

UPF and WFWP Melbourne, Australia's UN International Day of Peace 2019

Greg Stone
September 21, 2019



Melbourne, Australia -- The Australia chapters of UPF and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), an affiliated organization, held their annual conference commemorating the International Day of Peace on September 21, 2019, at the One Roof event space in Southbank in downtown Melbourne.

The conference, which seeks to support and foster peacebuilding within the diverse multicultural city, and this year was titled "Peace Building and Our Environment," attracted 85 participants, many of whom were Ambassadors for Peace and members of WFWP. The organizing committee comprised members of UPF's Victorian Peace Council and WFWP.



The goals of this year's event were the following:

support the realization of the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals through implementing Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals;

foster reconciliation to heal hatred and prejudice between people through the Bridge of Peace Ceremony;

showcase workshop presenters who speak about acquiring and understanding the right values, and how to implement these values in how we live our lives and manage human affairs;

honor the legacy of Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, who encourages us to live for the sake of others; and

share insights that will enrich the life of participants.

Following a video presentation on the life and works of UPF co-founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, Dr. John Bellavance, vice president of UPF-Australia set the tone of the conference with his presentation on "The Search for Meaning in the Modern World." Dr. Bellavance noted that one in four young people in Australia are at risk of mental illness. Some psychologists suggest that one-third of mental health patients are not clinically sick, but have a lack of meaning and purpose in their lives. In developed countries people often search for happiness in pleasure and through immediate gratifications, yet still they cannot find meaning and happiness. Such widespread phenomena as depression, aggression and addiction cannot be understood unless we recognize the vacuum of meaning in the lives of people. Society is facing a breakdown of traditional values that often comes with economic development. The underlying teachings of Dr. Moon were proposed as a comprehensive values education program that could address such issues. Since the theme of the day was the environment, Dr. Bellavance also spoke about Dr. Moon's sustainability and environmental protection initiatives in Brazil and Paraguay.



Program

The main program featured a Bridge of Peace ceremony; a keynote address, presented by Dr. Rachel Carling, a former MP of the Victorian Legislative Council; and afternoon breakout sessions in which participants could choose one of three workshops to attend.

Mrs. Anne Bellavance, vice president of WFWP Oceania, and Mrs. Meenakshi Sharma, president of WFWP India conducted the Bridge of Peace ceremony, a signature initiative of WFWP that seeks to foster real and lasting friendships between people from different cultural, religious and national backgrounds. The motto of the ceremony, coined by Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, co-founder of WFWP International and UPF, is: "If the women of the world can be sisters, the men of the world won't go to war."

The purpose of the Bridge of Peace is to enable healing and reconciliation between people who may have come from nations that were enemies in the past. Mistrust and prejudice can be passed on from parents to children by the attitudes children learn from and the conversations they have with their parents. The Bridge of Peace seeks to break this cycle. When we become sisters (and brothers) who share each other's stories and develop true friendships, then our world view changes. This brings about a change in how we think, communicate and act, resulting in healing and reconciliation.

The leading participants in the ceremony were Mrs. Shanika Kalansooriya, who provided a Buddhist perspective on the role women play in peacebuilding, and Mrs. Hena Jawaid, who provided a Sufi perspective.

Prior to the keynote address, everyone enjoyed a vocal performance by young emerging vocalist Hazel Zee, who sang passionately.

Keynote Address

Dr. Rachel Carling, a former MP of the Victorian Legislative Council, and an Ambassador for Peace, gave a keynote address on "The Australian Family – Where Did We Go Wrong?" in which she spoke about the importance of the family for the wellbeing of society. She said, the family, which has been redefined in so many different ways, is no longer trusted to make decisions for their own children. It is time to unite to strengthen today's families, embolden our parents and protect our children. Dr. Carling strongly urged the leaders and participants in attendance to stand up for traditional family values. She contended that everyone must take responsibility for the decline of moral values in order to secure the future of the family in Australia. Additionally, she encouraged participants to speak to their local elected officials about the values they consider to be important, saying "We cannot expect them to do the right thing if we do not persuade them." Many of the participants were inspired to heed her call.



Workshops

Three workshops were held during the afternoon breakout sessions, participants choosing between one of the three.

Workshop 1: Building Peace: Somali Spiritual Women and Peacebuilding

PhD candidates Mrs. Stephanie Carver and Mr. Ahmed Tohow spoke on the topic of "Somali Spiritual Women and Peacebuilding." Mrs. Carver and Mr. Ahmed conducted research, in collaboration with Monash University and the East Africa Security and Peace Forum, on the role and capacity of Somali women to forge new forms of peace within the Somali diaspora as "shadow peace builders" for the broader community. They contend that women could play a significant role in this process. The role of traditional Somalian values in relation to social harmony and justice in society were discussed. Before Somalia was colonized by European countries, Somalians relied on these values. Somalian women played a prominent role in traditional social cohesion, and had great influence in the peace process within clans and between clans. After colonialism and the civil wars which had been instigated by three colonial powers converging within Somali lands, these traditional values were stripped away and declined sharply.



Workshop 2: "Centering" Journey to Peace

Mrs. Linda Young, who has served as a Christian minister for the past 18 years, introduced "Centering Prayer" as a means to bring inner peace into one's life on a daily basis. Mrs. Young explained that individuals who experience inner peace radiate peace into the world. During the workshop, participants had the opportunity to practice and experience the benefits of "Centering Prayer."

Workshop 3: Religion/Spirituality On Our Mental Health: A Conversation We Must Have

Mrs. Sharon Orapeleng, a mental health policy professional and principal consultant at Psyched Solutions in Queensland, shared how one can harness religion and spirituality as a resource to positively influence one's mental health and emotional wellbeing in order to achieve peace within oneself.



Ambassador for Peace Awards

The conference concluded with the presentation of Ambassador for Peace awards, which were given to three community leaders: Mr. Ayad Hadi Yousif Al-hifadhi, Pastor Amira Yousif and Mr. Abdirahman Mohamed Sheikh.

Partners and Supporters

The Victorian Multicultural Commission made a generous donation in support of the conference.

Reflections from the participants:

"I was absolutely inspired by the people, the information that was presented and the hope that was given for the future."

"It was wonderful to see so many people from different countries....a real world family."

"[This conference] is working towards the biggest social need of this century – peace."

"[UPF and WFWP] are focused on "real issues" and mechanisms to improve and harmonize humanity."

"[This was a] great experience, breaking down barriers and promoting peace."

"[This conference was] great for raising awareness of the importance of the family and family values."