

'New Vision for Human Rights' by Dr. Yong Cheon Song

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“Commemorating U.N. Human Rights Day 2011: How Far Have We Progressed?”



Distinguished guests, Ambassadors for Peace, Ladies and Gentlemen! First of all, as Chair of Universal Peace Federation in Europe, allow me to warmly welcome you all to this European Leadership Conference which is aligned with this week's United Nations' "Human Rights Day",

I am very grateful that so large and distinguished a body of people as yourselves, with a deep interest and concern to protect Human Rights and Freedoms, has taken the trouble to gather here for this conference. The advancement of the Human Rights of all peoples is an essential part of the core mission of Universal Peace Federation and, we believe, a key element in building lasting world peace. Championing the rights and freedoms of others takes deep and selfless dedication and commitment, and we truly appreciate all those who undertake such work.

I feel that it is highly appropriate that we should be meeting to assess the current global situation with regard to Human Rights in this truly historic "Mother of Parliaments", which has been so instrumental over the centuries in advancing not only the rights and freedoms of people in this country but also those of people all around the world.

We meet against the backdrop of unfolding events in the Arab world that demonstrate in unprecedented ways a growing awareness of our shared humanity and of our destiny to become one global family in which the Human Rights of all, regardless of race, religion, nationality or ethnicity are respected. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that there must be what it calls a "**common standard of achievement for all people**". Even as we gather here today we can witness this principle bearing fruit in Egypt and Libya and of course we very much hope that the same will prove true of other nations such as Syria and Bahrain, as well.

In Egypt a spontaneous popular uprising against tyranny has called time on the gross violations of human rights of the passed 30 years and opened up the real possibility of democracy and greatly increased freedoms of all kinds for the masses. In Libya, the military might of NATO was deployed with the approval of most of the Arab world to protect the lives and freedoms of innocent civilians threatened by a brutal dictator who was a fellow Arab. In this, the human family represented by the UN, NATO and The Arab League (among others) can be seen to have stood together as one against totally unacceptable behavior by rogue members of that same family.

Universal Peace Federation is deeply committed to advancing the cause of both Human Rights and Human Responsibilities everywhere. The passed 60 years or so have seen great advances in this urgent and noble quest and Europe can feel justifiably proud of the seminal role that it has played in this process and which has seen it take the leadership role in implementing Human Rights around the world.

However, there can be absolutely no room for complacency or foot dragging. There remains an enormous amount of

work to be done if we are to build that world of lasting peace which we all long to see, in which all people live together in mutual respect, harmony, cooperation and co-prosperity and in which the Human Rights of all will be assured.

On a reflective occasion such as this, I feel that it is very important that we connect to a vision for human rights and to where this extremely important topic fits within the broad framework of humanity's deepest aspirations. I think we need to ask ourselves certain key questions such as; what is a true basis upon which all humanity can enjoy such rights? Where do human rights come from? why is there such a problem about enjoying them? And of course, how can human beings best be protected from abuse of all kinds?

Invaluable and noble though the work of righting human wrongs undoubtedly is, UPF believes strongly that humanity would do far better to focus more on ensuring that abuses do not occur than on righting such abuses once they do. A proactive approach is best and prevention truly is better than cure!

To do this, we need to look not only at the relatively more external forces at work in society such as social, political and financial pressures, but at the deepest well springs of the human heart that motivate and drive human behavior. Thus, I believe we need to search within the realms of morality, spirituality and religion, to find answers to these challenging questions.

I want to suggest that the lasting and long term solution is to be found in three main institutions, namely true religion, true families and human rights and character education imparted by the educational systems of the world.

So first of all, let us look at religion. Perhaps the most vital and radical lesson that it teaches us is that our creator never originally thought in terms of human rights at all. Rather, we learn that God created a world out of his own most fundamental qualities of true love and true heart and human beings in his own image. Thus we were created to grow to embody divine love and wisdom and to love others as God loves us and as we would have others love us. In such a world of true and loving relationships there could be no issues about abuse or exploitation of others and no need for any concept of human rights because these could literally be taken for granted through each person fulfilling their responsibility to become loving beings who truly lived for the sake of others.

That is why we need to look not only at the question of rights but also at the crucial issue of responsibility. Humankind is unique among the various species in having been given a portion of responsibility for our own growth and development. Animals and other forms of life generally grow to maturity more or less as part of an automatic process, guided by instinctual mechanisms. We alone of all the species exercise responsibility in our own growth and development. We decide how fully human (or otherwise!) we become. We are given a certain level of potential (including on the question of how we treat others) but it is up to us how much we realize that potential and whether for good or ill.

