

## UPF Ecuador Celebrates World Interfaith Harmony Week

Castulo Leiton  
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**Quito, Ecuador** -- A celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week was held Wednesday, February 1, 2023, at 7pm at the Bahá'í National Headquarters in Quito.

**Archbishop Luis Moreno**, Anglican Church in Ecuador and chairman of IAPD/UPF-Ecuador, gave the opening remarks as emcee, thanking the co-organizers of this event, CONALIR (National Council for Religious Liberty and Equality) and the Bahá'í Community, who offered the venue for the event. Unfortunately, it was raining heavily that day, but most of the people still came.



Archbishop Moreno stated, "The SMAI was conceived to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, and is held in the first week of February each year. Harmony in a world of crisis with the aim of achieving a world of peace, equality and equity, is the theme for this year."

**Freddy Paredes, Secretary of the Baha'i Faith Community**

"All religions call us to unity, all the prophets and envoys of God are the same soul, each one of them are the manifestations of God, and through them the holiness of God is manifested. As religiosity increases in humanity, we cannot deny that religion helps us achieve unity and universal peace. In our contemporary world, religion is often perceived as the cause of discord, conflict, the opium of peoples. However, religion must also be widely regarded as a positive force, shaping human thought and marking all individuals and societies. Religion reaches the deepest roots of human motivation, of the human spirit, which gives us life every day. It has awakened entire populations. It gives us the ability to love, the ability to forgive, the ability to create boldly and to overcome all prejudices, and to have discipline. Sometimes those impulses stop us and sometimes they help us make sacrifices for the common good...."



**Castulo Leiton, President of UPF Ecuador**

"The purpose of UPF is to promulgate and spread peace with the positive attitude of serving others, overcoming all kinds of barriers and promoting reconciliation on the common basis of universal principles and values. To build a global network of leaders representing the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the human family as well as all disciplines and sectors of activity. To promote and practice the ethic of living for the good of others as the guiding principle of building peace and a global community. To spread character education, touting the deep meaning of the family. To promote the need for interreligious and international harmony and cooperation, the need for close cooperation between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations, among others...."

**Francisco Sandanel, Representative of the Ambassador of Argentina to Ecuador**

"The Argentine government recognizes the fundamental right of religious freedom and the importance of the religious dimension that it has historically had in our society. Argentina has been characterized as a land of open gates where each community has had the freedom to settle and develop. It is a multicultural country, which, due to the different migratory flows that it has had throughout its history, has shaped a plural and multi-religious identity. It is currently characterized by a state committed to the defense of said freedom, coexistence and the promotion of interreligious dialogue in all appropriate areas. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is enshrined in our constitution...."

**Julio Cesar Guanche, Representative of UNESCO Ecuador**

"Dialogue and understanding between cultures and civilizations has been a fundamental vision of UNESCO since its founding. UNESCO has created efforts such as the Interfaith Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation, which brings together religious leaders from around the world to discuss issues of common interest and work together for peace. It has launched the Interfaith Education Initiative which seeks to integrate the interfaith dimension into formal and non-formal education in order to foster understanding and respect between people of different faiths. However, the perspective of interreligious dialogue faces serious problems, some of them linked to racism and the clash of civilizations.

To speak of a culture of peace for UNESCO is to speak of a way of organizing and energizing life. A culture of peace implies the absence of war, physical violence and bloodshed, but it also implies the



guarantee of the material and spiritual conditions necessary for a dignified life such as food, housing, health, effective participation and respect...."



**Lorena Chávez, Representative of the Ombudsman of Ecuador**

"There is a differentiated treatment of the state towards the different religions with respect to the majority religion. Differential treatment exists for different religions.

We began to develop a coordinated effort and establish a space for dialogue.

The goal of the Ombudsman's Office is to present this bill to the National Assembly in May...."

**Fernando Muñoz, Representative of CONALIR**

"CONALIR, since 2009, began with dialogues between the state and religious representatives to promote a law protecting religious freedom. Various religions were represented. It is not sectarian.

A group was chosen to participate in the drafting of the bill, and that group of people became CONALIR.

Religious dialogue should not be confused with ecumenism. The organization is not a judge of doctrines. All religions are equal in their rights...."

**Archbishop Chrysostomos Celi, Orthodox Church in Latin America and member of the Steering Committee of WCLC**

"It is very important not to end this meeting without first turning our eyes to God, our creator. CONALIR and UPF have come together to co-sponsor this SMAI. In all levels of society, we must seek peace, that path of building peace. Where God puts you, you must flourish there, in your family, the root of society. The first church, the first community of faith, is your home. Therefore, we must open ourselves to that omnipotent God who has given us the strength to move on. Ecuador is secular and not atheist. Most Ecuadorians believe in God."

**Orthodox prayer:** "Heavenly King, spirit of truth, you are everywhere, filling everything. Come and dwell in us, purify us from all stains, come and save our souls."

We also had the presence of representatives of the United States Embassy, the Islamic community, the Jewish community, the Evangelical Church, Brahma Kumaris, academic leaders, etc. It was a very significant event to advance the harmony of religions.