



Vol. 1 Issue 1 Summer 2024

# CONNECTIONS

A Publication of the Universal Peace Federation



## Interfaith Efforts for Peace in the Middle East

Hope for Peace at a Time of War

How Can We Help?

History of UPF's Middle East Peace Initiative

There is a Solution to the Conflict

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Dr. Charles S. Yang  
International Chairman  
Universal Peace Federation

## MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER

I am pleased to launch this first edition of "Connections" magazine, through which ambassadors for peace, UPF representatives, associates and friends can share their experiences and voice their views on current issues. At the same time, we will highlight key UPF activities that are impacting communities around the world.

As the world is torn by two major conflicts – between Russia and Ukraine and between Israel and Gaza – we have chosen to focus on one of them in this inaugural issue. The Middle East is an area in which our founders, Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, have invested many physical and spiritual resources over many years, in efforts to prevent the kind of conflict we see today.

I was personally involved in this area for many years, and had an opportunity to see first-hand how deep the animosity runs between many Israeli and Palestinian people. On the other hand, I also saw the basis for hope as people from both sides came together to express their desire for peace.

In 2003, following the terror attacks in the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, Rev. Moon launched the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI). He asked that Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders go to Jerusalem, a holy city to all three faiths, and pray for peace and reconciliation. In response, more than 35,000 leaders flocked to Jerusalem from all over the world. I had the privilege of leading many of those delegations. This movement is detailed in this issue.

Also in this issue, Jewish, Muslim and Christian writers share their perspectives on the current situation, and the way forward. What they have in common is their determination to seek a peaceful solution to historical conflicts.

Interfaith harmony is a key area of UPF's work. We understand that the world's religions are inspired by our one Creator, and that each one strives to lead humanity toward goodness. Just as we can take different hiking trails up a mountain and meet at the peak, all faiths guide us toward the ultimate goal of a peaceful, ideal world.

Thank you for sharing that journey with us.

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UPF is an NGO in General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

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Cover photo: Muslim and Jewish leaders share their views during a UPF interfaith gathering in Israel.

# Hope for Peace at a Time of War

By Hod Ben Zvi



As the child of Holocaust survivors, I carry a legacy of resilience and hope. My parents, who survived unimaginable horrors, attempted to immigrate to Israel in 1947. However, they were caught and detained in Cyprus for a year before finally arriving in Israel in 1948. Little did they know that their arrival would coincide with the outbreak of the War of Independence, known as the Nakba by the Palestinians.

My own life unfolded against the backdrop of repeated conflicts. Born a year after the 1956 war, I witnessed the 1967 Six-Day War, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and the first and second Lebanon wars. As both a soldier and a civilian, I grappled with the pain of armed conflicts. As a serviceman, I can never forget the horrifying sights of demolished buildings against the backdrop of serene nature, or the cries of wounded young men.



Gedaliah and Rachel Ben Zvi, Hod's parents. Taken at their home in Israel, Ein Hod, Artist's Village.

As a parent to four children who are still being called to the front line, I feel deep anxiety, as my wife suffers sleepless nights. We share the heavy weight of responsibility to create a peaceful world for the sake of future generations.

Today, we find ourselves many months into the war that erupted on October 7, 2023. The toll on civilians has been devastating. Lives lost, bodies wounded, minds traumatized – these are the stark realities faced by those caught in the crossfire. Hundreds have been abducted and held hostage, and an acute humanitarian crisis has erupted. Countless families have been displaced; their lives turned upside down.

Amid the chaos, I mourn the loss of my nephew, a civilian victim of the Oct. 7 attacks. Yet I hold on to the belief that dialogue, understanding and compassion can pave the way toward a more just and peaceful future for all.



Hod Ben Zvi lives in Jerusalem with his family.



Muslim, Jewish and Christian representatives discuss harmony among the Abrahamic religions at a UPF conference in New York.

## History of conflict

Despite my personal experiences, I do not claim expertise on Middle East issues. Instead, I consider myself a witness to the ongoing struggle between Israelis and Palestinians. This conflict, deeply rooted in history, territorial claims, and geopolitical interests, defies easy solutions. It involves multiple actors, both directly engaged and indirectly affected.

In this dire context, the opposing forces stand firm. On one side is Israel, supported by the United States, United Kingdom and Germany. On the other side the "Axis of Resistance," an informal coalition led by Iran, includes Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis. Meanwhile Russia, China and North Korea play their respective roles in this high-stakes conflict. Arab nations such as Qatar, Egypt and Saudi Arabia attempt to mediate, while international bodies like the United Nations and the European Union seek resolution.

In recent years, the Middle East has witnessed large-scale wars, taking a staggering human toll. The Syrian Civil War alone has resulted in approximately 600,000 casualties, while the Yemeni Civil War has claimed around 400,000 lives. Millions remain displaced, their lives uprooted, and refugees are scattered across the region and beyond. Additionally, the Libyan Civil War, the Turkish-Kurdish Conflict, Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Egyptian Sinai Insurgency have further contributed to the region's instability.

## Global power struggles

An understanding of the current conflict between Israeli-Palestinian requires considering the global landscape. This conflict is tied to a broader world struggle between powerful groups with contrasting features, whose aspirations for world hegemony shape their nations' course.

Fundamentalist regimes prioritize religious authority, restrict civil liberties, and often suppress opposition.

Communists offer totalitarian governance that replaces private property and profit-based economies with public ownership, and advocates the denial of God.

There are also new contenders for taking the lead. Powerful corporations influence public perception through knowledge control and manipulation, and challenge the status quo and the global power dynamics.

Democratic systems stand out because they respect free will, allow for pluralism and freedom of expression, and promote dialogue, accountability and individual rights. However, they also give room for extreme individualism and suffer from moral decline.

History and present reality show that none of these systems can independently bring world peace and harmony. Employing power, position, money and information in the struggle for world dominance leads to an uncontrolled arms race and the outbreak of violent confrontations.

However, fundamental human problems cannot be solved by merely changing the system or the regime.

### Basis for hope

Amid this complexity, hope lies in our ability to overcome the demonization of the other. High emotions prompt us to take sides, which will only deepen the divide and may damage the people we side with in the long run. Reconciliation efforts must denounce hatred and revenge and provide a path toward lasting peace.

