

UPF-Samoa hosts an Oceania Leadership Conference and launches IAPD

Seti Suafa
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Apia, Samoa -- On July 26–28, UPF-Samoa was privileged to host an Oceania Leadership Conference (OLC) that included the launch of the Samoa chapter of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), a dinner with Samoa Head of State Sualauvi Tuimalealiifano and his wife, a World Peace Blessing celebration, and time Samoa Victims Support Group, in addition to the usual program explaining UPF's Principles of Peace. The conference, held at the Samoa Ecumenical Center, attracted 21 participants that included a sitting member of parliament of the Samoan government, three religious leaders and a professor from the National University of Samoa. Helping to conduct the program were Rev. Park Shang Son, chairman of UPF-Oceania; Dr. Robert Kittel, president of Youth and Students for Peace; and Rev. Gregory Stone, secretary general of UPF-Oceania.

The first day comprised a presentation on UPF's Principles of Peace. On the second day, five representatives from faith traditions poured water into one bowl symbolizing unity and prayed for peace and cooperation among Religions on national and worldwide levels. Participants then signed the Founding Resolution of the IAPD to launch the Samoan chapter.

The program concluded with a celebration of the World Peace Blessing. Four couples participated in the ceremony. Longtime Ambassador for Peace Dr. Vaa Unasa and his lovely wife travelled from afar to participate in the ceremony. They were visibly overjoyed to receive the blessing. Dr. Kittel was interviewed, and television, radio and newspaper media reported on the event.



Also on July 27, leaders of the Samoa Victims Support Group (SVSG), which deals with domestic violence and family breakdown, participated with great interest. One leader cried as she digested the lectures reflecting on issues that she was going through in her marriage.

On July 28, Reverend Park successfully arranged a lunch meeting with Lina Chang, the leader of the SVSG. He listened patiently to details of SVSG operations in Samoa, Sydney and Auckland and heard about the sad underbelly of domestic issues in Samoan society. Lina and a youth leader, Manuia, revealed the challenges to handle the myriad victims of rape, incest, domestic violence, unemployment and poverty who come to them. They have faced opposition from police, lawyers, judges, and religious and cultural leaders who prefer to sweep such issues under the carpet to save face.

Later Lina and Manuia invited UPF to tour the support group's "Campus of Hope" in Tuanaimato, a safe haven for the various victims and a place for them to renew their lives. We met one girl whose healing involved training in weightlifting. She had literally lifted herself out of her troubles with the help of the Samoan Weightlifting Federation and had won a Gold Medal at the recent Commonwealth Games in Queensland, Australia. Another 18 year old, a victim of incest by both father and brother, didn't speak for many years until recently she took solace in a beautiful peace garden she tended at the Campus of Hope.

Possible projects UPF could do together with SVSG were discussed. It was decided that a Tong Il Moo Do mind and body health support group could be implemented immediately led by Tongil Moo Do Master Seti Suafa and his senior students in Samoa. Lina indicated a place for training, and Reverend Park immediately asked Gregory Stone to provide AUS \$2,000 to spark this group. It will buy a banner, logo printing and T-shirts for the Campus of Hope children and youth.

In the evening of July 28, dinner was arranged with the Head of State Sualauvi Tuimalealiifano and his wife and a new Ambassador for Peace couple, Hon. Taefu Lemi Taefus and his wife. It was an occasion to celebrate the launch of the IAPD and the peace Blessings in Samoa, as well as a chance for the OLC leaders to speak with the Ambassadors for Peace. Copies of Dr. Kittel's Four Family Loves were given to all the couples. Her Highness was particularly interested.

In summary, the Samoan leaders' sincere interest in UPF's Principles of Peace can spark further ongoing study and several opportunities for cooperation. Like minded leaders hopefully can cooperate to create a better environment in Samoa, multiply the World Peace Blessing, and surely build a heavenly nation. Through the SVSG especially, there is an opportunity to serve the hard-working caregivers and the variety of victims from dysfunctional families. One of the pastors who attended the OLC seminar is chairman of the newly formed SVSG advocacy and alumni "Be the Change" group consisting of over 90 families.

UPF-Samoa is grateful to our founders and the Asia Pacific regional leadership for the OLC in Samoa, promoting a new vision for peace and development and helping to bring light and hope to the Pacific Region. We hope to hold more OLCs and World Peace Blessings soon.

