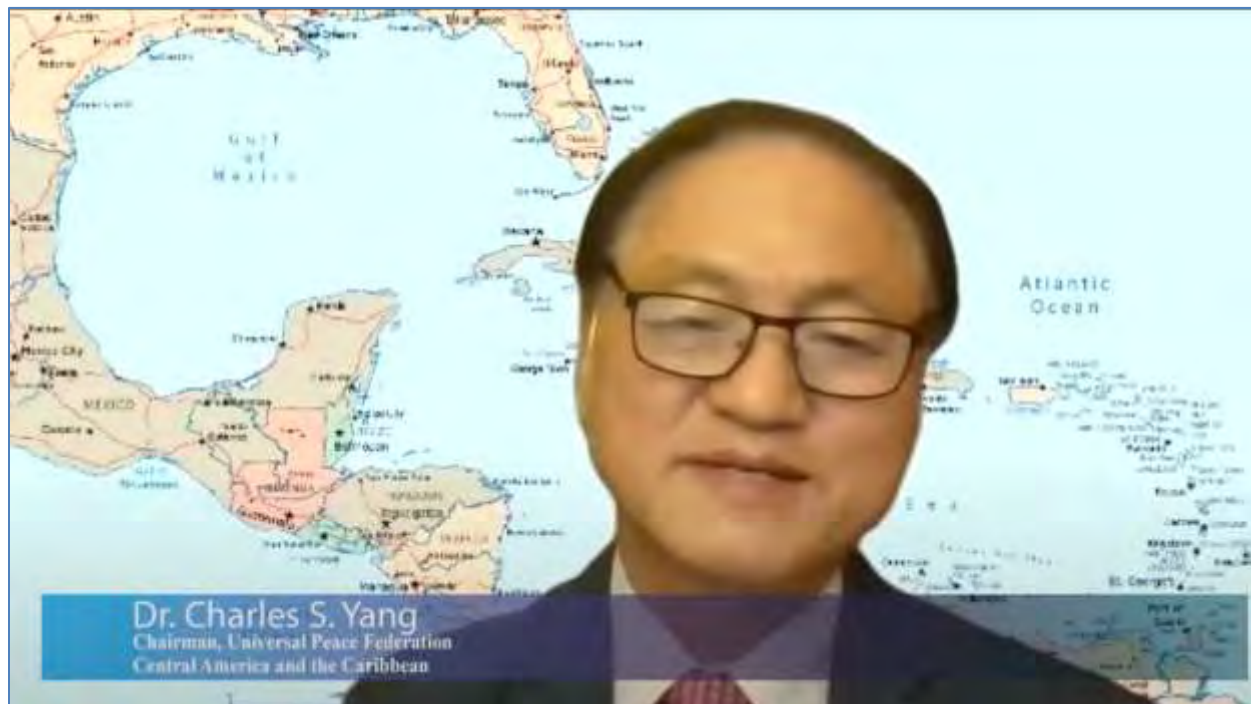


UPF-Central America and the Caribbean held a Peace Talks webinar in Costa Rica

Chang Shik Yang
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Costa Rica -- On the evening of July 30, 2020, UPF-Central America and the Caribbean held a Peace Talks webinar with panelists from the regional Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD). The Zoom webinar, "Challenges and Opportunities for Faith Communities in the Aftermath of Covid-19," had 100 attendees from 21 countries.

Mr. Remy Taupier (Secretary General, UPF-Caribbean) served as emcee and introduced the panelists.

