

UPF Italy: Peace Advocates in Rome Voice Commitment to Human Rights

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Rome, Italy – "Freedom of Faith, Belief and Conscience: Challenges and Achievements for a Culture of Peace" was the theme of a conference held in the Flag Room of the European Parliament Office in Rome on December 10, 2024. Organized by UPF-Italy; Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP Italy); the Centre for Studies on Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience (LIREC); and in collaboration with the European Parliament Office in Italy, the meeting aimed to celebrate Human Rights Day.



Mr. Carlo Zonato, president of UPF-Italy and moderator, explained in his opening speech that "the spiritual dimension of our existence is a founding principle in the vision of peace advocated by UPF, and the protection of rights and freedoms is vital to the development of this dimension."



Mr. Carlo Corazza, director of the European Parliament Office in Italy, then greeted everyone, saying, "The European Union is not only a project for peace but also for justice, prosperity and rights. It has a shared vision of man that places the freedom and dignity of the person at the center."

Dr. Raffaella Di Marzio, director of the LIREC Study Centre, opened the first session. She explained

that her association is "committed to promoting respect for all forms of diversity, whether spiritual, religious or otherwise." She emphasized the importance of placing the value of equality above differences, stressing the crucial role of dialogue in preventing all forms of discrimination.

She was followed by a presentation by **Ms. Elisabetta Nistri**, president of WFWP-Italy. She voiced her conviction that "Women are the expression of the feminine dimension of God and are called to rediscover their divine nature. Thanks to their sensitivity, attention to the needs of others and natural inclination to forgive, typical of the maternal heart, they can actively contribute to building peace and improving collective well-being."



In his report, **Mr. Franco Ravaglioli**, vice-president of UPF-Italy, shared a reflection of Father Moon: "Religion should play the role of conscience, establishing the criteria of justice. Every religious expression possesses universal elements derived from the one God of all religions. Therefore, faiths must purify themselves by practicing the core value of true divine love, which can be summed up by the teaching of living for the sake of others." At the end of the talk, Mr. Ravaglioli showed a film about the Interfaith Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), a project of UPF.



The second session was opened by **Mr. Davide Romano**, editor-in-chief of Conscience and Freedom Magazine. He called for a model of a state "that knows how to dialogue without taking sides in favor of any religion, guaranteeing all faiths, religious and non-religious, the possibility of expressing their principles and values with mutual respect. This pluralism represents the essence of a peaceful condition and is an effective method of preventing serious conflicts."



A video of **Mr. Antonio Stango**, president of the Italian Federation for Human Rights (FIDU), came next. The scholar argued, "A sovereign state, in order to respect freedom of thought, conscience and religion, must simply refrain from violating that freedom. It need not create institutional mechanisms to guarantee the right to not be unjustly arrested, tortured, or forced to follow a particular religion. It is enough that it does not oppress. Unfortunately, many states do not adhere to this philosophy."

Mr. Marco Respinti, media representative, journalist and editor-in-chief of Bitter Winter, highlighted in his video address, "The media can be a great ally of religious freedom, provided it continues to document serious violations of this right. However, the media can also become an insidious enemy when, for ideological or partisan reasons and self-interest, it reports fake news instead of the truth."



The last speaker of the second session was **Mr. Stefano Ceccanti**, professor of Comparative Public Law at La Sapienza University. He observed that although "we write charters and constitutions, the real principals that protect freedoms reside in the institutions that guarantee citizens the right to vote; the free election of parliaments; and the impartiality of the law courts even when that goes against the mindset of the majority. The issue of religious freedom is closely related to the institutions that guarantee pluralism."

The third session began with **Mr. Nader Akkad**, imam of the Grand Mosque of Rome. He "appealed to jurists, politicians and ministers of different religions who believe in the value of freedom of worship, to defend and support the right of all the communities that do not as yet have the recognition of the Italian government. This would benefit not only the communities concerned but also society as a whole."

The **Most Reverend Luis Miguel Perea Castrillon**, bishop of the Anglican Church of Europe, spoke next. For the prelate, "Freedom of belief is fundamental. My brother and sister have the right to believe and to follow the principles and values that define them and which are the result of a historical and cultural journey. No one can deny them the opportunity of freely manifesting their faith, nor can anyone justify religious discrimination."

Last to speak was **Rabbi Roberto Della Rocca**, director of the Culture and Education Department of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI). He reminded everyone, "In a civilized society, all religions must be considered with equal dignity. However, we cannot fall into the error of saying that there is an abstract equality among human beings, as this would be a great illusion. Instead, it is through differences and mutual interactions that progress, culture, faith, spirituality and peace are promoted."

The meeting ended with Mr. Carlo Zonato conveying his heartfelt gratitude to the speakers and the audience. He expressed his hope that "the solicitations that emerged during this important opportunity for dialogue, discussion and reflection can be shared and promoted by each one of us."