

# WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

The Official UN Observance in the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of February



## Short film about the conference

UPF Austria, Vienna International Centre (United Nations), January 31<sup>st</sup> 2020: Following up on conferences of the [Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations](#) in [Vienna](#), New York and [San Francisco](#) and supported by [UNODC](#), the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), Growth4Peace, the Women's Federation for World Peace, UNCAV and Youth&Students for Peace in commemoration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week organized a conference on theme of "[Faith Based Organizations and the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)". The conference was attended by 200 participants including UN diplomats, religious leaders, NGO representatives and other members of civil society.

The conference began with a welcome from Mr. Peter Haider, President of UPF Austria. The first Session of the conference, "Interfaith Cooperation, Peacebuilding and Crime Prevention," was moderated by Heather Wokusch. She observed the increasing importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation in areas ranging from international relations to criminology.

[Mr. Jean-Luc Lemahieu](#), UNODC Director, Division of Policy Analysis and Public Affairs, was the first presenter. He opened by quoting the speech of HM King Abdullah II of Jordan introducing World Interfaith Harmony Week at the Plenary Session of the 65th UN General Assembly: "humanity everywhere is bound together, not only by mutual interests, but by shared commandments to love God and neighbor; to love the good and neighbor." Referring to the Global Study on Homicide 2019, Mr. Lemahieu noted contexts in which homicide is perpetrated and the links to religious extremism. Observing that current developments often reflect "navigating without a compass," he called for the multilateralism of "all faiths working together in inclusive networks with the theme of humanity at the core."

[H.E. Mansoor Ahmad Khan](#), Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the United Nations (Vienna) and Ambassador to Austria with concurrent accreditation of Slovakia—opened with a 1948 quote from Founding Father Muhammad Ali Jinnah: "You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed; that has nothing to do with the business of the state." The Ambassador then provided examples of religious tolerance in contemporary Pakistan, such as the [Kartarpur Corridor](#) and the restoration of Hindu temples. He discussed the linkage of religion and terrorism within the context of the rise of the far right, ending with an appeal for integration and assimilation.

[H.E. Dato' Ganeson Sivagurunathan](#), Ambassador of Malaysia to the Republic of Austria and Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations (Vienna), expanded on the theme of crime prevention: "Malaysia believes that there is an urgent need for the international community to cooperate more closely in combating hate speech, discrimination and xenophobia, which have inadvertently been widespread through social media platforms." Noting that freedom of religion is guaranteed by Article 11 of Malaysia's Constitution, the Ambassador discussed the unique practice of open house traditions during the festive season especially during Eidul Fitr, Chinese New Year, Deepavali and Christmas. He called for "the majority who are peace-loving and moderate" to "reclaim our rightful place in the centre."

[Mag. Martin Pammer](#), formerly the Austrian Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, discussed the work of the Dialogue of Cultures Task Force of the Austrian Federal

Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, which he is heading now. As noted by BMEIA, the Task Force aims at "promoting intercultural understanding through education and the exchange of information, the rapprochement between different cultures and religions, the strengthening of intercultural competences and the inclusion of marginalized groups and religions -- nationally as well as internationally." Mr. Pammer called for religion and dialogue to be addressed holistically. Observing that Islam is a part of Austrian society, he referred to current issues such as the headscarf debate and vote to close the International Center for Dialogue (KAICIID). Noting that religion can be used as a political tool, he called for a more enlightened approach.

The next presentation was to have been given by [Prof. Dr. Anton Grabner-Haider](#) of the University of Graz, but he regretfully was unable to attend. Instead, his speech "Critical Philosophy and Peacemaking of Religions," was presented by Tanja Hirschmann. The first observation was that most teachings or moral norms of religions are useful for the individual life and for social situations; religions follow the goal of making and keeping the peace in situations of political conflicts. However, the "dangerous side of religious convictions" was also acknowledged with the observation that many religions draw a very strong border to different believers or to nonbelievers, the so-called outgroup. The conclusion was that "there are many ways to God" and that religious people must engage in "mental disarmament and in political reconciliation between hostile groups."

The Vice President of UPF Austria, [Mag. Elisabeth Cook](#), concluded the first Session with an overview of the World Clergy Leadership Conference (WCLC) which had been held in December 2019 in New York. Attended by nearly 1,000 religious leaders and guests from across the world, the WCLC event aimed at uniting races and religions while strengthening marriages and rebuilding families. Ms. Cook was among a delegation of seven Austrians attending the conference. She provided an overview of the peace declaration signing and clergy pledge to work for world peace. Mrs. Cook also discussed the "Peace Starts with Me" festival, which was held in New York's Prudential Center the following day. Impressed with the passionate approach of the African American community toward faith and belief, Mrs. Cook was one of 20,000 guests witnessing Mrs. Moon's appeal to Christians to unite in the spirit of the Gospel.

