

Strengthening the Ambassadors for Peace foundation in the Middle East

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In order to strengthen the ambassadors for peace foundation made through many years of dedication by Universal Peace Federation staff members throughout the Middle East, we decided that advanced education was necessary. Over the years, each country in the Middle East has appointed numerous ambassadors for peace, but we have not been able to create a unified spirit among these people. Some are faithful but working alone. Others have a local chapter, but we have not properly empowered them. In order to empower these people and create a more effective workforce, we realized that in-depth contemporary education was necessary.

For these reasons, we decided to bring them and some of our UPF chapter leaders together with our second-generation members in an advanced educational seminar.

A coalescing of hearts

As a cool autumn breeze blew down from the hills surrounding the ancient city of Rome, ambassadors for peace and UPF staff members met from October 29 to November 1 to review the Principles of Peace and the current activities of UPF worldwide at the UPF national office in Colle Mattia, Rome.

The seminar had the theme, "Applying the Principle: Practical Solutions for the Middle East." Among the twenty-three participants were ambassadors for peace from Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Syria, Jordan and Turkey, as well as national representatives and young second-generation Unificationist staff members. At one session, Italian ambassadors for peace joined us, as did UPF-Italy's staff. The international and intercontinental interaction proved to be both stimulating and empowering.

We started our seminar with a brainstorming session. This allowed the ambassadors to share from their wealth of experience and for all to gain a greater awareness of what was presently happening in the region. We followed that with a report on recent events in Korea, which my wife Marilyn gave. This provided us an opportunity to share guidance from True Mother and from our international president. Next, the secretary-general of UPF in the Middle East region, David Fraser Harris, gave a presentation that made the Principle of Creation real and applicable in our lives.

Following that was a lecture, the Destruction of the Family, which explained why the blessing given by our True Parents is the only solution to family breakdown and that it is necessary for all of us. The way in which all the participants willingly and gratefully received this message was deeply satisfying. Ms. Rehab Bitar, a Syrian lawyer and artist, commented, "I am so grateful to have this deeper insight into the true mission of the UPF founder. Now I can clearly explain when the people ask me about UPF and Father Moon."

The first day culminated in an interactive session between the ambassadors from the Middle East and ten local ambassadors for peace. Both groups shared their experiences in the field, which helped them understand how to network and support one another's work. Mr. Pak reported about his work with Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as did Rehab Bitar, who has worked with Syrian refugees for the past four years.

From Italy, Giuseppe Cali, who is the FFWPU national leader, and Betty Nistri, president of WFWP, spoke about the work they are undertaking in their respective fields. Giorgio Gasperoni, the UPF secretary-general in San Marino, explained the extensive intercultural work that Italian and Israeli young people are doing. The purpose of this effort is to expand work in the Middle East in conjunction with the European movement.

UPF's deep roots

The next day, I began with a presentation covering the legacy of our founder. I felt gratified upon sensing that this material moved the audience members. I began at the beginning with our movement in North Korea and explained how the sacrifices made then served as the foundation for the work that followed. I also spoke about my own enlightenment and growth, which came through a personal relationship with Father Moon. The audience, with open hearts, responded; at special moments, tears flowed. This was the high point of the seminar, when the ambassadors could make that heart-to-heart connection with the founder and understand deeply the incredible sacrifice behind UPF. In response to a request for honest feedback, Dr. Rouchdy, who is from Egypt, said, "I have only one word: tears."

Italian support

Giorgio Gasperoni followed this with a presentation explaining in more detail the numerous projects that his staff has organized to support projects in the Middle East. This, in turn, provided the ambassadors a chance to imagine countless possibilities for cooperation between those working on the Italian Peninsula and those in the Middle East.

In line with the theme, applying the Principle, David Fraser Harris continued with a presentation, "Using the Principle to Resolve Conflict." During a break, one ambassador asked me, "Please help me to forgive my sister, I need your help." This showed me that the material in the lecture touched the hearts of the participants in a practical way.

The third day finished with brainstorming and the development of a Strategic Action Plan for all the ambassadors from the Middle East. Participants brought up many good ideas, such as holding regular online meetings, having more peace ambassador seminars and translating materials into Arabic. Each person expressed the desire to do more and declared what he or she would do after returning home: create a cultural center for Syrian women and children, use the media more effectively, spread UPF educational materials to community leaders and use the UPF web page to report our activities...

Deepening our interaction

That evening we entertained one another, expressing our various cultures. We danced and sang. We no longer saw one another as Israeli, Lebanese or Jordanian but as brothers and sisters working for a better world. In that atmosphere, we could talk more deeply about our nations and the realistic situations we face.

On the last day, we went into the city of Rome to sightsee and spend time together. Seeing the sights and having time to communicate personally helped to deepen our bonds. Seeing Rome gave us a different perspective. Participants could observe a culture quite different from the ones they come from. This seemed to uplift them, providing them a glimpse of what their own countries might become if we could stop the senseless fighting. Peace is the only way for us to develop the Middle East; experiencing the peaceful mood of beautiful Rome served to emphasize this fact.

Crucial, sincere investment

We are sincerely grateful for the support and cooperation of the Italian UPF staff and the Colle Mattia staff. Our own staff comprised the Middle East region's core leaders as well as two of our elder second-generation members. With the cooperation of those in the first and second generations, we found a harmony that inspired the participants, especially through their observing the dedication of our core staff members' children.

We could all sense a beautiful synergy. We are proud of our second-generation members, and their skills were essential to this seminar's success.

In conclusion, we were so satisfied at the end to feel the deep bonds created centering on our True Parents' vision and hearts. We felt that the ambassadors for peace had reached a new level, not just in understanding but also in their dedication and devotion to the work that our True Parents have inspired. Each one left feeling called to do something in his or her country and to continue networking and supporting one another in carrying on True Parents' legacy.

Our ambassadors continually mentioned their appreciation for the warm and loving atmosphere at Colle Mattia.

The staff of the facility was very professional and responded to all our wishes. The local UPF staff and the other leaders cooperated well and supported us in many ways that gave us confidence to give more to our guests. I would also like to mention the generous support for our program from Cosimo Rizzi's family. Without all this kind help, we could never have achieved this level of success. This is what we

mean when we speak of "one family under God." Thank you, Italian brothers and sisters!

Some Reflections

Ilik Ashkenazi, Israel, businesswoman: This seminar gave me much food for thought for my personal and public lives. In addition, it was an opportunity to learn about the importance of this organization and its activities around the world. It is a great honor to be part of the life's work of Dr. Moon and his family. The lecturers brought me to tears and were so inspiring. We will take with us the advice of our elders and will build a better future.

Rouchdy Salah, Egypt, retired NGO activist: I was very much touched by the presentations by Umberto Angelucci and David Fraser Harris on True Parents and Divine Principle. I felt this time that the messages were received better by the attendees because of the limited numbers and the ambiance of a family reflected by the place of the meeting and the sincerity of the speakers.

Jihad Naaman, Lebanon, Catholic theologian and journalist: This was a good convention about the relationship between the theoretical aspects of peace and the practical ones. I realize, thanks to this convention, the power of the impact of the reconciliation of our minds and our hearts on our different societies, families and countries. We have to count on our knowledge and our will to fulfill more activities.