

UPF and Ambassadors of Peace welcome over 70 Syrian refugees headquarters

Margaret Ali
February 19, 2017



For over a year now we have heard much about Syrian refugees, their suffering and amazing journeys; some at the risk of their lives and others losing their lives on the way to Europe. We saw devastating pictures of unaccompanied, lonely children whose parents could not make it! We have always been wondering “what it is like for the children, young couples, teenagers, and larger families to be uprooted from their homes?” and then coming to a completely different and unusual milieu in Europe and now England. Most young people cannot speak English. Besides their normal suffering they are missing their food and culture and their own homes.



Therefore, it was an amazing opportunity for Universal Peace Federation (UPF), with our friends and Ambassadors of Peace, to welcome over 70 Syrian refugees to 43 Lancaster Gate; our UPF headquarters in the UK. The refugees were of differing backgrounds, ages and family circumstances. The actual concept developed when Margaret and a few Ambassadors of Peace went to visit Barnett Refugee Centre and met directors and some Syrian refugees and wondered of how we can help the refugees in some way and that is how the idea of welcoming the refugees developed.

We are extremely grateful to all our Ambassadors of Peace and friends who attended as well as gave financial contributions, which helped us to organise a most wonderful Middle Eastern dinner and provide great hospitality. There are many people to thank amongst our Ambassadors for Peace and I'm sure they know who they are. However, I would like to mention the special contribution of some UPF young achievers: Hannah, Daniela (and her sister too), Dominic and Matteo who helped from beginning to end; Natasa, Karla and Irene who attended and brought lots of refreshments; and

Hasina who contributed to the food.

For me, personally, the most touching moments was to see professional drummers (Arab drums DERBAKE) perform and they had extra drums for children to join in. It created a joyful atmosphere and soon after a group of young people decided to dance a folkloric dance called DABKE, which was so beautiful and lots of people were pulled in to dance. A friend told me how heartwarming it was to see them filled with joy and hope; so naturally feeling at home and at peace. I am sure that our Arabic speaking Ambassadors of Peace helped them to feel at home.

We were very grateful to Dr. Nazi Akbar who is the director of the refugee centre at Barnett and Farida who is one of the most dedicated representatives at the refugee centre and put in a lot of effort to bring the refugees. Both ladies were presented by UPF an Ambassador for Peace Award for their tremendous work. There was also a young father who took such good care of the young unaccompanied teenagers in the Calais refugee camp, whom were leaving in inhumane circumstances. He too received an Ambassador for Peace Award. As a welcome gift families were presented with a small box of chocolates. Sheikh Ramzy of Oxford Islamic Centre and Mr. Khokhar of Muslim Aid also distributed some gifts to the children.



At the beginning we felt lost; we didn't know exactly what must be done to make everyone feel welcomed, and yet looking back that is what we achieved. For the finale we cut and shared a custom made "welcome to London" cake, a simple activity that pulled everyone even closer.

We said goodbye, but with the intention of seeing each other again. Many Ambassadors for Peace, and UPF as a whole, are developing ideas for further interaction. Presently, we have accepted a recent invitation from the Barnett refugee centre to collaborate again for the upcoming EID party (in a few months) and both of us are looking forward to it; we cannot wait!