In short, what the whole area of human rights needs is a vision and concept of ideal or absolute standards of behavior and of how the adoption of altruism on a mass scale is the only real way that human rights can be guaranteed. This, sadly, it all too often lacks. True religion

(be it Islam, Judaism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity or any other) has played an immense part in fostering human rights and human dignity down the ages even if sadly it must be admitted that religious people (or those using the name of religion) have themselves been responsible for far too many human rights abuses. True religion is by far the most extensive network of effective organized human rights education that humanity has and we need more of it, not less!

So first, as already mentioned, I think that we should give deep consideration to the profound relevance and significance of religion to the effort to secure human rights. Religions, after all, provide a deep moral and spiritual framework that sensitizes us to the way we treat each other and demands that we aim to be selfless in our dealings with others. They teach that we share a common origin, the source of our sacred (and potentially even divine!)value. Religions teach of the unique and special value of each human being and of the need to serve and love others.

Violations of human rights, therefore, can be seen as rooted in moral failures and moral ignorance related to spiritual poverty. They began at a certain point when our original ancestors failed to heed the guidance of God and focused instead on their own immediate and self-centered desires and concerns rather than on expressed parental guidance of God.

Increasing spiritual awareness gives rise to a greater collective will to ensure the well being of all people. UPF therefore believes we should advance the values of all the world's great religions, highlighting their emphasis on universal values. For this reason, we believe that The UN Human Rights Council should establish an inter-religious advisory committee on human rights and human responsibilities which would have as its aim to bring the wisdom and deepest heart of the world's religions to bear on human rights and human responsibility issues.

Likewise, but on an altogether larger level, since the year 2000 we have been strongly advocating that an Inter-religious Council should be established as part of the structure of the U.N. and of similar authority within its structure to The UN Security Council. Among a great many other benefits that this would bring would be a greater awareness and concern at the U.N. for how different peoples and races around the world are treated. I want to thank Lord Ahmed and the members of The U.K. All Party Parliamentary Interfaith Committee that he helped to set up, for taking that initiative up with the UK government here in Parliament some years ago and for urging that Britain support ongoing efforts at The U.N. led by The Philippines to set up such a body. I hope very much that that committee and others will continue to press its case.

Second, I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important the family is (or should be) in establishing norms of good behavior by one human being towards another. It already is (and has considerable further untapped potential to be!) the main "school of ethics" in human society and should serve as the "school of love" wherein we learn to love, respect and serve others and find our true value through so doing.

By strengthening the institutions of marriage and family, we can educate our children to respect all people, thereby establishing a culture of respect for human rights rooted in the family. By the same token, all violations of human rights and failures of human responsibility can be seen to stem from breakdown in the family. For example, we saw only recently here in The UK how youths, many of whom were from broken and fatherless homes, freely violated the basic rights of others as they rampaged through the streets of London and other cities, burning, destroying and looting as they went.

We have also seen time and again how despots and tyrants and those who exploit or abuse others emerge from troubled and disturbed family backgrounds. We need look no further back in history than Saddam Hussein and Mohammmur Gaddafi for examples of this.

So, I believe it is vital that we do everything possible as a society to strengthen marriage and nurture strong and loving families in order to ensure that our young people grow up to truly respect the rights and sensibilities of others.

Third, the curricula in our schools and other educational institutions should teach clearly about both human rights and human responsibilities. Given that families are so often broken and impart the wrong values, it is vital that our education system do all it can to reinforce the lessons already being learned in good families about how to treat others and, as far as possible, make up for the lack of such nurture and guidance being received in broken ones.

This can be done through a character education or moral education curriculum. Men and women who are taught to fulfill their moral obligations and responsibilities in their families, or among classmates, friends and associates, will naturally respect and live for the greater good and fulfillment of others, treating all people as members of their extended family and will not violate or take advantage of others.

In recent years UPF has increasingly been invited by governments around the world to present programs of character education and human rights education to legislators, civil servants and members of the executive, as well as to mass audiences in schools and colleges. Based upon the success of such UPF programs (such as in Russia, China, Liberia, Jamaica, Nepal or Sri Lanka as well as others) we would like to see such programs established at the heart of all the educational systems of the world, including of course here in western Europe.

Our program tomorrow at The St. Giles Hotel will focus mainly on UPF's own distinctive vision for human rights and character education and I would urge you to attend those sessions if you possibly can as they will expand on many important themes that I have touched upon briefly here this morning but which deserve far deeper explanation. They will explain why we believe the answer to the human rights problems of the world is as former Prime Minister Tony Blair famously said in another context, "Education, education, education"!

I look forward very much to meeting you all during the course of this conference and to getting to know those of you who are here for the first time. I trust that you will find your experience here deeply meaningful and enriching and

once again I want to thank you all for making the effort to come and to contribute by your presence here! Thank you very much and God bless you all!