

UPF Australia's Interfaith, Multi-Disciplinary Australian National Peace Council

John Bellavance
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“The world needs a model for an ideal society where people can peacefully coexist, embracing all nations, cultures and religions – a community of mutual prosperity and universally shared values”
Dr. Sun Myung Moon – Founder, Universal Peace Federation (UPF)

On November 19th, the UPF sponsored interfaith, multi-disciplinary Australian National Peace Council was attended by 19 participants representing the states of Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia. The Australian Peace council is made up of Ambassadors for Peace from the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Unification faiths; as well as professionals and academics in the fields of education, health, social services, engineering, economics, business and community development. This national council was inaugurated in Sydney on November 2015 during a summit meeting of leaders from across Australia and Oceania. The Melbourne meeting was the second time the council has met.

Executive Summary

1. The council decided that further research is needed regarding reasons for the Australian government action in Norfolk Island, before the council could fully support the concerns of the people of Norfolk Island.
2. The council decided that the Peace Council was not equipped or ready to tackle the issue of domestic violence.
3. The council agreed that UPF should continue to work with South Sudanese diaspora to support peace building in South Sudan.
4. The council agreed that members should join government commissions that deal with social issues, both on the State and Federal levels.
5. The council deliberated about the need to revive the Federation of Island Nations (FIN). The council asked John Bellavance to contact Greg Stone, the regional secretary general and Dr. Walsh about how this could be best achieved.
6. The council agreed to support values education in Oceania.
7. The next Australian National Peace Council meeting was set for the 21st of January.

Bill Pontikis, founder of Cafe Care introduced the values he felt could underpin the work of the council. These were: respect, humility, honesty, living a moral life, generosity with one's financial resources and time, and forgiveness. He testified how these values came from his Christian faith.

John Bellavance introduced the purpose of the Australian Peace Council and objectives for the conference.

Justice in Norfolk Island

Dr. David Buckley presented on the social injustices perpetrated by Australia with respect to the self-

determination of the peoples of Norfolk Island. He suggested that peace is not just the absence of conflict, but also the presence of justice. He encouraged UPF Australia and the Australian Peace Council to support the people of Norfolk Island by mobilising the Australian public to pressure the government. He said that the Australian government had provided no explanations for dismantling the local government in Norfolk Island. The council decided that further information was needed regarding the reasons for the government taking this action, before the council could fully support actions with regards to Norfolk Island. The council hoped that Dr. Buckley could help with this, because without knowing the Australian government's views it was not possible to have a complete picture. Bill Pontikis said that he would also pursue further information from his federal member of parliament.

Values that underpin peace – Individual and local action for national and global progress

Dr. Stephen Rametse, President Africa Day Australia chaired the first round table discussion. In his opening remarks, he said. “a culture of peace is based on a set of values that reject violence and removes the root cause of conflict. Peace needs to be constructed. We need peace markers”. He encouraged members to identify and frame issues that undermine peace as, social, political or economic. Council members appeared to be in close agreement when it came to the values that can foster peace. Anne Bellavance, president of Women's Federation for World Peace said that peace starts with the individual and expands to family, and society. This view was echoed by many of the council members. Shillar Sibanda, vice-president of Africa Day Australia said that societal change starts with the individual acting within family and local community. Peter Pal, president of the Union of Greater Upper Nile States, said, “transformation within ourselves is key, based on this we can lead others to do the same”. Dr. Rametse added that individuals needed to reconstruct themselves in order to avoid selfish actions to occur. Individuals and governments must live for the sake of others. Dr. Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe, lecturer in Business Management echoed this view, saying that values education was critical in order to foster the right attitudes in individuals. Values education needed to lead to substantial change in the individual. For this to occur, values needed to be supported by skill sets. Dr. Apollo went on to say that our legal system and how justice is administered is an adversarial, winner takes all system that needs to change in order for true justice to occur.



From left: John Bellavance, Dr. David Buckley, Dr. Joseph Masika, recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia receiving the Ambassador for Peace Award, Bill Pontikis and Dr. Stephen Rametse.

Domestic violence

The second issue that was raised during this session was domestic violence. Dr. Joseph Masika, South Australian representative recommended that all UPF members in Australia apply to become White Ribbon Ambassadors. John Bellavance volunteered to provide the link to apply online and encourage UPF members to apply. Dr. Masika said that the billions of dollars that were needed to deal with domestic violence could be used elsewhere once this problem was solved. Council members expressed their heartfelt concern for this issue and agreed that a restorative approach was needed. Irene Anania, the UPF Director of Values Education suggested that to resolve family violence we needed to not judge, but educate the abuser, since each one is a product of society. Adel Gaballa shared that the values he was raised on as a Muslim, taught him to respect women; as a wife, a mother, a daughter and sister. Dr. Nsubuga-Kyobe suggested that a new tool kit could be produced to deal with this issue of domestic violence. Bill Pontikis and Rev. Austin Sanderson (Western Australian representative), both shared their knowledge on this subject, however, after much deliberation it was concluded that the Peace Council was not equipped or ready to tackle this problem.

Economic values and peace

Stephen Sibanda, former president of African Day Australia added that the values adopted by individuals, organisations and governments impact the social, economic and political realms. He provided the following example of government economic policies that society must be mindful of. Some prisons in America are now sources of cheap labour and in Australia family violence is starting to be outsourced to private companies. Adel Gaballa, former planner for economics policies in Egypt, provided an example of Muslim values that drove Egyptian economic planning. Policies of employment for all, infrastructure planning based on population growth were some examples of the way to plan a fairer and more considerate economic system. He suggested that Australia should learn from this approach. Dr. Nsubuga-Kyobe argued that the richness of a nation is not solely based on economic values.

Australian Peace Council Actions

The final session was chaired by Irene Anania. The focus of this discussion was to determine the issues that would be the focus of the work of the peace council for the 2017-18 periods. This session began with a presentation from Khalid Osman, CEO of Victorian Vocational Volunteering on the political repression of political figures in Sudan. He shared that the issue is not a Christian versus Muslim issue, but it is driven by opportunism, power and wealth, which is not representative of Islam. He recommended that UPF work with the African Union to support peace in Sudan. Peter Pal shared about the importance of respecting the self determination of the people of South Sudan and likened this to respecting the identity of individuals. The council agreed that UPF should continue to work with South Sudanese diaspora to support peace in South Sudan and look further into the human rights situation in Sudan.

Anne Bellavance suggested that council members join government commissions that deal with social issues, both on the State and Federal levels. This proposal was adopted by the council. The council also deliberated about the need to revive the Federation of Island Nations (FIN). John Bellavance reported that Dr. David Buckley was willing to look at how this could be achieved. The council asked John to contact Greg Stone, the regional secretary general and Dr. Walsh about how this could be best achieved.

Values Education

John Bellavance recommended that a national conversation occur about the values that could sustain Australia in the future. No decision was taken. Irene Anania reported on the values education undertaken by her and UPF in Palau and in Fiji. She explained that the model that she had developed as an outcome of her Masters was very well received by these governments and effective in fostering values in children. The model focused on the head, the heart and the hand. She said that it was not possible to truly reach the head, without first touching the heart. Community service (the hand) undertaken by the students after the values education, reinforced the learning that occurred in the classroom. The council agreed to support this initiative. Irene invited council members to communicate with her if they wanted to support this initiative.

The next Australian National Peace Council meeting was set for the 21st of January, 2017.