

Middle East Ambassadors for Peace Meet in Rome

Umberto Angelucci
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Rome was the meeting point for ambassadors for peace from across the Middle East and North Africa region this July. Following on a successful seminar held last November, ambassadors for peace from 8 nations were joined by representatives from the Women’s Federation for World Peace in the same region. Those who came included current and former city councillors, mayors and members of parliament, a cardiologist, a psychologist and an engineer; their involvement includes work with the UN envoy for peace in Syria, international youth and voluntary work, and women’s initiatives for peace in the Gulf.

This seminar kept the same title as our first advanced seminar: “Applying the Principle: Practical Solutions for the Middle East.” It was designed to give full voice to the heart and investment of peace ambassadors, while at the same time connecting them to the heart and vision UPF’s founders and in-depth explanations of the principles underlying UPF’s approach, including the focus on the family and the vital role of the international marriage blessing. Gathering in Rome gave participants the opportunity to interact and plan freely while also hearing a stimulating report on developments in UPF and WFWP in Italy and Europe. Building on the previous seminar, we increased the involvement of youth UPF in staffing and supporting the event, with key staff roles being filled by youth from the region and from Italy.



An opportunity for peace ambassadors to share

July is a hot month in Rome but UPF’s Peace Embassy at Colle Mattia is high enough above the city to

attract a cooling breeze which makes for a relaxing environment. The welcome dinner on the patio under the vines was followed by an informal introduction session where participants introduced themselves on a more personal level. From the outset it was clear that we had gathered some of the gems from the region, people who had stood strongly for UPF's values and priorities over the years.

The next morning participants had the opportunity to share more fully about their experiences of working with UPF/WFP and their specific expectations for this seminar. Here it became even clearer that those present understood well the focus of our seminar and were seeking deep and substantial cooperation.



A different structure

In addition to the basic presentations, many of which were similar to those given during our first advanced seminar, we added a new component to the seminar which gave every participant the chance to speak of their “highlights” as a peace ambassador. The presentations on the first full day began with a focus on the essence of healthy relationships – in nature, in the family and in social and international settings – and continued with an explanation (by Mrs Marilyn Angelucci, wife of the regional president) of the destruction of the family and the solution brought by the international marriage blessing. After a session focusing on the regional and global work of UPF and WFP, we still had three hours before and after dinner for the new component, which we called “Your Time.” These were very rich sessions, revealing the extensive commitment and broad-minded approach of peace ambassadors across the region.



Here is just a little of what they told us. A participant from Yemen explained how attending RYS 28 years ago had changed her life and her values; and that this year she had sent her son to the RYS Nepal project. A professor from Israel spoke of the very real obstacles to peaceful coexistence and the need for religious leadership to find solutions together. A lady from Syria spoke of her childhood memories of attending the mosque where Sunni and Shia Moslems sat together with Christians, all listening to the Grand Mufti. Now she travels every month to Geneva to help UN envoy De Mistura, in whose eyes she can see a real desire to bring peace in Syria. A Jordanian parliamentarian, herself from a poor background, spoke of her commitment to helping refugees in her country. A Lebanese doctor told us how his house had been bombed ten times by the Israeli army, and yet he refuses to hold it against the Israeli people. "There is no hatred in my heart." As a cardiologist he offers free consultation to many poor people in his country. "Let's do what our conscience and heart tell us. Let's live for others."

The next full day began with a moving account of the founder's life by the regional president. Then Giuseppe Cali, president of UPF Italy, explained some of the work of UPF and WFWP in Italy and Europe. "Italy has 5 million immigrants: ours is important work to bring these cultures together and make peace. We are one family under God." Giuseppe spoke about the Peace Road and about the Monza Peace Cup (soccer). "We don't want to do conferences; we want to change the world and make people sensitive to the real issues." In the ensuing discussion Lebanese and Syrian ambassadors for peace both spoke of their experience with welcoming refugees in their countries (Iraqis in Syria 12 years ago and Syrians in Lebanon now), and of the great benefit for all that comes from discovering the refugees' skills and the valuable contribution they can make to the host country.

The afternoon sessions began with a session on "Using the Principle to Resolve Conflict," which was followed by outlines of the UPF and WFWP plans for the region. This proved a good foundation on which to break into groups. Four groups then discussed specific plans for the year. Unlike the rather unrealistic wish-lists that have characterized such sessions in the past, these were well focused discussions, relating closely to the existing WFWP and UPF framework.



After a brief reflection session which included concluding remarks by the regional president and the awarding of five ambassadors for peace certificates, we enjoyed a closing dinner under the vines and a relaxing walk in the nearby hill town of Frascati, with a sunset view of Rome and ice cream to complete the cooling process. The following morning meant early departures for some, but those with later flights were able to spend the morning visiting Rome.

More planning and added young staff were key to the improvements this time. Participant reflections confirmed much of what we had seen ourselves. For more than one the highlight was "networking and sharing ideas" or "sharing best practices from others coming from the Middle East." One Jewish participant wrote that "it was very heartwarming to discover Father and Mother Moon as loving persons dedicated to peace and positive relationships between all human beings."