

Czechs Discuss Human Rights of Children

Juraj Lajda
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Prague, Czech Republic—UPF held a conference in the Czech Parliament on the theme “Human Rights and Children in the 21st Century.”

The conference date of December 14, 2015, was chosen to commemorate both Human Rights Day (December 10) and the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations.

Five of the panelists were members of the Czech Parliament, and other speakers came from Slovakia and Austria, with both academia and civil society being represented. The Czech chapter of UPF organized the conference, under the auspices of Member of Parliament Nina Nováková, in cooperation with the Civic Forum, European Women’s Union and UN Information Centre in Prague, and was supported by the Topaz Foundation.

The conference had two panels: one focused on human rights in general and the other on the application of human rights in protecting the family and children. There were around 70 participants.

In his welcoming speech Dr. Juraj Lajda, secretary general of UPF-Czech Republic, mentioned that this was the fourth UPF conference in the Czech Parliament focused on family issues in the last 18 months. The presence of many of the regular participants created a feeling of community, he said.

Discussing the family shows that there is something wrong with the family, and we need to speak about that, Dr. Lajda said. Even though many people say that the family is the basic unit of society, until now humanity has been unable to create many healthy and ideal families. There is still a long way to go until this goal will be achieved, he said. The family has become too individualistic and, especially if we speak about human rights for children, there is a tendency is to separate these rights from the family as a unit.

The first panelist was Dr. Michal Broža, director of the UN Information Centre in Prague. He mentioned that among the many important days proclaimed by the United Nations, Human Rights Day is the most respected: Since 1950 all nations commemorate this day. He also mentioned the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN this year. Two years ago was the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the position of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and since that time the situation in many countries of children, women and tortured people has improved, he said. Dr. Broža reminded the audience of the Four Freedoms introduced by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, and freedom from want. All these principles are anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the end he mentioned the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Professor Harald Scheu from the Faculty of Law of Charles University in Prague explained that because children are vulnerable, they have a right to be protected. The concept of human rights is derived from the concept of humans which was influenced by the Enlightenment. Reason and conscience form the base of the human being, he said. Human rights belong also to those who do not have reason and conscience. They are not individualistic and autonomous rights, but children have the right to receive protection. This protection is based on the paternalistic principle, i.e., responsibility of the subject, Professor Scheu said. The protection of children's rights cannot be done without paternalism. However, it is necessary to set the limits of this paternalism.



Mr. Peter Zoehrer, director of the Forum for Religious Freedom (FOREF) Europe and advisor to UPF-Europe on human rights, said the term “human rights” is a modern one and usually we recall the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948. However, “universal human rights” have become a myth, he said. The reason is that since 1990 there has been a second set of human rights declarations: the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI) proclaimed in 1990 and signed by more than 40 nations of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). This declaration is based on sharia law. Western politicians’ lack of awareness of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam already has caused many misunderstandings in negotiating with Islamic countries, Mr. Zoehrer said.

Also, when speaking about human rights, we do not speak much about children’s rights. Yet children are the most vulnerable, Mr. Zoehrer said. The question is how to protect them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares the dignity of individuals and basic rights. But the most fundamental right is the right to religious freedom as expressed in Article 18. Many call this right “the mother of all rights.” This concept guarantees the right to change one’s religion and also forbids forced conversion. Mr. Zoehrer also outlined four major challenges to human rights in the current world situation.

The next speaker was Dr. Martin Dilong, an expert on foreign affairs and human rights in the Christian Democratic Party in Slovakia, who spoke on the topic “Constitutional Protection of Marriage and Problems of Persecuted Religious Minorities.” On June 4, 2014, the Slovak Parliament approved an amendment to the Slovak Constitution that defined marriage as “a unique bond between a man and woman.” The Slovak Republic protects this, said Dr. Dilong at the beginning of his speech. The Bible states, “In the beginning God created man and woman,” and the Jewish tradition always protected a woman, he continued. The protection of marriage is not an ideology, but it has practical reasons. It is not a matter of one group but of all (not only Christians). The biggest problem is not migration and terrorism but demographic development. Religious freedom is not a privilege but one of the fundamental freedoms of humans. If we promote religious freedom, all other problems can be solved, the speaker concluded.