Despite the somber reality, let us also recognize the significant strides toward peace that have been made. Two crucial peace treaties stand out: the 1979 treaty between Israel and Egypt, and the 1994 treaty between Israel and Jordan. Additionally, the groundbreaking Abraham Accords, signed in 2020, brought together Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan. The possibility of Saudi Arabia joining this path toward peace remains hopeful.

At its best, the civilized world can educate humanity to transition from violent conflicts, mostly led by men, to non-violent conflicts,

where women often play a pivotal role. However, this assumes that conflicts are an enduring part of our existence.

UPF's founders, whom we affectionately call Father and Mother Moon, explain that the root cause of all conflicts lies in the alienation of human beings from God, our Heavenly Parent. This separation leads to ignorance about our true identity. Broken parent-child relations result in the fragmentation of minds, bodies, families, societies and nations. To restore our potential for peace and happiness, humanity must recognize that we are one global family under God.

We cannot sink into depression in response to world current affairs. Taking sides in conflicts based on social media trends will not do either. Since we cannot change anyone else, we must take the path of self-transformation, using our spiritual antenna to receive divine guidance. We should reject habits and concepts that separate us, showing compassion for the suffering and pain inflicted on so many, but avoiding the pitfall of dividing the world into victims and victimizers. Let us strive to become model parents, exemplary teachers, responsible leaders, and pioneers on the road to world peace.

*- Hod Ben Zvi is chairman of UPF-Israel.*



*Interfaith ceremony during a Peace Rally in Independence Park, Jerusalem*



## Soccer for Peace: The Goal is Friendship

Soccer for Peace is a project that has brought Jewish and Arab children together to play soccer in Italy and the small republic of San Marino. It began in 2015 and continued every year through 2019, when pandemic restrictions prevented travel.

The project was inspired by UPF-San Marino President Giorgio Gasperoni, who organized its first program in Turin, Italy. The following year, the San Marino Football Federation (FSGC) agreed to co-sponsor the event, together with the San Marino and Israel chapters of UPF, which continued for four years.

On separate occasions, the delegation was accompanied by prominent Israeli Arabs

Mr. Zouheir Bahloul, a sports broadcaster, journalist and parliamentarian, and Mr. Esawi Frej, former minister of regional cooperation in the Israeli government.

The program fosters friendship among Arab, Jewish and Sammarinese young people, through soccer matches and training together. In Israel, opportunities are rare for children from different backgrounds to meet and build friendships. We found that soccer brings the hearts together very fast. Participants in this program, who come from different traditions and even speak different languages (Hebrew and Arabic) return home as friends who have shared an uplifting life experience.

*- Hod Ben Zvi*

*Israeli and Palestinian children play together as one team, facing Italian and San Marino teams, in Turin, Italy in 2015 (boys' team, above) and in San Marino in 2019 (girls' team).*



# There is a Solution to the Conflict

By Dr. Eliezer Glaubach



The struggle for the Middle East's character and identity unfolds within Israel's borders. The establishment of the State of Israel was marked by persistent tensions among various Arab factions. These tensions exist both within the Arab community inside Israel and in Arab territories beyond its borders, including the Gaza Strip and neighboring Arab countries.

Over the years, this struggle has played out on two distinct levels. First, it is often depicted as a clash of "blocs," each with its own historical background and cultural ties. Second, internal conflicts persist among states and rulers, primarily stemming from fundamental issues related to religion and the diverse denominations within various faiths. These circumstances continually give rise to conflicts, which tragically manifest in clashes and bloodshed.

A recent example occurred on October 7, 2023, when Hamas militants clashed with residents of Israeli communities along the border between Israel and Gaza. This incident underscores the ongoing Jewish-Arab conflict, which has spanned 120 years. The struggle for hegemony over Mandatory Palestine - the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea - remains deeply entrenched. In November 1947, the United Nations Security Council proposed a division of the land between the two parties. While the Israeli leadership accepted this proposal, the Arab leadership rejected it, refusing to recognize the establishment of a Jewish state.

## Cooperation: The Middle East Confederation

In 2003, I proposed a formula fostering peace in the Middle East through regional cooperation. The core of this proposal lies in the establishment of a confederation that unites the already existing State of Israel with additional Arab territories. These territories include the Gaza Strip, Judea, Samaria, and a southern strip of Lebanon between the Green Line border and the Litani River.

The key principles of this confederation are as follows:

### 1 Autonomy and National Identity

The confederation allows each distinct group of people to maintain its own state or autonomy, ensuring the realization of their national identities.

### 2 Preserving Settlements

Settlements remain intact, enabling communities to thrive while fostering cooperation.

### 3 Freedom of Movement

The confederation facilitates unrestricted movement between the parties, promoting interaction and understanding.

### 4 Strategic and Economic Arrangements

Within the framework of the Confederate government, strategic and economic agreements are established.

The proposed border between the two political units - the State of Israel and the Arab autonomous territories - will be based on the 1967 lines. Jerusalem will continue serving as a neutral central city, devoid of physical borders. In the area of the Temple Mount, the mosque, and the entire Old City, joint local administration mechanisms will be necessary.

Cultural preservation is a priority. In the State of Israel, Jewish identity and culture will be maintained, while Palestinian culture will be addressed within the framework of the confederation arrangement.

The principle of institution shall be agreed upon by the parties to preserve the democratic and liberal character of the confederacy. To include the Gaza Strip in the proposed confederation, it would be appropriate to establish a framework of international governance to ensure a fair existence for its residents.

The establishment of the proposed confederation would require an international agreement between the parties, with the declared agreement of both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. Detailed agreements would be necessary for the confederation to function. Legislative and governmental procedures will be essential for nesting the confederacy.

While controversial issues such as security powers, joint civilian management (particularly economic aspects) in Jerusalem, and maintenance of shared infrastructure require in-depth discussions, the model described above outlines the feasibility of reaching an agreement on a confederation.

Goodwill cooperation, and overcoming hostility, mistrust, and differing viewpoints are prerequisites for implementing this plan. Ultimately, the Middle East Confederation's realization rests on dismantling barriers while respecting all involved parties' physical and cultural needs.

- Dr. Eliezer Glaubach is chairman of the Foerder Institute of Liberal Studies.

