

PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR PEACE INITIATIVE

(Special session and round table discussion in the Czech Parliament)

Czech Parliament on the April 11, 2016



„The role of politicians and religious leaders in providing a constructive and wise response to critical contemporary challenges“

Over 30 participants, including 3 Members of the Czech Parliament, attended a round table discussion in the Czech Parliament on the April 11, 2016, discussing how parliamentarians, religious leaders, civil society leaders and NGOs could contribute to lasting peace. The meeting was hosted by Mrs. Nina Nováková, member of the Czech Parliament, under the theme: **„The role of politicians and religious leaders in providing a constructive and wise response to critical contemporary challenges“**. It was a follow-up of the International Leadership Conference held by UPF in Seoul, Korea, last February, during which the „Parliamentarians for Peace Initiative“ was launched at the Seoul National Assembly on February 15, in the presence of 150 Parliamentarians from all over the world.

In her opening speech, Mrs. Nováková, who had attended and spoken at the Seoul meeting, stressed the role of parliamentarians and their responsibility in the decision making process. Maintaining peace is a demanding task requiring total and sincere investment as well as a moral perspective, she said, reaffirming her commitment to peace as a parliamentarian.

Dr. Thomas Walsh, president of UPF International, outlined UPF's peace strategies and activities worldwide. He then elaborated on the Parliamentarians for Peace Initiative that

intended to bring together Parliamentarians beyond national, religious or political affiliation, to address current issues of conflict from a value-centered perspective, in collaboration with civil society leaders and faith-based organizations.

Dr. Aaron Rhodes, president of the Forum for Religious Freedom and former president of the International Helsinki Committee, emphasized that the struggle for human rights should not shy away from confrontation. He recommended Parliamentarians to take on the fight for human rights on the national level, and recognized that in the name of human rights democracies sometimes adopt freedom-threatening policies, like some hate speech legislations. Human rights are rooted in natural law, he said, and we need to distinguish between natural human rights such as freedom of speech or religious freedom, and political human rights such as the right to have a job, shelter etc.

Mr. Jacques Marion, UPF secretary general in Europe, then outlined the plans and perspectives for UPF activities in Europe in 2016. One of the main focus of UPF in Europe, he said, is the strengthening of the family, suggesting that the family structure was a fitting framework for a balanced view of human rights in our pluralistic world. He introduced UPF representatives from Switzerland, Austria and the Czech Republic who gave a short overview of their national and international activities.

A special welcome was given to the former foreign minister of the Czech Republic, a member of Parliament and the honorary chairman of the TOP 09 political party, **H. E. Karel Schwarzenberg**, who in brief remarks pointed out that human rights should not be applied at the cost of others in the peacebuilding process. Human rights should not be stolen by those who violate them, he concluded.

The discussion went on with participants on various issues of human rights, peacebuilding, and freedom of speech. It was a significant step towards establishing and developing the Parliamentarians for Peace Initiative in the Czech Republic and in Europe.

Reported by
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