The last speaker on the first panel was Marek Benda, MP. The “candle demonstration” which took place in the autumn of 1988 in Bratislava was an expression of protest against communism, he said. “Thanks to this I am here today,” he said. International human rights are developing. Originally there were three basic human rights: the right to life, the right to religion and of conscience, and the right of ownership. In modern history we were fighting against many regimes – the Soviet Union, the Islamic State, China, and Russia. The West has disintegrated because it always invents more human rights and does not concentrate on these three basic human rights. As a consequence, human rights have become relative and we are not able to keep the basic and original human rights.

The second panel was opened by Mrs. Gabriela Pecková, who is a member of Parliament as well as a medical doctor. She focused on the topic of new technologies in medicine, especially in genetic engineering. New technologies surely have a great potential to heal many diseases but can be misused. In history technological progress has not always contributed to the development of people. It is necessary to take into consideration the ethical and legal aspects of the situation. She spoke on the topic “Children and Their Right to Privacy” in connection to the new technologies.

The next speaker was Mrs. Jitka Chalánková, MP and medical doctor. “The family is a much older institution than the state, and that is why the family has the right to freedom to educate their children. The state must not determine how to educate children. The state should protect the family and not interfere; otherwise the family is under the threat of totalitarianism. The state can interfere only in special cases,” said the speaker at the beginning. Unfortunately, in numerous European countries many institutions and self-appointed organizations are misusing their authority. For them children have become a commercial commodity which should be protected, especially from their own biological parents. It is necessary to recognize what is really the best for the child. Mrs. Chalánková is involved in the current case of the so-called Norwegian children in which two children were taken away from a Czech mother.

Mrs. Radomíra Keršnerová from the National Centre for Family spoke about the situation in the families and how to harmonize taking care of small children with having a profession and a job.

Mrs. Markéta Adamová, MP, spoke about the current immigrant crisis from the viewpoint of protecting children’s rights. She visited the detention camp in the Czech Republic and met some immigrants. In some cases the children were isolated from their parents because the parents were in the process of investigation for crossing the border illegally. Until the situation is resolved, the children will remain separated from their parents. She mentioned that the detention camp tries to care for the children well. Nevertheless the Czech government should be prepared to accept more immigrants.

Mrs. Nina Nováková, MP, as the next speaker said that children should be taught about human rights starting in childhood. Human rights can be applied only in relationships. The education given in schools is very important. According to Czech law, education aims at development of the human personality, including moral and ethical values. Education is not free from neutrality. Culture is passed on through internalizing to the next generations. We should pass on the culture of European integrity, which is based on humanism and Christianity, the speaker emphasized. The immigrant wave is a great challenge for us, but we should educate the immigrants about the foundations of European culture.

The last speaker was Mrs. Jana Jochová, director of the Committee for Defense of Parents’ Rights. In the beginning she put forth a question: Whom do Czech children trust most when they have a problem? According to statistical research, 56 percent of children trust their parents, 6.8 percent trust the churches and 6.4 percent trust their teachers. Human rights are best realized in the family, she continued. Parents’ and children’s rights are inseparable. Some parents unfortunately are completely uninvolved in the education of their own children. On the other hand, there are parents who want to avoid the state system of education (i.e., compulsory vaccination). The state tries to educate children. There are many subjects for education – such as education on health, democracy, media education, etc. The state should respond differently and strongly support functional and healthy families in order to prevent non-functional families.

The conference had a very good response from the audience. The panelists expressed how necessary this kind of event is for raising awareness regarding human rights and the family. A few expressed their desire to hold similar events in other cities and nations.