

Norway's World Interfaith Harmony Week

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Oslo, Norway—UPF-Norway organized an evening conference on “Finding Ways to Reconciliation” as part of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week.

The February 4, 2016, event was cohosted by one of the many Oslo churches belonging to the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the country’s majority religion.

This was the third year in which UPF-Norway has commemorated this significant UN initiative for interreligious understanding by organizing an event for leaders of a wide range of faiths. And this year for the first time, the conference was recognized by the political authorities.

Oslo Deputy Mayor Khamshajiny Gunaratnam opened the event by emphasizing the need for tolerance. Her main point was that in a society with great religious and racial diversity, a large amount of tolerance is definitely needed. We are different and cannot make others think like us. That does not work. We must show tolerance, she said. Tolerance is not the same as acceptance, but a condition for creating a sense of belonging in a society with great diversity.

Religious leaders representing the Lutheran Church, Sunni Islam, Shia Islam, Buddhism and Brahma Kumaris lit candles for peace while the master of ceremonies, Steinar Murud, the secretary general of UPF-Norway, explained about the significance of the event, how it was initiated six years ago and the great need for such events in a world marred by war and terrorism.

The Rev. Sjur Atle Furuli of the Lutheran Church spoke about the importance of forgiveness, grace and reconciliation in today’s secular society. We must dare to enter the difficult dialogue and talk about the painful things many have experienced.

Imam Sayed Masih Soltani spoke about the people with whom we need to be reconciled, claiming that “my worst enemy is the one between my shoulders.” We have to begin with ourselves and our own use of words, as words may trigger wars, he said.

Steinar Murud of UPF-Norway emphasized how we all need to be reconciled not only with other people but also with ourselves and God. An essential requirement for reconciliation and forgiveness is a mature heart. It is the parental heart that is needed in today’s world. A brotherhood of humanity is not enough. We should even learn to see things from God’s viewpoint, he said.