

## World Interfaith Harmony Week Observed in Taiwan

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Taipei, Taiwan—UPF-Taiwan observed U.N. World Interfaith Harmony Week 2017 with a seminar on “Social Responsibility of Taiwan Religious Institutions in Facing Serious Social Moral Crisis.” The event, which was co-sponsored by the Taiwan Conference on Religion and Peace, a well-known Taiwanese nonprofit that promotes interfaith dialogue, took place on January 20, 2017 at Pu-Hsien Buddhist Lecture Hall in Taipei. About 40 representatives of different faiths, including the Taoist, Buddhist, I-Kuan Tao, Muslim, Christian, Catholic, and Unificationist faiths, attended the seminar.

The opening remarks were given by Venerable Master Ching Yao, president of the Taiwan Conference on Religion and Peace, and president of the New Taipei City Buddhist Association. Master Ching Yao is also the vice president of UPF-Taiwan. He called on all the faith representatives to stand up and be the conscience of society. He said all religions teach about having harmony between mind and body. Religious people contribute a great deal to the stability of society. Taiwanese society has been built up from the goodness of the people with strong families and religious traditions.

Master Ching Yao also pointed out a serious moral crisis among Taiwan’s younger generation. Beginning in elementary school, youth are required, by the Gender Equality Policy, to learn about sex, including homosexual sex. Sexual autonomy will eventually become a new trend among youth, he said. Other moral crises in Taiwan, including the decriminalization of adultery and legalization of recreational drugs was also discussed. He expressed disappointment that some public figures fall short of their social responsibility, supporting and promoting homosexuality. The majority of the religious side are rarely given a voice on this. Furthermore, any action against same sex marriage or homosexuality will become a discrimination issue or viewed as a violation of human rights, he added.

He also expressed his disappointment over what followed after a group of religious leaders gave a message to the Legislative Yuan, the legislature of Taiwan. In their message, they emphasized maintaining and keeping the civil law, which protects the majority of opposite sex families. However, some legislators neglected the message, wanting to make changes to the civil law and pass the same-sex marriage bill as quickly as possible. In December 2016, the legislature passed the first draft of the bill.

Master Ching Yao underscored the need for religious groups to voice their concerns, or it will seem they agreed with the decision made by the vocal minority.

Master Ching Yao also said that the most important responsibility of religious leaders is to convey to the followers of their faith the seriousness of any change in laws related to the family. Religious people have to safeguard the traditional family structure by ensuring the opposite sex marriage law is protected by the constitution. He urged everyone to closely monitor the recent developments with this issue. He also added that most East Asian religious groups are very passive; however, it is time to change this. We can no longer allow the vocal minority to have bigger voice than the silent majority.



The next speaker was Dr. Chu Wu-Hsien, former minister of the Ministry of Civil Service of the Executive Yuan of Taiwan, and chairman of the Taiwan Interfaith Foundation.

Religion is flourishing in Taiwan; there are 27 religions officially registered in the country. For example, I-Kuan Tao, a religious movement that incorporates elements of Confucianism, Taoism and Chinese Buddhism, has 26 main branches and hundreds of thousands of followers in Taiwan. There are more than 40,000 Taoist temples in Taiwan.

Religious institutions should have a common goal of taking responsibility on social issues and help guide the citizens of Taiwan in maintaining moral standards. The change in ruling parties in the last 10 years in Taiwan is evidence of the moral crisis which it is in. Relationships between different groups have been torn apart due to distrust and hostility. Recently, the “one fixed day off and one flexible rest day” bill drew criticism from both labor rights activists and businesses. The continuous changes to the “Pension Reform” has led to disagreement between the public and private sectors. And there is the “same sex marriage” issue. Family tradition is the most important cultural asset of Chinese people, especially in Taiwan; therefore, we need to stand up for the sake of protecting our traditional culture. Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has said that “same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples ought to enjoy equal civil rights.” However, the Constitution of the Republic of China says “marriage is for opposite sex only.” Changing the law will have a negative impact on the family structure that we have kept for thousands of years. Twenty-three countries support same-sex couple acts. And only South Africa and Israel have approved a same-sex marriage bill, before implementing a same-sex couple act. This moral crisis will create a lot of social problems. Religious people should no longer be passive and need to stand up for the sake of protecting the next generation.

Other speakers were Father Chen Ke, secretary general of the Chinese Regional Bishops’ Conference, Taiwan; Mr. Andrew Chang, secretary general of the Taiwan Interreligious Coalition for Cherishing Family; Mr. Tseng Hsien-ying, a parents representative of the Happiness of the Next Generation Alliance; and Dr. Hsu Hui-chen, director of the Department of Family Education of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU)-Taiwan.