

IMAP Italy: Rome Seminar Weighs Human Rights Principles and Realities

Vittorio Patanella
December 11, 2025



Rome, Italy – UPF-Italy and the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD-Italy) marked Human Rights Day on December 11, 2025, at the Europa Experience – David Sassoli exhibition space in Rome. The event highlighted freedom of faith, belief and conscience as a cornerstone of peaceful coexistence and European integration.

Moderated by **Mrs. Gabriella Mieli**, head of external relations for UPF-Italy, the conference brought together institutional, academic and media voices to address the widening gap between human rights principles and present realities.



Ms. Elena Grech, deputy head of the European Commission Representation in Italy, stressed that human rights are central to the EU's identity and credibility. She pointed to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; the annual Rule of Law monitoring, which includes press freedom and judicial independence; and external tools such as the EU's global sanctions regime, targeting serious violations like genocide and torture.

Mr. Carlo Zonato, president of UPF-Italy, gave prominence to the spiritual dimension of human life. He argued that religious freedom is not a political privilege but an essential right, and that when conscience is constrained, all other liberties are weakened.

A message from UN Secretary-General António Guterres was read, warning about shrinking civic space and reaffirming the duty to protect the most vulnerable.

Speakers then examined key challenges. **Mr. Antonio Stango**, president of the Italian Federation for Human Rights, denounced inconsistencies between international law and state practice. He challenged the claim that human rights are merely "Western," through examples such as Taiwan.



Journalist **Mr. Marco Respinti**, director of Bitter Winter, cautioned against turning commemorations into empty rituals, and defended rights as being inherent to human nature. **Ms. Raffaella Di Marzio**, founder and director of the LIREC Study Centre, addressed discrimination against religious minorities and coercive "deprogramming" practices.

Mr. Angelo Lucarella, an expert in constitutional law and European affairs, noted that even where religious freedom is formally recognized in the constitutions of authoritarian countries, its implementation varies. He identified populism and fundamentalism as risks to freedom.



Mr. Riccardo Burigana, director of the Center for Ecumenical Studies in Italy, traced the evolution of Catholic teachings up to the Vatican's 1965 declaration of *Dignitatis Humanae*, which recognized religious freedom, and the 1986 "Spirit of Assisi," an interreligious movement for peace.

Prof. Matteo Luigi Napolitano, historian at the University of Molise, discussed the diplomatic tension between the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam.



The event concluded with UPF presenting the Ambassador for Peace award to philanthropist **Mr. Francesco Pio Piccolo** and **Professor Gianni Cara** (accepted by a delegate), in acknowledgement of their sustained commitment to social inclusion, education, and humanitarian service.