

Multi-culturalism - A Contribution for Peace?

Robin Marsh
September 25, 2011



The United Nations, Geneva, 23rd September 2011

In a major conference in UN Geneva convened by the Universal Peace Federation and the Women's Federation for World Peace, the role of multiculturalism was considered by such influential figures as Ambassador Makarim Wibisono, the former Chair of UN's ECOSOC and UN Human Rights Council and Dr Walter Schwimmer, the former Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

In an introduction by Dr. Yong Cheon Song, Chairman of the Universal Peace Federation in Europe he quoted UPF's Founder, Dr Sun Myung Moon on the role of religion in solving interreligious and intercultural conflict.

'Religious people have not always been good examples in the practice of love and living for the sake of others, especially beyond the limits of their own culture. For this reason they should engage in deep self-reflection. It is time for religious people to repent for their preoccupation with individual salvation and narrow denominational interests.' Dr Moon suggested that an Inter-religious Council at the United Nations would be an ideal forum for dialogue between the religious-cultural spheres of the world.

'Good morning distinguished delegates, it is a pleasure to welcome you to this European Leadership Conference on Multiculturalism at the United Nations in Geneva.



Multiculturalism: A contribution to Peace ? Marking the UN International Day of Peace 2011

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September 23-24, 2011
European Conference in Geneva, Switzerland

Excellencies/Colleagues and Friends

Welcome to the United Nations in Geneva for the European Leadership Conference, continuing a series of conferences held earlier this year in Geneva, Oslo and Vienna. We are also commemorating today the UN International Day of Peace, and will address the theme of "Multiculturalism, A Contribution to Peace?"

The organizers include representatives of non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors, including the academic and religious sectors, governments and the International Organization on Migration (IOM).

The choice of theme, Multiculturalism and Peace, was spurred by the recent tragic events in Norway and the public statements of prominent European Heads of State about the failure of multiculturalism in their nations. The emphasis will be on Europe, but not excluding the input or best practice models from other continents, all of whom have a stake in the success of European integration policy.

The conference will provide a vision for change by looking more deeply at root causes, a common language of core values, best practice models and the essential missing "will". Plans are in place to then living concrete recommendations to the United Nations and International Organizations, government policy-makers and community leaders that would help appear televisos and stimulate peace-building within nations with a longer term cooperation envisaged towards the implementation of conference results.

Day two of the Conference will take place Saturday September 24, 2011 at the University of Geneva and will allow more time for interaction while considering the universal values and belief priorities that are necessary to create a world in which the people of every region, race, nationality, culture and religion can live together in peace. We will also delve more deeply into the root causes of conflict, and the ways to move together towards reconciliation and prosperity as one human family. Participants will all experience an interactive session, facilitated by the UPF Youth Council.

Sincerely yours,


Dr. Yong Cheol Song
Chairman, UFE Europe


Carolyn Handschin
Vice President WFNP-Europe


Amb. Makarim Wibisono
Executive Director of the
ASEAN Foundation

Multiculturalism has for several decades provided the primary strategy relied upon by liberal Western society to promote mutual respect between people from different cultures, who find themselves living side by side in our increasingly globalised urban societies. However, several European leaders have in the last months referred to the failure of multiculturalism. UK Prime Minister David Cameron stated in Munich last February: 'We have encouraged different cultures to live separate livesWe have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong.' In response the Muslim Council of Britain expressed that their community are still being treated "as part of the problem as opposed to part of the solution."

Our world cultures today spring in the main from religious roots. UPF has played a significant global role in facilitating dialogue between different cultures and in particular dialogue between religions. Through these experiences we are confident that people of diverse cultures can share a vision to which all feel they belong, in which we are all part of the solution rather than each other's problem.

To promote peace and cooperation we need a dialogue which brings us close enough to discover that which is best in the other; rather than maintaining the distance of ignorance, fear and mistrust through which we magnify each other's failings and become ever more estranged. Our struggle to live in peace is not a result of the clash of irreconcilable cultural differences, but rather our inadequate practice of the central moral guidelines which all the great religions and cultures hold in common. By identifying these essential values and constructing a common vision around them we can share a solution rather than our cultural diversity being perceived as a problem. Founders, faiths and cultures hold as central that by practicing living for the sake of others, we become other-centred rather than self-centred. They all agree that the essence of good character is true love expressed through unselfish actions.

In August 2000, at the UN in New York, UPF's Founder made a very important suggestion as to how we can re-balance our institutions and show a positive example of unity and cooperation beyond religious and cultural difference. The key is that we build unity on shared values and then apply those values to others beyond the limits of our own culture, race, nation or even religion.

Let me summarise what he said:

It is time that international organizations, which support the ideal of world peace, reconsider their relationship with the great religious traditions of the world and encourage mutual respect and increased cooperation between the world's political and religious leaders.