#### Resources:

*Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Viability of One-State Models* - Pnina Shavit Baruch  
*The Holy Land Confederation as a Facilitator for the Two-State Solution* (2022)  
*A new EU policy to support disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants*

*The Temple Mount has stood as a holy site in Jerusalem for three thousand years. It is venerated in Judaism, Islam and Christianity.*



# History of UPF's Middle East Peace Initiative

By Larry Moffitt



The Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) began in 2003 with a conference in Washington, D.C. from February 27 to March 2. It was convened by the Interreligious and International Federation for Peace, the predecessor of Universal Peace Federation. Dr. Thomas Walsh and Mr. Taj Hamad led this conference of distinguished scholars and religious leaders, which included Jewish, Muslim and Christian faith leaders from the United States, Israel and elsewhere in the Middle East. This created an excellent foundation for the long-term work of the Middle East Peace Initiative.

Two months later, the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) founder, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, asked the US clergy of ACLC to "end the era of the cross" and go to Jerusalem to help bring reconciliation between Jewish and Christian leaders.

Tensions were very high in Jerusalem, with the backdrop of the terror attacks of 9/11 a little over a year before, and the Second Intifada, which began in 2000, still ongoing. Suicide bombings and direct fighting between the Palestinian and Israeli armies had turned Jerusalem into a ghost town. Yet the Jewish members of the group planned to visit the Temple Mount, and the Muslims the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in which the Golden Dome of the Rock, third most holy place of Islam, is located.

Before their first trip to Israel, Rev. Moon spoke to a group of leaders in the Unification movement, including Dr. Charles Yang, Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, Dr. Michael Jenkins and Archbishop George A. Stallings Jr., telling them it was time for Christians to go to Jerusalem and embrace the Jewish leaders. When that happened, he said, Muslim leaders would reconcile with Christians and Jews.

*Participants in an interfaith pilgrimage to Jerusalem visit the Dome of the Rock at Al-Aqsa Mosque on Temple Mount, on Dec. 22, 2003.*



Dr. Jenkins said: "Father Moon told us that one of the things that causes the greatest tension and fear in Jewish people is the history of persecution, which finally led to the Holocaust... Constantine at the Malvan Bridge saw a vision of the cross in the sky and heard a voice that said, 'By this sign you will conquer.' He had crosses painted on every shield. The Crusades likewise were led by popes and kings to retake Jerusalem, fighting against Jews and Muslims to 'save Jerusalem.'"

To Christians, the cross is a holy symbol of the victory of Jesus' love and forgiveness, but to the Jewish people it has been a symbol of great destruction. One hundred and twenty ACLC clergy affirmed the "end of the era of the cross," many even removing the crosses from their churches before going to Jerusalem to reconcile with their older brothers, the Jews, and their younger brothers, the Muslims.

Dr. Jenkins said: "When we first called the organizers in Israel, we told them we want to bring 120 Christians to Israel to meet with rabbis. Hod Ben Zvi, Israeli representative for IIFWP, said, 'This will be very difficult.' But we told him these Christians were willing to take down the cross because they understand it is a symbol of division, blame and accusation. This was a surprise. It got their interest."

Then the rabbis agreed to meet. The organizers worked far into the night drafting the Jerusalem Declaration for the clergy to sign. The declaration proclaimed that Islam, Christianity and Judaism are one Abrahamic family. But to remove the barriers of prejudice, discrimination and judgment and make love the center of faith is not simple. Could they get unanimity for the declaration? Would everyone sign it? Would anyone? Or would it be picked apart and argued over?

*Dr. Charles Yang and ACLC ministers march in Jerusalem on their way to bury the cross as a part of their pilgrimage to Israel, May 16, 2003.*





*Sincere prayer by followers of all faiths is a consistent feature of all MEPI events.*

Dr. Jenkins recalls the exact moment when, to his understanding, the Middle East Peace Initiative began. Archbishop Stallings took the lead on behalf of Christianity and history, saying first, "I want to repent for not having loved and protected our Jewish family, and we repent that we have not embraced our Muslim family." The rabbi was deeply moved, and then Archbishop Stallings asked him to sign the Jerusalem declaration. The rabbi said, "I'll sign it on one condition: if the Muslim sheikh from Nazareth comes forward and signs with us." Sheikh Manasra from Nazareth came up and joined Archbishop Stallings and the rabbi onstage.

The Jerusalem Declaration called on all to respect and love the founders of the Abrahamic faiths. It also said that Jesus should be welcomed to his home in Jerusalem. All were asked to strengthen their faith and join together to lead the world toward peace. This became the foundation for MEPI, and the foundation for all faiths to join together in interfaith cooperation. It opened a path for the civic leaders to advance peace.

Dr. Charles Yang, who chairs UPF worldwide, explained, "The core values of UPF center on the faith that we are all from one God, that Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism and all the major faith traditions come from one God. That's not easy for many Christians. We run seminars to help Christians understand that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was sent by God. That isn't an easy step for Christians. It takes time, it takes understanding. It takes a spiritual experience to understand that God is bigger than any one religion, even Christianity."

When Rev. Moon spoke at the United Nations in 2000, he said: "World peace can be fully accomplished only when the wisdom and the efforts of the world's religious leaders, who represent the internal concerns of the mind and the conscience, work cooperatively and respectfully with national leaders, who have much practical wisdom and worldly experience about the external reality, or body. In this light, it is time for us to give serious consideration, even to the prospect of restructuring the United Nations. For example, perhaps it is possible to envision the United Nations as a bicameral institution, where religious leaders and people of faith, academicians, business people, elected officials who have faith as their center, faith leaders, form the upper house."

Dr. Yang said, "It's taking the peacebuilding vision of MEPI and applying it globally. It's not just about reviving the authority of God in the Middle East. It's about God's sovereignty over the world."

On May 18, 2003, the faith leaders signed the Jerusalem Declaration and a foundation for interfaith cooperation was established. Rev. Moon welcomed the clergy back from Israel and signed the Jerusalem Declaration. From that time on, he initiated and encouraged continuous efforts to unite religious leaders and believers from every faith, and to inspire them to work together for the higher cause of world peace and unity.