As a beginning of the second session [Mag. Victoria Lobas](#), founder of Asanga Yoga gave an introduction to traditional Yoga Philosophy and led the audience into few minutes of meditation. She quoted Mahatma Gandhi, who famously said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world." Here, Gandhi is telling us that personal and social transformation go hand in hand. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change.

Dr. Afsar Rathor, President of Growth4Peace and a former project manager in the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and other UN organizations served as moderator of the second session.

As the first speaker [Prof. Dr. Zekirija Sejdini](#), Head of Institute of Islamic-Theological Studies at the University of Vienna, spoke about the challenges of Islam in the European context. The growing number of people, who have emigrated from different parts of the world inevitably increased the religious and cultural pluralism in Europe and have caused uncertainty in the society. His concluding words were: "The future will not depend on the challenges we face but on the answers we find together."

[Mr. Augustin Nicolescou](#), Co-Director of the Herbert C. Kelman Institute and Programme Manager at the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, said that while at least on the surface none of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) are addressing religion and faith directly, we can identify the crucial role, Faith based organizations may have to play in fulfilling them. He shared his experiences of his work, which has been focused on two different conflicts, one in Sri Lanka and the other in Israel and Palestine.

Ms. Mais Mohamad, president of the organization "Unlimited Perspectives", said that by fulfilling the UN SDGs we can find concrete solutions to the challenges we face in our world. She explained that a first goal in her organization is to learn coexistence, which means to live in peace, to respect and accept one another. The best way to live with one another is to know his or her background, culture, history, mentality and philosophy. She stressed the requirement of good education and knowledge to obtain the necessary qualification to resist stereotypes and prejudice and to acquire awareness, justice, acceptance, human values, equality and human rights.

The last speaker was [Mr. Gottfried Hutter](#), a theologian and psychotherapist, who had also studied political science. He focused his speech on a book he published recently titled "Honorable Peace - 100 Years of Middle East Conflict – How Can Lasting Peace be secured between the Muslim World and Israel?" He spoke about his dream for peace in the Middle East, which should be an honorable one. How does this book differ from most other contributions aiming at a solution to the Middle East conflict and why does the author believe that his view can lead to a form of peace that will enable all parties to relax and reconcile? The main difference may be the author's decision to accord its due place to one of the most potent motivating powers in this part of the world, the religions.

As a finale Mr. Jürgen Solis sang the award winning song "[We are One](#)" and led us all to join in with him. This song got the RUMI WORLD MUSIC AWARD for the best song in Las Vegas 2015.



Rev. Dr. Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar



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40th Years of Middle East Conflict  
[honorablepeace.com](http://honorablepeace.com)  
 How Can Lasting Peace be Secured between the Muslim World and Israel?  
 Honorable Peace  
 Gottf

Panel of speakers seated at a long table during a conference. The table features a purple banner with the text "WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY" and the acronym "WIP". The banner also includes various religious symbols: a globe, a crescent moon, a cross, a star of David, and a Khanda. Nameplates are placed in front of each speaker, including "DAN LEE", "WALTER FAHREZ", "HEATHER WOODOCK", "MANJIV AHARJI", "DATU GANESON SVAGURUNATHAN", and "PETER HADER". A woman in a blue jacket stands at a podium on the right side of the stage.



