

## Universal Peace Federation Honors Activist Women in North Carolina

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On April 28, 2012, a statewide Universal Peace Federation (UPF) event titled “The New Era of Women Leadership” was held at the Lovin’ Life Ministries center in Durham, North Carolina. The event was aimed to bring public awareness of human-rights violations in Japan, Liberia, and the United States, and it addressed how we, as passionate individuals, can collaborate to solve this global problem.

The main focus was kidnappings of Unificationists in Japan. Other topics included sex trafficking in the United States, as well as the physical- and sexual abuse of women and children in Lebanon.

Special guests from dozens of organizations, countries, races, religions, cultures and backgrounds gathered to share their personal experiences with human-rights violations and their current efforts to resolve these issues.

The event began with musical entertainment by Unificationist Stephanie Nishida and included a delicious meal, during which attendees socialized. Several guest speakers kicked off the evening with personal testimonies, visual presentations, and innovative ways we can help address human-rights issues all over the world. Sharon Pace, North Carolina’s UPF state coordinator, discussed the power and will of women in building peace.

Beverly Goll-Yekeson, founder of Liberia Crisis Center, conveyed the pressing issue of sexual abuse and human-rights violation of women and children in Liberia. Ambassador for Peace LeVander Brinkley, who attended an *Original Substance of the Divine Principle* workshop in Korea, followed with a passionate song about her personal experience with Jesus Christ and Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

Throughout the evening, attendees split into discussion groups to answer and ask questions about the topics addressed throughout the day. These breakout sessions were effective because they allowed for each attendee to connect in some way to other people of different races and to the human-rights issues.

Luke Higuchi, president of Survivors Against Forced Exit (SAFE), gave a presentation about the reality of forced abductions of Unification Church members in Japan over four decades. Higuchi’s video presentation, personal testimony and detailed explanation touched the audience deeply. Following that, Sharon and John Pace presented Ambassador-for-Peace awards to several individuals who have been working tirelessly in their efforts for combat sex trafficking and abuse.

After the awards were given out, Becca Bishopric, fellow of *Women NC*, a nonprofit organization originating from the United Nations Commission on Status of Women (CSW) and the United Nations International Treaty Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), gave a presentation on the issue of sex trafficking in North Carolina and the United States.

To conclude the event, Carolyn Sampson, president of Women’s Federation for World Peace of North Carolina, discussed the role of women in striving for world peace. She gave practical suggestions to women and men for better involving ourselves in peace-making.

The evening ended with a prayer, where every attendee held hands in a circle, while Sharon Pace offered a prayer for peace.

*Contributed by Mr. Benjy Uyama, a second-generation Unificationist from Raleigh, North Carolina.*