*- Larry Moffitt is secretary general of UPF-North America.*

**“World peace can be fully accomplished only when the wisdom and the efforts of the world’s religious leaders, who represent the internal concerns of the mind and the conscience, work cooperatively and respectfully with national leaders, who have much practical wisdom and worldly experience about the external reality, or body.”**

*- Rev. Sun Myung Moon*



*Rev. Sun Myung Moon adds his signature to the document signed by faith leaders who participated in the trip to Jerusalem.*

# How Can We Help?

By David Fraser-Harris



The year 2023 saw multiple crises in the Middle East, and they haven't gone away. Here we trace some of the efforts to respond to these crises on the part of UPF, our heroic ambassadors for peace and our generous partners. UPF is not a relief organization; at least, that is not its primary focus. But events over the past two years led us to take the actions described here.

## Earthquake in southeast Turkey

In early 2023, UPF-Europe and Middle East was preparing for a March conference in Istanbul. We were planning to bring a high-level delegation from Albania to meet with key Turkish leaders. This was part of the process of establishing a UPF Peace Council in Turkey. Then, on the morning of February 6, a devastating earthquake hit southeastern Turkey and northern Syria. It quickly became evident that this was not the time for the type of conference we had been planning. Our first thought was to send condolences to key representatives. Then we needed to see how we could help.

The president of UPF-Turkey, Binod Paudel, assembled a team of volunteers and traveled

to Antakya in Hatay province, the area most affected by the quake. They spent a week there, distributing emergency relief items – blankets, tents, clothes, food, water and first aid – reaching 20,000 people in all. After meeting with local authorities to assess mid-term needs, they decided to support the rebuilding of local elementary schools so that young children could continue their studies.

UPF-Turkey then put out an appeal for donations. Substantial help came from UPF's international partners, including the International Relief and Friendship Foundation (IRFF) chapters in Sweden and Germany, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) in Europe and the Middle East, and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) in Korea.

In the meantime, Mr. Paudel had to obtain the approval of the local education authority, a process that took six months. The generous donations received from partners made it possible to provide two 'container' classrooms and seven family homes, each equipped with toilet, shower room and washing machine.

These were completed and handed over to the local authority in time for the start of the new school year in September. UPF's hope was to set up a good model project; happily, the Antakya education director recognized it as the best school project in the city.

Students and teachers in front of their new 'container' classroom in Antakya, Hatay province, Turkey.



## Syria: How to bring help to a divided country?

When it comes to a humanitarian disaster, no one is an enemy, but translating that sentiment into practical help in a war-torn country is another matter. The first to step forward to help Syrian victims was UPF-Lebanon. Secretary General Hermine Schellen secured aid from IRFF Germany and partnered with local ambassador for peace, Sheikh Sohaib Al Habli, a Muslim leader from Saida in southern Lebanon. Sheikh Al Habli wasted no time in delivering a vanload of blankets to Lattakia in Western Syria.



Sheikh Sohaib Al Habli checks the loading of supplies in Beirut, for delivery to Syria.

Reaching opposition-held northern Syria was another matter, but here again it was an ambassador for peace who connected us to a partner who could – literally – deliver the goods. Dr. Mohammad Habash introduced us to the Association Sans Menottes (ASM-SY). Getting help there was vital: as Dr. Habash pointed out, initial figures for earthquake fatalities were 321 in regime-held northern Syria compared to 7000 in the opposition-held part. Pala ASM was already active in northern Syria, running programs to rehabilitate people released from regime jails (and opposition ones too). Known and established locally, they quickly produced a report on the effect of the earthquake and the needs of families, especially those in remote villages not reached by larger organizations.

Since ASM's international office is in France, UPF-France met with them to assess possibilities. Meanwhile, WFP in Birmingham UK held a Women's Day event in early March, at which they gathered several hundred pounds in donations. They especially wanted to find a way to help northern Syria. Their donation was sent to ASM's representatives in southern Turkey, who were able to purchase food baskets in Afrin for families in the countryside around Afrin, Jindires and Idlib.

But the most complex effort was getting aid to Aleppo, the city in government-held Syria that was most affected by the February earthquake. Pivotal to this effort were two people: UPF-Lebanon's Hermine Schellen and Syrian ambassador for peace, Rehab Al Bitar. In this case the aid came from IRFF donors in Italy and eventually reached UPF-Lebanon in May, with the help of IRFF Germany. UPF-Lebanon then proceeded, working from a list provided by Syrian charity Nabad, to source medical supplies and other emergency items.

But then a further barrier arose. A labyrinth of Syrian government requirements followed: preapproval of the list of items, approval and documentation from the local administration, approval from the Ministry of the Interior, and then from the Ministry of Finance. All of this was navigated by UPF's dedicated Syrian ambassador for peace, Rehab Al Bitar.

Customs inspection at the Syrian border.





Finally, everything was picked up in Lebanon on October 23 and taken to the Syrian border, where further bureaucracy delayed the items for another day. From there to Aleppo took seven hours, with 20 police checks. The aid was finally delivered on October 27 to the Senior Home for the Care of the Elderly in the Al Mashatayah neighborhood. Aid packages were given to the most needy. Some were families who had lost a father to the earthquake. Others were elderly people who had been pulled out from under the rubble, each facing serious difficulty: some had been paralyzed, some had lost their memory. These people without relatives are cared for by the dedicated staff of the Senior Home.

### North Africa Disasters: Morocco

On September 8, 2023, an earthquake struck Morocco's Al Haouz province, causing widespread destruction and killing 2960 people. UPF's response to this was led by ambassador for peace Dr. Hajiba Ayoubi, who brought together an effective joint effort, partnering with WFP and Morocco's Anwar Association. [See the report on page 18.]

### Floods in Libya

On September 10, unprecedented flooding in Libya was caused by Storm Daniel and the collapse of two dams near the city of Derna.



Damage from the flood in Libya. (Photo by Benghazi charity LIFE.)

As with Syria, we were faced with the challenge of bringing help into a divided country. One ambassador for peace based in Western Libya told us, "There is a problem with the logistics of delivering aid, even from within Libya to the affected areas." Thanks to the help of an active Russian ambassador for peace, we contacted a charity based in Benghazi, but we still faced many obstacles getting supplies to them.

Heeding advice from all sides (Libyan and international), we decided, via UPF-United Kingdom, to seek a partnership with the British Red Cross, whose direct connection with the Libyan Red Crescent meant that they were already on the ground. This enabled us to channel substantial donations gathered by our partners, notably FFWPU, to the areas of greatest need.

