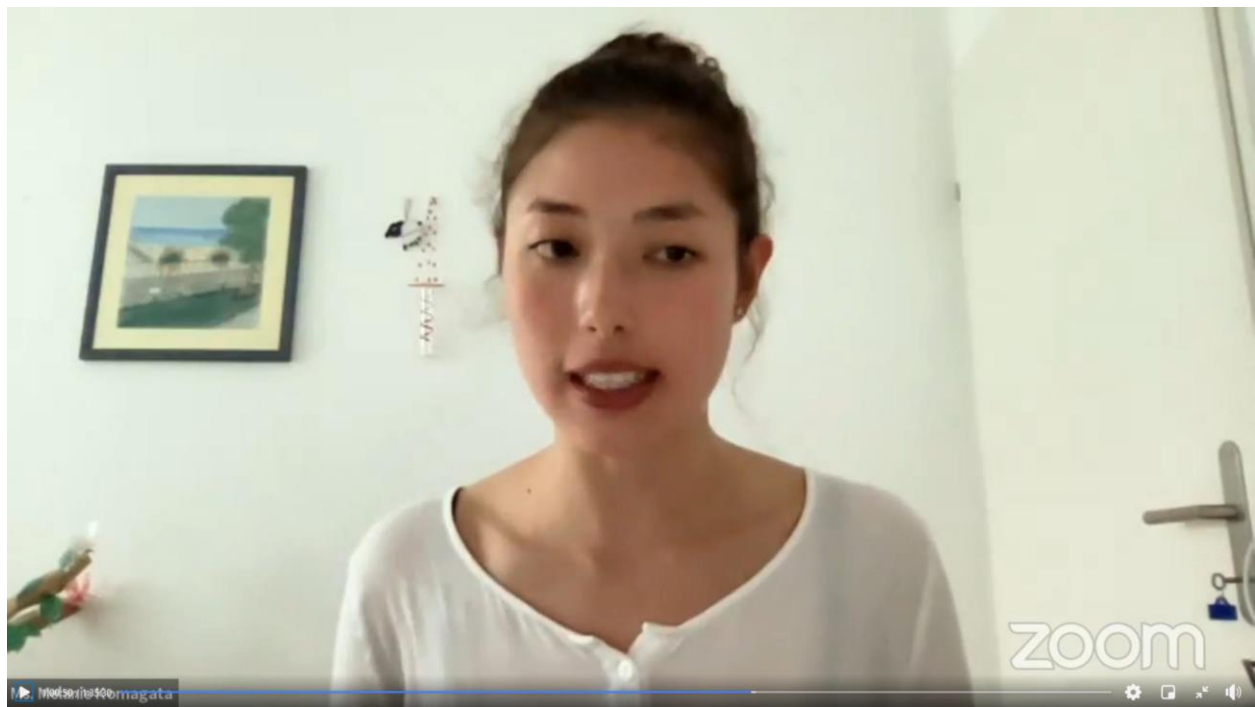
Dr. Maalouf mentioned two UNODC programs:

1) Strong families: This program deals with parenting and points out that parenting under stress is not easy; it involves dealing with children in a very difficult social environment. The family can play a crucial role in protecting children and helping them to grow up in a healthy way.

2) Programs that address trauma and address parenting issues under the COVID-19 situation. Parenting skills are registered in different apps that can help parents to face the difficulties in the present time.

Living in dire circumstances doesn't mean that we are doomed, Dr. Maalouf said. The family remains the core social institution for the achievement of many of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Carolyn Handschin, the president of the UN NGO Committee on the Status of Women, Geneva, Switzerland, said this meeting on "celebrating families" in the framework of the International Day of Families is very timely. The UN at this time is focusing on families and megatrends, for example, new communication technologies for families.



These megatrends respond to the needs or reactions of people, Mrs. Handschin said. The roots of these megatrends are in people. The quality of families is crucial for the outcomes. The microtrends of today are, for example, social media, Facebook, etc.

The failure of families in nurturing and training their members has created many problems, Mrs. Handschin said. It is also important to address the important role of men in families. The family has had a rough time in recent years, because UN studies, starting from the individual and going on directly to the community, have almost "canceled" the family. The family is a driver of change and development, Mrs. Handschin said.

Because of the recent difficulties of different groups with "the family," pro-family advocates regrouped around different family-related issues, creating and empowering new alliances focusing on common issues. Important issues that brought people from various positions together were, for example, understanding the roles of fatherhood, motherhood, leadership in the family, accountability, as well as family and responsible citizenship, liberty and expression of confidence.

There are steps to allow us to advance more rapidly toward human dignity. The man and the woman share the leadership role, Mrs. Handschin said, and through that they create new depths of engagement, new levels of peace and prosperity. Masculine dignity can be discovered as women understand the feminine aspect of dignity.

Positive trends are being recognized again, and there is no need to go back to the "old traditional" family model that obviously had big problems, she said. Forums of discussion must include different viewpoints, so that the best possible outcomes can be achieved. This is what family is all about: to sit down together with others and address those who differ from us.

Mrs. Handschin ended her presentation with a quote from UPF founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, "The global citizen lives with the heart of a parent, caring for God, people and the earth."

