

UPF Continues Weekly International Webcast to Address Challenges of COVID-19

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UPF International, New York -- The second edition of "Peace Talks," titled "Governance Challenges in the Era of the Coronavirus," had over 500 participants from 94 countries.

The program included an introduction from Dr. Thomas Walsh, chairman of the Universal Peace Federation; and presentations from H.E. Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, president (2010–2015), Nigeria; Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, prime minister (2006–2015), Canada; Hon. Sang Hyun Yoon, chairman, Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee, National Assembly, Republic of Korea; and Dr. Intisar Azzuz, President of the Presidential Council of Libya on Women's Affairs.



Dr. Thomas Walsh opened the discussion with some introductory remarks about governance and a country's special responsibility to address the well-being of its citizens. He noted that governments around the world are being evaluated 24/7 by the media and the public. Criteria include government's level of preparedness and how quick the response; who knew what, when, and where; and the importance of transparency so that decisions can be based on accurate data. He also pointed out the value of learning best practices from countries that seem successful such as South Korea and Sweden.

Comments from the panelists follow.

H.E. Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, president (2010–2015), Nigeria. The biggest challenge facing Nigeria and

the African continent is the shortage of test kits, according to President Jonathan. "Without testing, we cannot measure the scale of infections, and without testing, people will continue to spread it." He also described the logistical constraints in trying to reach and provide care in crowded cities and the rural areas. "There must be communication from the national level down to the small-town mayors as well to those living in the countryside."

President Jonathan recalled his time in office in dealing with the Ebola epidemic in 2014. Although the tolls were high, Nigeria learned valuable lessons from that time. He referred to the importance of setting up a coordinated emergency management strategy to treat those infected and monitor those in contact with the disease. But most importantly, he emphasized, is to educate the citizens. Besides shortage of test kits and logistics, there is also a serious limitation of personal protective equipment (PPE), protective clothing, helmets, gloves, face shields, goggles, and face masks.



Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, prime minister (2006–2015), Canada. Hon. Harper served as prime minister during the global financial crisis (2008–2009) and received high marks in dealing with the situation in Canada. The Covid-19 pandemic is far more complex and bigger, he said, because it represents a dual crisis: health and the global recession. He expressed fear that the impact will be "much greater than what we believe."



He noted that South Korea and Taiwan have been able to contain and mitigate spreading of the virus. This

is, he believes, because of an early response and the government's ability to lock down the people and "test, track and trace."

Hon. Harper said it is too early to fully comprehend the crisis in terms of governance: "We may find the government's role was actually minimal." He gave as variables the examples of population density, weather, temperature, and public willingness to follow guidelines -- factors that government has no control over. He thinks that many people are underestimating the virus' impact on the economy and the government's ability to continue to provide economic support, as well as the economic bounce back.



In referring to the financial crisis of 2008-2009, Hon. Harper pointed out that President George W. Bush convened the G20 leaders and economic financial heads to develop a coordinated framework to respond to the financial crisis. There was a high degree of coordination, but in today's situation, Mr. Harper sees "a lack of global leadership." He said that there should be greater cooperation, yet, for example, there have been disputes between the United States and Canada over medical equipment and an oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia.

For future crises and pandemics, Hon. Harper said that there must be better international coordination, preparation and cooperation.



Hon. Sang Hyun Yoon, chairman, Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee, National Assembly, Republic of Korea. It's been four months since the first case was reported in Wuhan, Chairman Yoon pointed out. In only four months the number of coronavirus cases has reached more than 2.78 million, and more than 194,000 have died. The cost of the pandemic may top more than \$9 trillion. South Korea's first confirmed case of Covid-19 was in late January. At one point, South Korea had the highest number of cases following China.

South Korea learned from the SARS epidemic in 2015 in terms of best practices and preparedness. The

people were educated on the dangers during that crisis, so when the current virus appeared, the public was willing to accept and follow the general guidelines of social distancing, face masks, and so forth. Korean companies are stepping up to help; he gave the example of Samsung, which is manufacturing face masks.



The chairman said it is time to lower economic sanctions and provide humanitarian aid to countries that need help, including, Venezuela, Syria, Cuba, and North Korea. Hon. Yoon described this pandemic as an opportunity to build inter-Korean cooperation and consider sending medical teams to North Korea "to fight the common enemy." He expressed hope that the world will learn from this calamity in terms of the value of global cooperation.

[Dr. Intisar Azzuz](#), President of the Presidential Council of Libya on Women's Affairs. The holy month of Ramadan began last night, and today is the first day of fasting for the 1.8 billion Muslims in the world. Dr. Azzuz described the situation in Libya, which has experienced much turbulence in the past 9 years -- civil war, destruction, displaced people, and as a result, the country is poorly equipped to deal with the pandemic. Yet, interestingly, the virus infection rate remains low. "Less than 70 cases have been registered," according to Dr. Azzuz.

She credits the government with taking the bold step to close its borders and airports to prevent the spread, though she admits that the southern border is hard to control and remains open. Night-time curfews and closure of public spaces are in place, but people are free to travel and shop during the day. Libyans who were abroad when the borders were closed, including Dr. Azzuz, hope to return soon. Hospitals are experiencing shortages of protective gear and medical workers.

Dr. Azzuz is concerned about the spread of the virus to Libya if cases continue to rise in Africa. But she believes the pandemic is teaching us important lessons that we must protect and care for each other, especially the poor and the vulnerable.

In general, the panelists agreed the world is learning from the pandemic experience, but there is much room for improvement at the international level, institutionally, involving the IMF and World Bank, and on the individual level, as witnessed by a question from the audience concerning selfishness. Everyone, no matter their nationality or life status, has a responsible role to play during this time of crisis. The virus can be spread by anyone, including those who are asymptomatic, so now is a critical educational moment when selflessness should be encouraged and practiced. This as an opportunity to learn from what happened and be better prepared for future crises. As Canada's former prime minister said, "We should be humble," and we need to recognize as Korean congressman Yoon said, "We are fighting a common enemy."

Dr. Walsh then asked the panelists several questions about multinational institutions such as the United Nations, regional organizations and government agencies, such as the Africa Union, and the European Commission, which recently apologized to Italy and Spain for its slow and late response to the crisis.

This was followed by a brief question-and-answer session with questions from the audience via the Zoom chat function.

The link to today's webinar is available on our webpage at upf.org/peacetalks, and on UPF's YouTube account: www.youtube.com/watch?v=whB-TPwIowU

Audio: soundcloud.com/upfpeacetalks/peacetalks2-topic

The UPF webinar was picked up by Newsabode, a website based in New Delhi, India, and can be found at: newsabode.com/governance-challenges-in-era-of-coronavirus-are-being-tested-monitored-globally/