Here is an excerpt from the Red Cross's letter of thanks to UPF-UK: "Thanks to your kindness, 125,000 people have been provided with essential items like toiletries, 5,000 people have reunited with their families and 14 shelters have been set up. The Libyan Red Crescent teams were delivering humanitarian aid from the first hour of the disaster, providing first aid, supporting with rescues, and evacuating families. They continue to support those who have lost everything, three months on."



Syrian recipients of aid from UPF and partners.

### War again? The tragedy of Israel and Palestine

The shock of October 7, the horror of the ongoing destruction and loss of life, and the fear of greater escalation leave us without words. Yet we can never stop striving for ways to end the conflict and alleviate the suffering. UPF's efforts here have been channeled toward providing medical aid to hospitals in Palestine. This is partly because we were already working in this area long before October 7.

In September 2021 UPF hosted a webinar entitled "A Helping Hand," which brought together the founder of Project C.U.R.E., Dr. James Jackson, and Dr. Asher Salmon, head of the International Relations Department at the Israeli Ministry of Health. Discussions focused on the possibilities of improving the health system in Palestine and supplying medical equipment. Following a January 2023 meeting with the senior Shariah Judge of Palestine, who is also personal advisor to the president, UPF met in March with the CEO of Project C.U.R.E., Dr. Douglas Jackson, and the health minister of the State of Palestine, together with the advisor to the president. This laid the groundwork for the delivery of donated medical equipment to Palestinian hospitals.

In light of the ongoing conflict, our focus is now on the supply of emergency medical equipment and supplies. UPF is partnering with Project C.U.R.E. to raise funds for the delivery of a 40-foot container. As explained on our live crowdfunder page:

"In response to calls from its ambassadors for peace around the world, the Universal Peace Federation of Europe and the Middle East (UPF-EUME) has arranged to partner with Project C.U.R.E. to assist with the delivery of medical supplies and equipment to hospitals in Palestine. Project C.U.R.E. has successfully delivered disaster aid pallets to Gaza and has more on the way.



Aid package safely delivered in opposition-held Syria.

"In addition to further disaster relief there is a vital need for supplies to rebuild hospital capacity. UPF is seeking your help to send a 40-foot container of medical supplies by ocean freight.

"Project C.U.R.E. has worked to change the lives of children, women and men in both Israel and Palestine for nearly three decades. We deeply grieve the loss of life, the wounding of innocents and the destruction of civil society. UPF ambassadors for peace see themselves as one human family under God. With the heart of a parent, they have been calling for ways to help end the suffering in both Israel and Palestine. This specific appeal is focused exclusively on providing aid to Palestinian hospitals."

So, just in case you were asking, "How can I help?" this should give you an answer.

— David Fraser Harris is secretary general of UPF-Middle East and North Africa. From 1997 to 2012 he was based in Damascus, Syria, supporting UPF programs in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and other nations. He now lives with his family near Edinburgh, UK, and continues to travel and support the region.

# Compassion and Collaboration Light the Way in Troubled Times

By Dr. Hajiba Ayoubi



As an ambassador for peace of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), I would like to share my testimony about working in solidarity with the Anwar Association, to support the victims of the violent earthquake that struck El Haouz in the Marrakech region of Morocco, on September 8, 2023. I will also share my feelings about the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

## Aid Mission to Earthquake Victims

Our mission, carried out on October 15, 2023, brought much-needed relief to the residents of the village of Amarghot, located in the Ait Tamlil Commune of Demnate Province. My profound gratitude goes to our steadfast partners, UPF and WFWP, whose unwavering trust and financial support made this mission possible.

Our convoy arrived in Ait Tamlil at 11:00 am, facing the formidable challenge of navigating the poor road conditions and geographical isolation that significantly contribute to the vulnerability of the local population. This seclusion exacerbates the difficulties of delivering relief aid, highlighting the urgent necessity of our intervention.



Clean bedding, as well as food, was essential for families whose homes and belongings had been damaged or destroyed.

Upon arrival, the Anwar team immediately engaged with the women of the village, offering support and listening to their stories. The residents of Amarghot had been severely impacted by the earthquake that struck their village five weeks earlier, leading to a dramatic deterioration in their living conditions. The psychological impact, particularly among children who were dealing with trauma from the loss of loved ones, damaged homes, and the pervasive fear instilled by the disaster, was deeply troubling.

The situation was particularly dire for the women in these isolated communities. Already burdened by severe socio-economic challenges – including high vulnerability and poverty rates, the absence of their husbands who leave in search of work in cities, and numerous health issues, particularly gynecological and joint-related – the earthquake only intensified their plight. This catastrophic event left them facing a future fraught with profound uncertainty.

Members of our convoy organized various activities to uplift the spirits of the children, including games and interactive sessions. We also distributed essential donations to the affected families, providing them with immediate relief and a semblance of normalcy amid the chaos.

This humanitarian mission underscores the critical importance of solidarity and swift action in the face of natural disasters.

I was profoundly moved by the resilience and strength of the Amarghot community. As a senior advisor in Morocco and a dedicated peace ambassador, I am very proud of these collaborative efforts between UPF, WFWP and the Anwar Association, which exemplify the power of unity and compassion in overcoming adversity. Together, we continue to strive towards a more just and supportive world, where every individual can look forward to a future with hope and dignity.

## Observations on the War

As a Muslim Arabic woman living in a neighboring country, I witness the profound suffering endured by the Palestinian people with deep sorrow and empathy. The ongoing conflict has led to severe oppression, daily violence, and the tragic loss of innocent lives. The reality is one of constant fear and hardship, where families are torn apart, homes are destroyed, and basic human rights are routinely violated. Despite these harrowing conditions, the resilience and steadfastness of the Palestinian people are a testament to their enduring spirit.

The path to peace, while fraught with immense challenges, is not beyond reach. It requires an unwavering commitment to justice, the protection of human rights, a genuine dialogue between all parties involved, and more wisdom from the biggest countries in our world. The international community, including UPF and WFWP, must play a pivotal role in facilitating this dialogue (as they have done and continue to do).

From my perspective, true peace can only be achieved through a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the conflict, ensures equitable solutions, and fosters a climate of respect and understanding of the Palestinian cause. The journey to peace is long and arduous in this conflicting world full of wars and weapons, but with collective effort and a shared vision for a just future, it is a goal that we must relentlessly pursue.