Hon. Anna Záborská, a member of the Slovak Parliament and former member of the European Parliament, said the fact that we are connected through a videoconference supports the idea and the UN topic that humanity is indeed one human family. Slovakia is a small country, she said, but a proud partner of the family of nations surrounding it.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many elderly people normally would have been left isolated and unable to relate to their family members. However, through modern technology, this problem could be remedied. Children and grandchildren could do more through modern technology. The creativity of young people and the ability to work with social media and modern technologies are great, but they don't really replace the real human touch and care. However, through regular video calls, despite the separation and lockdowns, the world can still communicate and collaborate.

Hon. Záborská said it is important to ask whether we can really become a society of intergenerational solidarity? Or does modern technology create a distance among people, even dehumanizing human relations and creating addictions to virtual reality?

Golli Marboe, an Austrian journalist, TV and film producer, and lecturer on journalism and media, said there are two current phenomena regarding media and the family:

There is a significant increase in psychological problems through the influence of the media, fake news, disinformation, etc.



There is a significant increase in the time spent on media, particularly social media, which are accessible through smartphones and tablets almost anywhere, and this is impacting families and family members.

Mr. Marboe asked where we can get the new competence to handle media correctly, as the social influence of old-style media is decreasing more and more.

Our current market economy is continuously influencing people, he said. The trends are to become younger, more beautiful and richer. In this context, it has to be understood that esteem in a capitalist society is very much based on material wealth.

There is a growing phenomenon of young people not trusting social media, but using it anyway on a daily basis. Quiet people struggle more with the aggressive nature of media, "cancel culture," "fake news," etc.

Another important point raised by Mr. Marboe is that we should ask questions before trying to give answers. Finally, he suggested that human dignity must be the measure of all things, especially in the digital space, which is the space of so many young people. We should ask questions and let children know that there is no lawless space on the Internet.

Christine Uhlig, a veritas scholar for European advocacy, Alliance Defending Freedom International, Vienna, Austria, said there is significant legal protection of the family under international law (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16).

However, she said, there are no doubt current challenges to the family. We need strategies to strengthen the family.

Referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, she stated the international human rights laws haven't changed. However, some states and governments are interpreting these human rights documents very differently.

She mentioned various examples of state interference based on purely subjective interpretations of international laws, especially regarding the family. There are numerous examples of children being removed from family homes, based on highly questionable interpretations of international documents and laws concerning the family.

Other challenges Ms. Uhlig mentioned were the increasing absence of fathers in families, a well-known problem. She also saw the need for creating paternity and maternity leave for both fathers and mothers equally, in order to create greater bonding of both fathers and mothers with their children (UNICEF 2019).

She mentioned religions and diverse faith-based organizations as important contributors and supporters and advocates for families.

Finally, Ms. Uhlig emphasized that as parents we should know our rights and obligations. In this way, our rights can be protected and strengthened. States and governments depend on families and shouldn't undermine the family and overreach their areas of competence. Parental care is more fundamental and important than anything that states and governments can do, she said.



Question-and-answer session:

Melanie Komagata from Switzerland presented the questions from the audience.

In answer to a question about why the UNODC invests mainly in underdeveloped countries, Dr. Maalouf explained that the developed countries have similar programs.

Asked how to help people become better parents, Mrs. Handschin replied that we don't need states to interfere in children's education. Parents need to listen and self-evaluate from time to time.

When asked for an effective strategy to create strong and healthy families, Hon. Záborská said that instead of "planned parenthood," we need to talk about responsible parenthood.

As a journalist, Mr. Marboe was asked how we should deal with the effects of the media on the family's mental health? He replied that we need to teach children how to use the media and educate them to be able to decide and not just to copy.

Finally, Ms. Uhlig emphasized the vital role that faith-based organizations and religions can play as key stakeholders, and that it is important to encourage their involvement.

Dr. Dieter Schmidt, the chair of UPF for Central Europe, concluded the meeting by adding a few important points. He expressed his gratitude to the UN for establishing the International Day of Families. He emphasized that in the frame of the COVID-19 situation, families have been instrumental in overcoming this crisis. We are all part of this one human family created by God, Dr. Schmidt said. We are from the one common Creator, even though we all have different parents. The origin of everything is a universal parental being. True love is the fundamental principle behind UPF and its peacebuilding efforts.

Parental love is very important, because in a parental role we can be totally altruistic, Dr. Schmidt said. Based on this principle of leading with a parental heart, we should evaluate some of the key leaders in this world. Parental leadership is a new paradigm.

How can we be good parents? We need to balance our rights and responsibilities. The foundation for parental love is "conjugal love." Marriage is a door opener to bring unity and peace, and in this way, we need to study how we can strengthen our marriages, so that families can be strengthened as well.

He ended his presentation by quoting the French economist Jacques Attali: "Altruism is the only way possible."

Each panelist gave brief final comments:

Hon. Anna Záborská: Technologies are an effective helper, but not a replacement for family and parental care. Families should not be at the mercy of technological progress or the state.

Dr. Wadih Maalouf: Families and parents are caregivers that are important in everyday life.

Christine Uhlig: The family is the best environment to protect and support families and children, so we should emphasize the need for protection of the family.

Golli Marboe: We need to learn not to stop the media, but to handle them. Learning to use the media is part of growing up today. The media are part of our daily world.

Carolyn Handschin: We are one global family, and we need to consider what this really means, not just use the term. It involves listening to others, and listening to those who have different ideas, as we are one family.

Dr. Dieter Schmidt: The secret to reviving the family is to find the connections to the larger whole and connect to the whole of humanity, the world and God. A peaceful world can be realized only on the foundation of happy and healthy families.