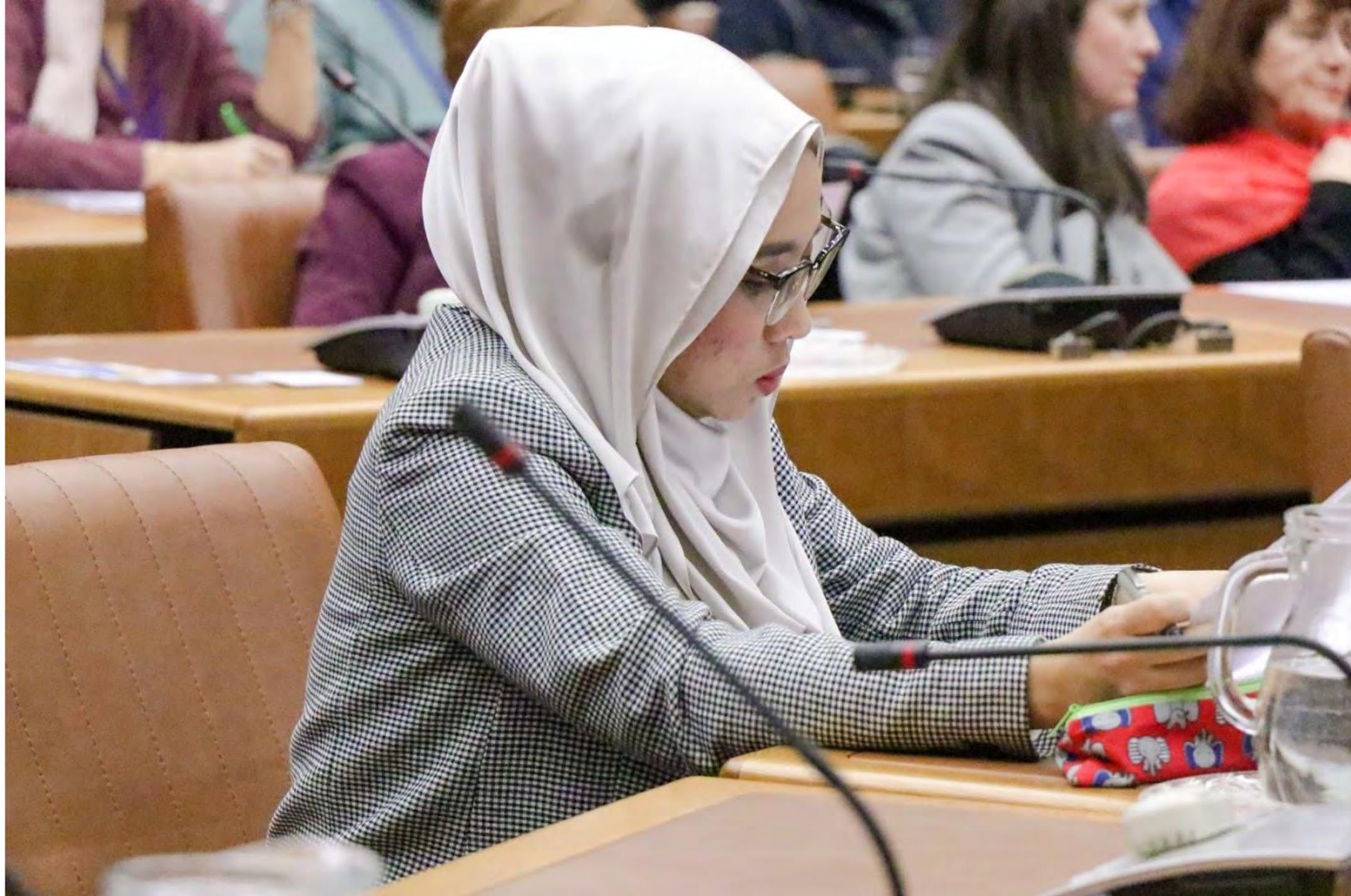






MANSOOR AHMAD  
KHAN







MARTIN PAMMER

HEATHER WOKUSCH

MANSOOR AHMAD KHAN

DATO' GANSESON SIVAGURUNATHAN







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VICTOR LOPEZ

ANTHONY HUTTEN

AUGUSTIN NICCOLESCO

AFSAR RATHOR

ZEKIRIJA SEIDINI

MAIS MOHAMAD

**WORLD INTERFAITH  
HARMONY WEEK**

UPF

Religious symbols: Om, Crescent Moon, Star of David, Cross, Wheel, Yin-Yang, Khanda, Ankh, etc.







**ZEKIRIJA SEJDINI**



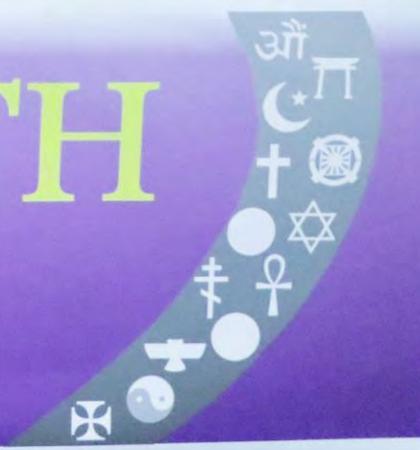
AUGUSTIN NICOLESCU

AFSAR RATHOR

ZEKIRIJA SEJDINI

MAIS MOHAMAD

# WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK





INTERFAITH  
ANY WEEK



AFSAK KATHOR

ZEKIRIJA SEJDIRI

MAIS MOHAMAD

PETER

5 RUSSIAN

4 FRENCH