– Dr. Hajiba Ayoubi is a medical doctor, working in health management with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Kingdom of Morocco. She is a peace ambassador for both UPF and WFWP. She is also the Morocco Country Chair for World Peace under the auspices of the ALL Ladies League.

A local clown cheers up the children while their families collect aid packages.



# Compassion and Collaboration Light the Way in Troubled Times

By Dr. Hajiba Ayoubi



As an ambassador for peace of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP), I would like to share my testimony about working in solidarity with the Anwar Association, to support the victims of the violent earthquake that struck El Haouz in the Marrakech region of Morocco, on September 8, 2023. I will also share my feelings about the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

## Aid Mission to Earthquake Victims

Our mission, carried out on October 15, 2023, brought much-needed relief to the residents of the village of Amarghot, located in the Ait Tamlil Commune of Demnate Province. My profound gratitude goes to our steadfast partners, UPF and WFWP, whose unwavering trust and financial support made this mission possible.

Our convoy arrived in Ait Tamlil at 11:00 am, facing the formidable challenge of navigating the poor road conditions and geographical isolation that significantly contribute to the vulnerability of the local population. This seclusion exacerbates the difficulties of delivering relief aid, highlighting the urgent necessity of our intervention.



Clean bedding, as well as food, was essential for families whose homes and belongings had been damaged or destroyed.

Upon arrival, the Anwar team immediately engaged with the women of the village, offering support and listening to their stories. The residents of Amarghot had been severely impacted by the earthquake that struck their village five weeks earlier, leading to a dramatic deterioration in their living conditions. The psychological impact, particularly among children who were dealing with trauma from the loss of loved ones, damaged homes, and the pervasive fear instilled by the disaster, was deeply troubling.

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A local clown cheers up the children while their families collect aid packages.



# Universally Shared Values: No Peace without Religious Harmony

By Dr. Franco Famularo



**"There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions."**

*— Hans Küng (1928-2021) Swiss Catholic priest and theologian*

Current global realities point to a desperate need for peace. At the root of each civilization, we find religious or philosophical thought from which stem values and culture that inform each family, tribe and nation. Hans Kung's words are as relevant today as they were when he first made his prescient statement.

The Middle East Peace Initiative was inspired in 2003 by the founders of Universal Peace Federation, Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, upon the foundation of decades of interreligious dialogue and efforts to encourage peaceful relations among representatives of the world's religions. Peace among religions has been central to the founders' efforts since the 1954 birth of the Unification community.

Subsequent interreligious efforts include a Supra-denominational Association established in Korea in 1967 and the founding of the interfaith Unification Theological Seminary in New York in 1975, a center of interreligious ferment that spawned the New ERA Ecumenical Conferences during the late 1970s, the Youth Seminar on World Religions of the early 1980s, the Assembly of the World's Religions in 1985, the publishing of World Scriptures – A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts, and the founding of the Interreligious Federation

for World Peace in 1991. Universal Peace Federation, founded in 2005, is the fruit of the many decades of perseverance by the founders and dedicated activists, including ambassadors for peace.

Central to this effort are the following five principles that elucidate the common values that are universally shared by all world religions, including religions of the Book:

1. We are one human family created by God.
2. The highest qualities of the human being are spiritual and moral in nature.
3. The family is the "school of love and peace."
4. Living for the sake of others is the way to reconcile the divided human family.
5. Peace comes through cooperation beyond the boundaries of ethnicity, religion and nationality.



**“ UPF considers the pursuit of universally shared values to be of greater significance than the harmonization of doctrine in interfaith dialogue. ”**

UPF considers the pursuit of universally shared values to be of greater significance than the harmonization of doctrine in interfaith dialogue.

The Bible and the Koran, for instance, share a great deal in terms of common values that relate to daily life, such as family and social relations.

The Middle East Peace Initiative, an example of UPF praxis, has since its inaugural conference in February 2003, promoted dialogue, people-to-people diplomacy, fact-finding trips, interfaith pilgrimages and conferences. It has brought, and is still actively bringing, religious leaders, parliamentarians, academicians, women leaders, youth and civil society representatives together in Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Forums explore Track II approaches.

A more recent expression of how an emphasis

on universally shared values has contributed to the peace efforts between Jews, Christians and Muslims is to be found in the webinars that seek to bring together representatives of Arab Islamic countries of the Middle East, such as Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, with representatives of Israel. Soon after the Abraham Accords were formalized, UPF began a series of virtual gatherings that included religious, political, academic and business leaders to engage in dialogue about the significance of the peace initiative.

Participants included former prime ministers, parliamentarians, diplomats, scholars, and business leaders from Bahrain, Canada, Czech Republic, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, the United States and more.

Hans Kung's words still ring true today!

*- Dr. Franco Famularo is president of UPF-Canada*

*Interfaith religious leaders each pour a vessel of water into a common basin, representing the universal truth of which their teachings are a part. This ceremony is often a feature of UPF interfaith programs.*



# Whatever Happened to Right and Wrong?

By Dr. Frank Kaufmann



There is a known aphorism that says, "Truth is the first casualty of war." I would like to offer a similar aphorism of my own, "Right and wrong are sacrificed on the altar of the desire for peace." My "abandoning right and wrong" aphorism is related to some degree to the frequently heard chant "no justice, no peace," justice being the link to questions of right and wrong.

Unfortunately, the "no justice, no peace" chant is owned by victims and the aggrieved. It is chanted as a threat. Love of justice is a claim forbidden to defenders of establishment ideals. For example, what if one were to champion justice in this way: "We would be delighted to welcome this family to live among us, but unfortunately they are here in our community illegally"?

Would a person saying this be admired as a champion of justice, or immediately be branded a bigot, a racist, and a nationalist? Why should someone defending the law not be admired as a champion of justice? Justice by definition is bound intrinsically to law. To demand that a community welcome lawbreakers, traditionally known as criminals, and embrace them as a sign of being for "peace" is an example of right and wrong being sacrificed on the altar of desiring peace.

