

## UPF Sydney, Australia inaugurated Its International Media Association for Peace

Gregory Stone

Saturday, November 7, 2020



Sydney, Australia -- The International Media Association for Peace (IMAP) inaugurated its Oceania chapter during the first webinar it held for the region on November 7, 2020, on the theme, "The Quest for Trustworthy Journalism in an Age of Unchecked Social Media and Fake News." Speakers from America, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu shared their insights and views on what is a free, responsible and moral media with innovation and mission. The webinar was attended by 76 participants from 10 nations and has been viewed 377 times to date on Facebook.

Mr. Geoffrey Fyers, secretary-general of UPF-New Zealand, was the moderator. He highlighted the importance of the time we are living in now when we can communicate with anyone in the world in a moment. He expressed his gratitude that IMAP-Oceania was inaugurated, despite the many critical challenges facing and polarization in the world, to foster understanding and create a sense of unity and purpose. He said that there has never been a more urgent time, especially in media, for different perspectives to come together and share their insights and understanding to help create a more harmonious and peaceful world.



Mr. Yutaka Yamada, chairman of UPF-Oceania, introduced the UPF co-Founders the late Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon primarily as religious leaders who are passionate in achieving world peace through innovative ways including through the media. They have created many newspapers and publishing enterprises in different parts of the world. He stressed the importance of resolving the declining media credibility while preserving the freedom of press.

Dr. Robert Kittel, coordinator of IMAP-Asia Pacific, gave the keynote remarks. He discussed the theme of the webinar, compared absolute truth to relative truth and emphasized the importance of universal

values. He introduced the mission of the World Peace Media Conference, which was founded in 1978 by Rev. and Mrs. Moon and re-branded as the International Media Association for Peace. The IMAP inaugural conference took place at the World Summit 2020 in Seoul, Korea and brought together 500 media persons from 45 nations. Dr. Kittel then briefly explained the universal principles of peace, living for the sake of others and honoring marriage.



Mr. John Ruddik, a media commentator of the Sydney Morning Herald, The Spectator and Sky News TV and author of "Make the Liberal Party Great Again," Australia, explained the things people need to know about media. If a country is a democracy, then the media is automatically powerful. In a country with a non-democratic government, media exists, but the government, military or state is powerful. He continued, saying that in a democracy, people vote for the political party that will run the country and that they are influenced more by the media than anything else. And that many in the media support one side of politics. He asked whether it is possible to live with the media ideal in today's highly polarized society. He encouraged everyone not to give up on the hope of an objective media and to create a path where that can happen. He said that he is not very optimistic but does not want to give up hope.

Mr. Kennedy Maeakafa Fakana'ana'a-ki-Fualu, founder of Tonga News Hub, Tonga, spoke about media strategy. He shared that he attended a program years ago about fake news and unchecked social media. He believes that there are many voices from the media that are very partisan, even in Tonga, a small island nation. He decided to create Tonga News Hub to be a platform where he can share different perspectives of stories. He himself screens the news to make sure it is true and would be of service to the community, locally, and to the world. Google Alerts, he said, is a good tool for screening news. He concluded by saying that he believes in the media coming and working together to form an initiative in the Pacific that can expand and contribute to a peaceful world.

Ms. Paea Halatanu Nawaqatabu, administrator and radio journalist of Pacifica Radio Fiji, shared her experience serving as a volunteer community-based radio announcer for Wansolwara, the University of South Pacific's independent news and online publication produced by students journalists of the school's journalism program. "News attracts audiences that advertisers want to reach. And advertisers pay to access those audiences. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Fiji Times online could only be accessed by persons paying a subscription fee while the general public relied on a free and reliable online publication called Fiji Village. During COVID-19, Fiji Times made their online publication free to the public. Digital platforms allow the relationship of news producers and news consumers to be more fluid and interactive." She stressed the need of people to have accurate news in order to govern themselves well. She mentioned that news consumers are not passive because they screen, filter and create news and can even make it go viral, such as fake news that leads to a nationwide panic.

