

International Day of Peace Observed in Finland

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Helsinki, Finland—A discussion of the current European refugee crisis was the focus of Finland’s observance of the International Day of Peace.

”Refugees—a Challenge for Europe” was the theme of the event, which took place on September 21, 2015, and was attended by about 40 people.

The first speaker was Mr. Jouni Hemberg, the executive director of Finn Church Aid, a prominent development aid and emergency relief organization. It operates in some 20 countries with key objectives of peace, education and livelihood.



Mr. Hemberg spoke on “Each One of Us Deserves a Tomorrow,” noting that the first obstacles in dealing with the refugee issue are ignorance, prejudice and outright disinformation. He provided numbers, photos and some of his experiences over 23 years in aid operations.

People leave their homes and countries due to an overwhelming conflict in the society or bad administration, he said. They leave to seek a better future. Especially young people need a better perspective for their lives; otherwise there is a risk that frustration will turn them toward radicalism.

For the same cost of supporting one person (refugee) in Europe, one could help 15 persons in their country of origin, including their education, Mr. Hemberg stated. He concluded with a strong call for a long-term, sustainable policy in resolving the root causes of refugee problems.

The second speaker, Ms. Kaisa Väkiparta of the Finnish Refugee Council, pointed out that the number of refugees worldwide is 60 million and is increasing. It is bound to become more visible in Europe and in Finland, too.

She appealed for the enactment of a few concrete measures. For people who are in need of urgent protection, visas should be made easier to get. In view of the number of refugees, the quotas of refugees

in recipient countries should be increased. And the focus of aid to refugees should be in the countries of origin.

There was a short video of introduction to UPF International, showing the multiple issues and the worldwide presence of UPF.



His Excellency Dr. Saad Jawad Kindeel, ambassador of Iraq to Finland, brought up the fact that Iraq has 3 million internal refugees. The Iraqi government is fighting on two fronts: on the military front against terrorists and on the humanitarian front with logistical and financial difficulties. He appealed to observers and actors to assess the situation and to look for solutions by ethical and humanitarian criteria.



A newly appointed Ambassador for Peace and a promoter of intercultural projects in Finland, Mrs. Ogechukwu Eneh from Nigeria greeted the audience. She is seeking to connect Nigerians living in Finland to UPF-Finland as well as to their local communities in Nigeria to support UPF's peacebuilding efforts there.

Another commentary about growing in an intercultural setting and contributing to mutual cultural adjustment in Finland was shared by Ms. Saido Mohamed.

The event concluded with a panel discussion and a lively sharing over refreshments.

In many hearts there was an expressed resolve to be involved.