**“If anyone truly wants to press for peace... they must advocate for, and model the courage to take up, the question of right and wrong.”**

## All people desire peace

The desire for peace is perfectly universal, which makes claiming to be for peace a perfect artifice to bludgeon any poor soul who even timidly wants to assert the importance of right and wrong. The absence of peace in any situation, from the smallest ("Mommy, Billy won't give my toy back.") to the largest ( Hamas-Israel, Russia-Ukraine) is never because one person is pro-peace and the other is not (except of course war profiteers), but rather conflict is always over disagreement about who's right and who's wrong.

If anyone truly wants to press for peace, including as pertains to the current Hamas-Israel conflict, they must advocate for, and model the courage to take up, the question of right and wrong. True peace seekers should be ready to assess elements of a conflict courageously in light of moral judgment, and must be able to do so with an open mind.

Israel's current military activity is in response to an attack on its homeland, and in pursuit of rescuing Israelis being held hostage. Even rabid ideologues, of any stripe, are likely to concur that people have a right to defend themselves and their loved ones. Most will agree that humans have a right to try to rescue loved ones from death and brutality.

If nearly everyone affirms these two human rights – to defend oneself and rescue loved ones from harm – we have to look elsewhere to understand the mind-boggling intensity of hatred leveled at Israel and its sympathizers on the international scene, from the streets of major cities to the Hague. (It should be noted that spray painting and burning down US and European cities and sacred treasures is unlikely to result in peace and positive welfare for people living in the Holy Land.)

## Attacking Israel is nothing new

Not wanting Israel to exist has existed at least since May 14, 1948. People doing things like what Hamas did on October 7 is nothing new – save perhaps for the sub-human barbarity that characterized parts of the October 7 attack. Since 1948 there have been at least 14 attacks on Israel from foreign countries, and at least 11 major coordinated terrorist attacks carried out on Israelis, including some for sustained periods of time. I am not saying Israel doesn't deserve to be attacked, I am just pointing out that in its very short modern existence, Israel has been attacked, often for sustained periods, at least 25 times.

## October 7 is unique among attacks on Israel

Despite the October 7 attack on Israel looking like dozens of similar attacks Israel has sustained in its short modern existence, I posit that this conflict is unique and unprecedented. This conflict in Israel is the first of its kind for several reasons.

It is not because present day Israel is much different than it has always been. Nor is its present assailant – Hamas, and now Iran – much different from the dozens of other groups and nations that attack Israel on a regular basis. The difference is neither Israel nor Hamas, but rather the surrounding world in which this current conflict transpires. The world has changed, and from this fact the conflict is unprecedented.

The main change, in my opinion, is that classical, higher education worldwide has been undermined over the course of approximately 30 years by a totalistic, systematic, carefully crafted design to replace learning, critical thinking, and the pursuit of knowledge and information with full-scale indoctrination in "decolonial" ideology.

The Jews' actions in trying to protect themselves and recover their loved ones are now seen entirely as the deeds of colonizers, oppressors, white-adjacent, America-adjacent, perpetrators of racism, imperialism and colonialism.

Jews never saw this coming. This is why I call this current Middle East conflict the first of its kind.

Pursuing peace and the end of conflict must proceed with a clear understanding of reality on the ground. It is a mistake to think of this conflict as anything like all the others. Israel now seeks to defend itself and rescue its loved ones in a world they have never known. As such, conversations about peace and serious recommendations must start with a clear grasp of the geopolitical reality in which this conflict transpires.

– Dr. Frank Kaufmann is founder and president of *The Settlement Project*, which promotes peace, freedom, and God-given rights. He is also founder of the *International Peace Organization*, *Twelve Gates Foundation*, and chief editor of the Wikipedia alternative *New World Encyclopedia*.



Israel is a small state, a little over 22,000 square kilometers, about the size of the US state of New Jersey. It is surrounded on all sides by much larger Muslim nations. It holds 9.3 million people. The territory of Gaza is tiny, only about 365 square kilometers, about twice the size of Washington, DC, with 2.1 million people. It shares a border with Israel in the north and east, and with Egypt in the south. To the west is the Mediterranean Sea. Under these circumstances, residents of both places live in a constant state of insecurity.

## An Islamic Perspective on Peace

By Dr. Tageldin I. Hamad



The Muslim perspective on peace in the Middle East is diverse, and is influenced by various religious, cultural, historical, and political factors. The Quran and Hadith (the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) advocate for peaceful coexistence, resolving conflicts through dialogue, and upholding justice. Justice includes addressing grievances, ensuring fair treatment for all parties, and upholding human rights.

Moreover, Islam encourages compassion and mercy (Rahmah), and emphasizes that leaders and individuals be urged to act with kindness and understanding, fostering a climate where dialogue and reconciliation are possible.

Muslims interpret religious texts in different ways, leading to varied perspectives on achieving peace. Some advocate for non-violent approaches and diplomacy, while others might support resistance against what they perceive as oppression or injustice.

“Islam encourages compassion and mercy... kindness and understanding.”

Spreading knowledge about Islamic principles of peace and coexistence can help counteract extremism and foster a culture of peace. The concept of reconciliation (Sulh) is central in Islam. This involves resolving conflicts through dialogue and negotiation, seeking common ground, and making compromises to achieve lasting peace. Decisions should be guided by the principle of public welfare, aiming to benefit

the entire community and avoid harm. Islam encourages forgiveness (Afw) as a means to move beyond past wrongs and build a future based on mutual respect and cooperation.

The history of colonialism, the creation of Israel, wars, and foreign interventions have deeply impacted the region. Many Muslims see these historical and ongoing issues as central to understanding and resolving conflicts.

A significant focus is on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with many Muslims advocating for Palestinian rights and an end to occupation. The concept of justice and a fair resolution is paramount in this context. Conflicts within the Muslim world, such as those in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, also shape perspectives.

Efforts towards peace often call for addressing sectarian divides, foreign interference, and the root causes of these conflicts. Many Muslims believe that a fair and unbiased role by the international community, particularly by major powers, is essential for achieving lasting peace.

Overall, while there is a strong desire for peace rooted in Islamic principles, achieving it is complex, and requires a multifaceted approach that addresses political, social, and economic injustices.

Implementing these principles requires the collaboration of political leaders, religious scholars, and the broader community. It also involves creating inclusive political processes, supporting grassroots peace initiatives, and promoting policies that address the root causes of conflict. All of this is possible, however challenging it may be to achieve consensus within and beyond the Muslim community.

