

IAPD and, UPF Lebanon's meeting at the Lancaster Tamar Hotel in Beirut

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On May 27, 2021, the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) a branch of the Universal Peace Federation Lebanon, held its second meeting at the Lancaster Tamar Hotel in Beirut, Lebanon. Over 25 religious leaders were in attendance representing, Sunni, Shia, numerous Christian denominations, and Druze. The reason the meeting was called urgently was to pray for the conflicts of the Middle East especially the Palestinian/Israeli dispute and recently called a ceasefire. This is an issue deep in the hearts of the Lebanese people and the religious leaders were eager to gather together to show their solidarity and join in prayer.

Dr. Sarah A. Ahmed was the Moderator, a young Sudanese doctor who is now volunteering for UPF in Lebanon. Father Joseph Saghbini a priest of the Greek Catholic Melkite Church, gave a historical overview of the situation based on his 27 years of living in Palestine and working with the Christian community there. A video to introduce IAPD was shown followed by a heartfelt talk by Mr. Thomas Schellen, President of UPF Lebanon, emphasizing the universality of humankind and that we are all children of the same God. He also mentioned that religious leaders must be part of the solution to these conflicts, and we should not depend only on the United Nations and other associations.

Following this, Sheik Mohammad Abou Zeid, Senior Judge in the Family Court of Saida/Lebanon, led an interesting round table discussion among all the religious leaders. Mentioned in the discussion was peace, justice, principles, power, media, action and misuse of religion. Mr. Umberto Angelucci the Regional President of UPF, Middle East and North Africa, mentioned that he would like to initiate some projects with the religious leaders that could create a culture of peace and prosperity for those present.

As closing remarks, both Mufti Mohammed Dalal and Mrs. Hermine Schellen reminded us of the role of religion and the role of dialogue. According to the Mufti, true religion is the origin of peace. Mrs. Schellen mentioned that because of her experience with the Lebanese people her once prejudiced view was changed through personal interaction and dialogue, and she grew to understand their heart and devotion to God.



As an outcome of the program, a number of Peace Education Seminars are being arranged in the mosques of Saida, churches in Zahle and also in other cities following the model of the successful Peace Education Seminar now taking place at the Coptic Orthodox Church of Lebanon. This follow-up of educating the young people to become initiators of peace is extremely important to create a culture of peace. These areas of Lebanon have been infamous for rebellions and revolts as well as the breeding ground for young extremists and activists. These locations are exactly where we need to create a new generation of peacemakers, and this is what we will do together with these religious leaders following this inspiring conference.

We ended in a prayer lead by Mr. Angelucci and followed by all participants joining in the prayer with their own tradition of prayer. We could feel the sincerity and deep desire for peace among all those present.