

IMAP and UPF-Canada IMAP Webinar Expounds NGOs' Role in Peacemaking

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**PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST:
Can non-governmental organizations make an impact?**

Tuesday, November 26th, 2024: 2 PM EDT

Binod Paudel
President, UPF
Türkiye

Hajiba Ayoubi
Senior Advisor,
UPF Morocco

**David Fraser
Harris**
Secretary general,
UPF Middle East
and North Africa

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IMAP, Europe and Middle East – The International Media Association for Peace hosted a webinar on November 26, 2024, focused on the challenges of achieving peace in the Middle East, emphasizing the role of NGOs in addressing immediate needs, engaging in interfaith dialogue, and providing humanitarian aid.

Mr. David Fraser Harris, secretary general of UPF in the Middle East and North Africa, acknowledged the difficulty of discussing peace in a region that is currently, as well as historically, embroiled in pervasive conflict. While politicians may handle formal negotiations, he believes that NGOs have an important role to play in opening minds and hearts and finding ways to foster understanding and cooperation, laying the groundwork for lasting peace.

Mr. Fraser Harris gave a presentation on humanitarian responses recently organized by UPF chapters in the Middle East and North Africa, highlighting the challenges faced in delivering aid to areas affected by natural disasters. He discussed the earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria in February 2023, and the subsequent response efforts, including the role of UPF-Lebanon and the Association Sans Menottes in Syria. Mr. Fraser Harris also reported on the response by UPF and other organizations to the earthquake that hit Morocco in September 2023, and the storm that brought serious flooding in Libya just a few days later. He emphasized the importance of partnerships and the role of NGOs in providing aid.

The moderator, **Mr. Pierre Beauregard**, then introduced **Dr. Hajiba Ayoubi**, a medical doctor with the Moroccan Ministry of Health and senior advisor to UPF-Morocco. Dr. Ayoubi shared about the Solidarity

Caravan for the 2023 earthquake in Al Haouz Province, Marrakesh-Safi region of Morocco. She detailed her involvement in coordinating the humanitarian caravan, which aimed to provide aid to residents of Amarghot village. Her contribution included the distribution of essential goods, as well as engagement with the local community through organizing fun and games for the children and families whose lives had been torn apart by the earthquake. Dr. Ayoubi emphasized the importance of collaboration, community involvement, transparency, and accountability in enhancing the impact of NGOs in crisis response.

Mr. Binod Paudel, president of UPF-Türkiye, then shared his efforts in response to the earthquake in Turkey. Southeast parts of the country were devastated, particularly the city of Antakya, with over 53,000 people confirmed dead and hundreds of thousands wounded. Mr. Paudel shared about his relief efforts, including the support from the Turkish ambassador and the local community. To provide a safe place for children in Antakya to learn, after their schools had been destroyed, his team arranged for a school to be constructed out of a shipping container. The school project was supported by various organizations including the Family Federation, EUME.

A discussion followed on the challenges of achieving peace in the Middle East. **Dr. Michael Jenkins**, president of UPF, emphasized the importance of NGOs in addressing immediate needs and fostering interfaith dialogue. **Mr. Larry Moffitt**, secretary general of UPF-North America, emphasized the fact that NGOs can quickly pivot to provide needed help, whereas governments move slowly.

In conclusion, Mr. Fraser Harris stressed the importance of never giving up in the pursuit of peace, no matter the challenges. Both Mr. Paudel and Dr. Ayoubi wholeheartedly agreed with those sentiments. All participants felt honored to have heard the moving reports of the magnificent efforts the speakers and their collaborators have made in support of their fellow men and women in the region.