Ms. Heather Maraki, editor of Capital FM 107, Vanuatu, gave a background of the Vanuatu media industry, composed of two active newspapers, three TV channels and four radio stations. She stated that COVID-19 has greatly affected the economy, particularly privately-owned media companies. As social media is accessed by the majority of the population of Vanuatu, these media outlets have had to create social media pages to inform their audiences of the latest news. The Media Association of Vanuatu has been encouraged to call for an urgent meeting to discuss accreditation. Accreditation by the association will not only target news companies but also journalist's own social media pages. It aims to lead people to the pages that are trustworthy and minimize people connecting to rumors or speculations that do not promote peace.

Ms. Khairiah A Rahman, senior lecturer of the Pacific Media Centre, AUT University, New Zealand, defined trust between a journalist and an interviewee: "It's an interdependent and committed exchange of meaning between or with one another. A journalist relies on the interviewee's truthful response and the

interviewee is confident that the journalist will report what is said accurately." She explained that fake news and misinterpretation happens because of political and personal agendas and biases at personal and collective levels. "Even freelance or individual journalists are not free from their personal agendas and biases. It takes a lot of self-reflection to do just, balance and honest reporting." She concluded by giving her recommendations: "own your own biases, include the voices of those you write about, persuade without agenda and engage in dialogue to develop better understanding with others, and [do] not to share [news virally] until you have checked all sources."



### **QandA Session**

Question: How can the government control fake news without encroaching on human rights? (Ikene Nokwikee, University of Japan)

Ms. Rahman: When we talk about government control, it is not something that is good for a democracy. The control of fake news is not something that we should leave to the government. It needs to start from the professionals themselves, media outlets themselves, people who take pride of their profession and want to tell the story honestly. There needs to be transparency, honesty and ethical practice. It starts with the individual. Learning intercultural communication and looking at stories from different cultural lenses can help us develop an understanding of others. Understanding the view of the other party even if our standpoint is different.

Dr. Robert Kittel: The media is meant to be the watchdog of the government and society. The question is: Who watches the watchdog? I think the answer is another watchdog. Media has to be self-regulated. If the government tries to control fake media then the issue of censorship will come up, not only the issue of human rights but also the issue of press freedom will come up. Why don't we have network accreditation and start to acknowledge, regulate ourselves?

John Ruddick: The government should absolutely have nothing to do with media censorship. We have the principle of non-government interference in government companies, which we have believed for three centuries in the West, and it has been a very good principle. What's new in this generation is the power of social media -- Facebook, Twitter, and so forth. What should the government do about social media? In the U.S., they are talking about the law treating the social media company not as a publisher but as a platform. Social media companies act like publishers; however, we don't want the public to see this point of view. It's a tricky situation. These massive companies could easily be subjected to more regulations in the coming years. How will the government grapple with the idea of censorship with the powerful social media? Media needs to have more diverse voices, partisan viewpoints. It is important to understand the other side.

Dr. Kittel: We need to be humble. If we have in our own character universal values something beyond me should follow. It comes to character. Not only in media, but also in governance and other areas of society, how do you manage the vast wealth we are creating in a good way to have good governance, good media and good laws? In academia, very liberal ideas are often taught. The concepts we are grappling with in the media is being grappled with in every other field. We have to come together to find these universal values and begin to advocate them. We [need to] work together and find the peace and harmony that we are looking for that can be sustainable.

Mr. Kennedy: There needs to be more independent news reporting. Journalistic integrity is very important, yet the influence of corporations telling the news, polarized news and all is a problem. What can we do to support independent journalism? We don't have the reach of the audience that the big media

has. But, then, big media has the money, but luckily the Internet, gives small voices the opportunity to be heard on the same level as big media. How can we or what can we do to collectively support independent reporting?



It seems that there needs to be more education for children and young people to gain media skills and learn to evaluate news and information. Are there any panelists involved in teaching media evaluation skills or who are aware of these skills being taught to young people?

Ms. Paea: Back in high school, I was taught media jargon and how to evaluate media I came across.

The coordinator of IMAP-Oceania, Mr. Kenji Watanabe, expressed his deep gratitude, on behalf of IMAP-Oceania, to all the panelists and participants. He said the insightful presentations and discussions brought great hope that trustworthy journalism is possible by developing like-minded journalists to function as a conscience of society. He added that Oceania nations, although isolated from other parts of the world, are connected to the world by the ocean, which is the source of life. So the important role of the media is to be balanced and to stimulate peoples' conscience. He encouraged all the panelists and viewers to work together to form a strong voice of conscience for this region and beyond.

