

UPF France: French and UK Peacemakers Mark Channel Tunnel's 30 Years

Jacques Marion, President and Robin Marsh
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Calais, France and Dover, United Kingdom – On August 24, 2024, two groups of UPF peace ambassadors and volunteers simultaneously gathered to commemorate the 30-year anniversary of the Channel Tunnel: one group in Coquelles near Calais, France, on the French side of the Tunnel; another group in Folkestone near Dover, UK, on the British side.

Inaugurated by Queen Elizabeth and President Francois Mitterrand on May 6, 1994, the Channel Tunnel was opened to the public in June that year. In the past 30 years, millions of people have crossed the channel on trains that connect London and Paris in a little over two hours.



The Tunnel linked two nations that had been at war for many centuries. Although various tunnel plans had been on the table since the early 19th century, they had regularly been buried by mutual distrust and wars. Therefore, when the Channel Tunnel was built, it became a model and inspiration for supporters of

the International Highway for Peace, a project launched in 1981 by the UPF founders at the 10th ICUS Conference in Seoul, Korea, where the plan for a Japan-Korea tunnel was first announced.

The International Highway for Peace became part of the founding vision of the Universal Peace Federation in 2005, when the plan for a bridge and tunnel at the Bering Strait linking the Asian and American continents was added to the project. If completed, it would link four major nations that had been in conflict in the 20th century, and yet will play a crucial role in shaping the future.



French Events

At 11 a.m. on the French side, at the Holiday Inn hotel in Coquelles, three delegations of UPF peace ambassadors and volunteers from France, Belgium and Great Britain gathered. Two assistants of local parliamentarian Mr. Marc de Fleurian were in attendance, as well as UPF-UK chairman of the board **Mr. Keith Best**, a former British parliamentarian, and his wife. Over 40 participants had come from the London, Brussels and Lille regions.



After a short introduction by **Ms. Bénédicte Suzuki**, a member of the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) for northern France, UPF-Europe and Middle East co-chairman **Mr. Jacques Marion** gave a presentation on the Peace Road vision and activities around the world. Hon. Keith Best spoke, in French, on the eventful history of the Channel Tunnel. He was followed by the two parliamentary assistants, **Mr. Francois Kaczmierczak** and **Ms. Sandrine Démaret**, who offered their messages of support.



Mr. Hugo Veracx, chair of UPF for West Europe, shared some insights into the founders' motivation for the Peace Road project. In conclusion, **Mr. Patrick Jouan**, vice president of UPF-France and an organizer of the event, followed by the imam of the Ahmadiyya community in northern France, **Mr. Ussama**, representing the UPF peace ambassadors, gave a word of greetings and thanks to all participants.



To commemorate the event, a group photo was taken in front of the tunnelling machine "Virginie," one of the five boring machines used on the French side, which is exhibited on a roundabout in Coquelles. A celebration lunch at the Holiday Inn concluded the event, after which a small group of French ambassadors for peace and UPF leaders crossed the channel to join the British group that had gathered in Dover.

UK Events

On the UK side, the approximately 40 participants were in high spirits, despite the challenging weather conditions due to the remnants of a hurricane. They included representatives of UPF-UK; ambassadors for peace; members of the River South Community of FFWPU led by **Pastor Adza Mould**; students from Greenwich University, coordinated by **Mieko and Trevor Davies**; and Young Achievers, who were also students.

Most participants drove from London to the Dover region. They engaged enthusiastically in photo opportunities and enjoyed a visit to the Battle of Britain Memorial, reflecting on the sacrifices made for the peace we now cherish. With the assistance of Exhibition Centre staff, the participants appreciated the time spent at the memorial, with occasional views of the Channel and the iconic white cliffs of Dover.



The next destination was the Samphire Hoe Nature Reserve, created from land reclaimed using soil and rock excavated during the Channel Tunnel construction. Although the visit was shorter than planned due to the weather conditions, the participants were able to briefly experience the unique environment of the nature reserve.



The day concluded with a festive dinner at the Dover Marina hotel, where the delegation from France and Belgium was warmly welcomed by British peace ambassadors, volunteers and guests. The dinner featured several speeches, including those by Pastor Adza Mould, **Dr. Siama Niaz**, a UPF-UK patron who generously supported the event, **Mr. Ahmed Shebani**, who worked on the construction of the Channel Tunnel, and Ms. Mieko Davies.

Representing different cultures and religions, the group symbolized the new, one-world environment which the International Highway for Peace envisions – clearly, an idea whose time has come!