Dr. Charles S. Yang (Chairman, UPF-Central America and the Caribbean) gave opening remarks:

Recently, the co-founder of the UPF who is widely known as a Mother of Peace, Dr. Hak ja Han Moon, strongly addressed that we have to find solutions that come from beyond human efforts or mankind's knowledge, and instead from the guidance of God. We should overcome this pandemic together as one family under god, beyond race, religion and nationalities"



Panelists

Rev. Guillermo Osorno (Pastor, Assembly of God Church, Nicaragua) was the first panelist to speak:

In the midst of all this that we are experiencing, this pandemic and its crisis, God broke the agendas that we all had on this earth. We did not have time anymore to be involved in so many meetings, commitments here, commitments there, forgetting the family, wife and husband, parents and children, not even time to study the Word. God put us on His agenda. Now we have time to be with the family, pray together, read His word, and have a secret time with our God. All the necessary and prudent measures that we have taken on this earth are necessary, like those that many took to follow the system of evangelism. They did not take a step back, but in the midst of what they were experiencing, they kept working, and now we realize that many churches grew by their system of faith by maintaining their evangelism.

What are we doing? We have learned that men and women of faith in the midst of a crisis are trained to give the best example of faith and open up better opportunities to do God's work: a church that does not sleep even though its temples are closed, its faith is open 24/7, a church capable of connecting with the pain of the people, a church close to the needy. A church that stands shoulder to shoulder with the community of our people, sometimes shining and other times silently. Serving our neighbor without social, political, or religious discrimination. What we are going to do, we have to understand this, we must align ourselves with technology to better capitalize on the times and resources that God has put in our hands."



Father Ignatius Dominic-Savio Cétoute (Priest, Saint Lucia) spoke next.

We don't know yet how and when this Covid-19 crisis is going to finish. The Spanish flu lasted two years. Because of this uncertainty and the financial difficulties, people are anxious and there has been an increase in emotional and psychological issues. We as church communities need to reach out to people and offer encouragement and hope as well as emotional and spiritual guidance. It's a good opportunity for faith organizations to work and cooperate together. It's a good opportunity to become more prayerful and more in tune in our relationship with God."

Dr. Carlos Heriberto Rivas (Pastor, International Revival Tabernacle, El Salvador):

God bless you all. This pandemic has surprised us all. It has broken all our schemes; it seems like a raging sea that threatens to drown us all. This virus is like an unexpected and furious storm with all of us at its center. The truth is that we realize how fragile and disoriented we are at this time. This pandemic has exposed everything: our vulnerabilities have exposed the false assurances with which we have built our projects, our agendas, our routines and our priorities. But in these times of fear in which we are living now, the best thing we can do is to strengthen our faith because, be sure, God is with us."

Major Darrell Wilkinson (Director, Salvation Army, Barbados):

The challenge we face is to improve and maintain the quality of life for our nations' people, particularly those who are most vulnerable. To help in this process, I believe there is a window of opportunity for faith-based organizations to first remove or dismantle the institutionalization of our faith. This refers to the organizations that formalize a particular approach to religious experience, or faith and worship involving adherence to dogma and focuses merely on the need and interest of the institution rather than the needs of the people.

Secondly, Covid-19 has given us the opportunity as faith-based organizations to become more personal, having that sense of connectedness to an ultimate concern. This provides the opportunity for faith-based organizations to recognize that partnerships are required if we are to adequately and meaningfully affect changes for the betterment of our people. No one organization has all the resources to fight this battle; neither do governments. If there is one thing Covid-19 has taught us is that it has no respect for nation, gender, profession, race or creed and that we all are interdependent, needing each other, nations and people alike. Thus, it is imperative that we partner with other organizations, institutions and governments to fight this battle. I want to believe that UPF may have been raised for such a time as this, as it seeks continually to partner with other faith-based organizations and governments for world peace.



Hon. Francisco Liranzo (Dominican Liberation Party, Dominican Republic) was the last panelist to speak.

Good evening, everyone. Thank you for this multireligious meeting. My focus is on the protection of the environment because it has three elements of God. I believe that Covid-19 has come as an encouragement, a breath, a pause for nature because we human beings live contaminating and abusing it. Without these three elements -- air, water and earth -- we would not be able to live, nor breathe, nor sow, nor produce the necessary food for life. Thanks to Covid-19, the negative effects of the misuse that we the human beings have been giving to nature have diminished just a little.