Multiculturalism - A Contribution to Peace?
Friday, September 23, 2011
AT THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE GENEVA – Room 19

9:30-10:40 Opening Session • Government & Migration

Chair: Mr. Heiner W. Handschuh, SG, UPF-Europe
Introductory Remarks: Dr. Yong Cheon Song, Chair, UPF-Europe
Amb. Makarim Wirasmino, Executive Director, ASEAN Foundation
Amb. Evan P. Garcia, Permanent Representative of Philippines to UN
Amb. Robert Vandermeulenbroucke, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgium (retired)
Ms. Monica Malek, Integration Dept., Ministry of Justice and Police, Switzerland
H.E. Willem van Eekelen, former Minister of Defense, Netherlands

11:00-12:15 Session 1 • Model UN "Interreligious Council"
"Special Session on Multiculturalism" (youth actors)

President of the Council: Mr. Omer Mohideen Bawa (Switzerland)
Opening Statements by youth delegates representing:
UN Secretary General: Ms. Isobel Brady (Austria)
DG IDPM: Ms. Huda Balhi (Austria)
DG UNESCO: Ms. Elsa Ferriani (Switzerland)
"Council Debate": By members of Interreligious Council (youths representing their faiths):
Christianity: Mr. Mattia Kobia (Protestantism); Ms. Lica de Guzman (Catholicism) (Switzerland)
Islam: Ms. Neelam Rose (GB)
Hinduism: Mr. Karthik Raghavan (Switzerland)
Judaism: Mr. Ilja Schleszyk (Austria)
Sikhism: Mr. Sundeep Singh (Norway)
Unitarianism: Ms. Cathleen Dumav (USA)
Interactive debate with all Council members on recommendations

Lunch break

13:30-14:45 Session 2 • Interreligious/ Intercultural Cooperation and Human Rights

Chair: Prof. Adnan Holden Egger, Department Ethics and Moral Theology, University of Fribourg Switzerland
Dr. Walter Schwimmer, former SG Council of Europe
Rev. Dr. Win. McCormick, Dean Ecumenical Sepulva Cathedral
Mr. Neil Bullock, Director, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, Geneva Liaison Office, UN Development Program
Dr. Bashir Qureshy, President, European Network against Racism (2001-2007)

15:00-16:15 Session 3 • Women and Development

Chair: Dr. Je-jeo Domingo, Minister at Mission of Philippines in Geneva
Ms. Blandine Molland, Gender Issues Coordinator, Int'l Organization for Migration
Ms. Nicole Heydari, Cultural Analyst with Coalition Forces in Afghanistan
Ms. Carolyn Handschuh, President, WFWP Europe

At their root, human problems are not entirely social or political, and so social and political approaches will always be of limited effectiveness.

Although secular authorities rule most human societies, religion lies at the heart of most national and cultural identities and has far greater importance in most people's hearts than do political loyalties.

Religious people have not always been good examples in the practice of love and living for the sake of others, especially beyond the limits of their own culture. For this reason they should engage in deep self-reflection. It is time for religious people to repent for their preoccupation with individual salvation and narrow denominational interests. Religious leaders, who represent the internal concerns of the spirit should work cooperatively and respectfully with political leaders who have much practical wisdom and worldly experience about external material reality.

The existing United Nations structure, composed of national representatives, may be regarded as a congress where the interests of each member nation are represented. I propose that each nation, in addition to its current UN ambassador, sends a religious ambassador to the United Nations to serve as a member of an Interreligious Council, or UN Senate. The mission of the representatives to this UN Senate would require that they have a genuinely ecumenical or interreligious consciousness and that they have the training and ability to teach a universal, transnational ideal of peace.

Such Ambassadors can provide a long term vision rooted in spiritual values which can complement the role of UN diplomats who often have relatively short periods of office and focus only on political approaches. They would promote movements dedicated to the realization of peace and social welfare and serve as conscientious guardians of high ideals such as justice, security, and peace.

I am delighted that in our next session youth delegates will be voicing their hopes for a peaceful future by enacting the work of such a UN Senate or Interreligious Council. We will not create world peace just

through tolerance of others, guided alone by pragmatism, or motivated only by the desire for personal advancement. When young people dialogue from the foundation of love for the best in their own cultures and as a result discover that they share their most fundamental ideals and hopes with those from other religions and cultures, we do indeed feel hope for our multicultural future.

Multiculturalism - A Contribution to Peace?
Friday, September 23, 2011
AT THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE GENEVA – Room 19

16:45-18:00 Session 4 • Educational Programs and Institutions

Chair: Prof. Richard Friedli, Prof. Emeritus, Department of Science of Religion, University of Fribourg - Switzerland
Ms. Christine Aghazarm, Migration Research Division, Int'l Organization for Migration (IOM)
Mr. Jack Codley, Chairman, Universal Peace Federation, UK
Ms. Ruveni Wijesekera, Project Manager, Swiss Academy for Development (SAD)

18:30-21:00 VIP Reception & Dinner with Entertainment at Vieux Bois (by invitation only)

   

Innovative Approaches to World Peace
UPF & WFWP Program
Saturday, September 24, 2011
UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA, UNI-Mail, Hall MR-290

08:30-09:45 Session 1 • Multiculturalism and Principles of Peace and Value-based Leadership
Coffee break

10:15-11:15 Session 2 • From a Culture of Conflict to a Culture of Peace

11:15-12:30 Session 3 • Group Interactive Program - World Café format
Lunch break (Lunch provided for 7 day-conference registered participants)

14:30-15:30 Session 4 • As a Peace Loving Global Citizen, an insight into UPF's Founder and Origins
Coffee Break

16:00-17:00 Closing Session • UPF Update and Participant Reflections

Such an Interreligious Council can become a role model for our multicultural society by demonstrating the ability to serve the other, recognize the view of the other, respect and love the other, listen to the other and learn from the other. The Interreligious Council can be a reservoir of humanity's great cultural heritage, a shining light of human maturity and an example of practical virtue; a Council of the wise, righteous and just, representing a shared vision and showing a substantial example of intercultural cooperation which can support political leadership by being the solution rather than the problem.

I commend this proposal for your consideration and suggest that you read Rev. Dr Moon's full speech to the UN in 2000 which our staff will make available to you all.

Thank you for your kind attention.'