

## World Interfaith Harmony Week 2019 celebrated by UPF UK in Parliament

Sarah Tohma  
February 6, 2019



World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) 2019 was celebrated by Universal Peace Federation UK on February 6th afternoon in partnership with other groups in Parliament and at Lancaster Gate in a programme entitled 'Prayers and Words to Create Harmony'. Hosted by Mr Afzal Khan CBE MP, UPF contributed to a programme organised by the Forum for International Relations Development (FIRD), that included eminent speakers from Parliament and the inter-religious world, 'Building Bridges Through Interfaith Dialogue'. Rev Dr Marcus Braybrooke, the Chairman of the World Council of Faiths, and UPF's Patron, Mr Virendra Sharma MP both made wise contributions to the programme on behalf of UPF.



During the evening WIHW programme in Lancaster Gate on February 6th, UPF revived the traditions developed in the 1990's when they convened a long lasting series of 'Prayers for Peace' that featured many causes and issues around the world. The programme encompassed both short speeches highlighting the good features of faiths other than our the speaker and prayers for conflicts that did not include the speakers own faith community on the world stage.



Prof. Harbhajan Singh shared a personal experience, which shaped him to who he is now, from a young age. He was born in a Sikh family but started exploring other faiths. When he was 12, he was already reading the bible and knew he was open to other faiths. Even though his parents opposed him he kept searching and came across the teachings of the Rev. and Mrs Moon. This had an impact on his spiritual search and also in the course of that journey he was able to reach his dreams of meeting extraordinary people like Gandhi, Mother Teresa and Rev. Moon. Through his experiences and wisdom, he spread the message of modesty and humility. People of faith shouldn't be rooted in external things as it can lead to conflict and emptiness. Furthermore, his wise words about, 'not to hate and not to have jealousy towards others,' are very fundamental for all faiths.



Meeta Joshi recounted the times her heart was touched hearing of the real life experiences of refugee families who came to this country after being displaced from troubled areas of the world. She addressed further issues these families had faced on a daily basis such as abuse and genocide. She went to UAE (United Arab Emirates) to practice her strong belief and passion in belief of saving humanity by providing food for children who are vulnerable and poor. 'We are all one,' and 'we have to embrace diversity,' are teachings of interfaith and this is what we should be aiming for. Many religions have a common base of non violence, love and peace. She's learnt mainly from Hinduism, but also from other faiths, that you should look after your neighbours first. This demonstrates that all religions teach different paths but they lead us to the same goal. God resides in every human being. Respond, forgive and lets be together as one.

Meeta's daughter, Nishi, performed a beautiful South Indian dance devotional and a classical Indian dance that was delightful.

Sheikh Dr Hojjat Ramzy, spoke about mainly how similar and one religions are in so many forms. He encouraged us to talk about everyone's religion and not to single out our own for our own benefit. Sheikh Ramzy wants to educate people that all religions aim for peace no matter what they are and we should help each other to be united because true peace comes from these religions. His question, 'Do we

love each other enough to stop bitterness in this world?' was very thought provoking. He said, 'We must leave behind this bitterness and come together to give peace a chance.' For example, he shared what Nelson Mandela said, 'As I walked out the door to the gates to lead me to the freedom, I thought if I didn't leave behind the hate and bitterness, I would still be in prison.' He shared that 70% of the Quran is including Christianity and Judaism, showing its important that we should trust each other and start working for peace.



Dr Krishna shared a wonderful reflection about her Hindu faith with some history behind to support her message of how there should no segregation and we are all one community. She shared some insight about the origin behind the name 'Hindu'. It's a myth, there is no Hindu religion but it is a cast and

community. At the famous river flowing through the Himalaya, a 'Sindu' came through this river but the local people couldn't pronounce 'Sindu' but only 'Hindu'.

Sheikh Rahman added his insights. He said faith is divine because it is a human interaction. 'Any faith is right.' As a councillor, he emphasised on the importance of carving religion out of the political affairs and that we are victims of faith policies of the 60/70s. Every human being is blessed with a human spirit and we can call upon the angels to save us. Interfaith is like a circle, you can have any faith and you will reach the centre if you are sincere. Even if you are a non-believer, you will reach the light.



Our final speaker, Dr. David Hanna. He has a Unificationist, Anglican background. In 2003 went on project of UPF MEPI Pilgrimage in Mecca Jerusalem and shared a experience. In the centre of city next to church he was sitting on the wall, it was almost sundown and he saw Muslims, Jews and Christians were running to pray. He was very inspired that everyone had this fervour and devotion to pray and it exhibits how we are all one. He shared some words of Rev. Sun Myung Moon that, 'Human beings like peace but they also like disputes. The fundamental reason why war exists is because the problems of human beings lie within us. We human beings enjoy fighting.' If we see that, 'All religions hold peace as their main and essential hope, even in segregated denominations, the kingdom of love will heal it.'

The event was concluded with prayers from different participants and each lit candles following their prayer.