- Dr. Tageldin I. Hamad is chairman of the World Association of Nongovernmental Organizations (WANGO), and international coordinator of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD)

## Africa Spiritual Day Ignites a Continent

By Dr. Paterne Zinsou

UPF-Africa has been working for decades in almost every country in Africa. In 2018 and 2019 Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon visited several African countries, and set in motion a new level of connectivity between our various projects and activities.

Dr. Moon spoke at major events in Senegal, South Africa, Sao Tome and Principe, Niger, and Zimbabwe, inspiring tens of thousands of people. She visited both Muslim-majority nations and Christian-majority nations, and observed that whatever their religious faith, African people had a strong spiritual awareness and commitment. She encouraged UPF-Africa to work through our affiliate association, the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), to inspire religious leaders to play a greater role in the continent's development.

From August 11-15, 2022, 60 spiritual and religious leaders from Africa attended the IAPD Assembly in Seoul, South Korea. At the conclusion of the assembly, on August 12, they all signed a resolution to work with the African Union to promote African unity by focusing on our shared spirituality.

Then, on January 7-8, 2023, a convocation of religious leaders was held in Maputo, Mozambique. At that meeting, based on a proposal by Dr. Moon, a resolution was passed to hold an Africa Spiritual Day Celebration



Interfaith prayer at Africa Spiritual Day celebration on May 22, 2024.



Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon addresses the African Continental Summit in Niger, at the Palais Des Congrès in Niamey, Niger on Nov. 28, 2019.

once a month, as a universal worship service that people of all faiths could participate in. We envisioned this as a celebration of the rich spiritual and cultural heritage of Africa, fostering unity, peace, and solidarity among African people. It would be an opportunity for leaders, dignitaries, scholars and spiritual figures to come together to reflect on the spiritual values that bind them, and promote dialogue, peace and cooperation for a better future.

In this way, IAPD-Africa aims to support the African Union's objectives and flagship projects for sustainable peace, to create impact and momentum toward a unified African continent. We then proceeded to hold four Africa Spiritual Day events, each with its own particularity and impact.

The first Africa Spiritual Day Celebration was held at the Revelation Spiritual Home (TRSH) in Johannesburg, South Africa, on February 12, 2023, hosted by its founder, Imboni Dr. uZwi-Lezwe Radebe, chairman of IAPD-Africa. The second was held at Faith Mansion World Center, City of Testimonies, in Calabar, Nigeria, hosted by Bishop Dr. Emmah Gospel Isong and Lady Pastor Helen Isong of the Christian Central Chapel International, on April 16, 2023.

The third event took place at Bible Gospel Church, Matero, Lusaka, Zambia, hosted by Archbishop Peter Ndhlovu on August 13, 2023,

with the theme “Ubuntu and Sustainable Environment.” The fourth Africa Spiritual Day Celebration took place at the Grand Bassam Fatima Zahra Mosque in Cote d’Ivoire on October 13, 2023, hosted by Cheikh Imam Moussa Drame, chairman of IAPD-Cote d’Ivoire. This was the first time an Africa Spiritual Day event took place in a mosque.

After these four events, things moved very quickly. An IAPD-Africa delegation, led by co-chairman Rev. Bakary Camara, traveled to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for a meeting with policy officers of the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) of the African Union. Its goal was to ensure that the AU represents not only African governments, but also the people of Africa.

On April 4, 2024, Dr. Radebe visited the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa and signed an MoU with Mrs. Salma El Tanany, head of CIDO. At that time, it was decided that CIDO and IAPD-Africa would jointly sponsor an Africa Spiritual Day on May 22, as part of the commemoration of Africa Day on May 25. One week later, IAPD-Africa was invited to attend a conference organized by the Interfaith Dialogue Forum (IFDF) under CIDO, together with the G20 Interfaith Forum.

On May 22, 2024, IAPD-Africa held the 5th Africa Spiritual Day event at the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa.

It was a tremendous success. About 500 participants attended the gathering. Hundreds more joined on Zoom; the event was also live-streamed on YouTube and Facebook in English and French. Some 21,000 viewers watched the program, including about 3,000 who gathered at the various branches of the Revelation Spiritual Home of Imboni uZwi-Lezwe Radebe. The event was also broadcasted by Addis Walta TV, which has over 10 million viewers.

Father Louison Emerick Mbila, chaplain to the African Union, and Pastor Adane Dechassa, executive director of the Interreligious Council of Ethiopia, served as co-hosts during the program, which was held in the Medium Hall of the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa. The program included sincere prayers and invocations by various spiritual leaders, including prayers for peace in the Middle East by Jewish and Muslim leaders. There were also speeches by AU and IAPD representatives and religious leaders of different faiths, and an uplifting musical performance by an Ethiopian church choir.

This is only the beginning. We hope this initiative will blossom and spread across the nations of Africa, uniting our peoples in heart and spirit, and generating new energy for the betterment of our continent.

– Dr. Paterné Zinsou is secretary general of UPF-Africa.

Participants at the Africa Spiritual Day Celebration held at African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on May 22, 2024.



## Safeguarding the Family at the United Nations

By Lynn R. Walsh

The Universal Peace Federation recognizes that sustainable peace and harmony among civilizations has its foundation in the most intimate and formative social unit of humankind, the family. This fundamental and natural unit of society, grounded in marriage, has a unique capacity to socialize and educate children, transmitting values, virtues, ethics, the duties of good citizenship, and the capacity to respect and love others. Through healthy family experiences we learn to embrace and value all relationships in our wider, global human family.

Conversely, the breakdown of the family contributes to a wide range of social problems, including poverty, crime, physical and mental illness, and loneliness. Therefore, pro-family policies and education are needed.

The UPF Office of the Family in New York seeks to bring relevant research and best practices in support of the family to the United Nations. UPF has been an executive member of the NGO Committee on the Family (NGOCF) for over ten years. Our work is committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) article that states: “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection from society and the State.”

While the family is affirmed in the UN charter and the UDHR, and the United Nations does honor an International Day of Families and a Global Day of Parents, the institution has been impacted by the culture wars, resulting in a challenging environment for advocacy of the “natural family” or “traditional family.”

UN member states are divided on this issue. The United States and Western European countries tend to promote progressive values, while more traditional or authoritarian countries, including many Islamic states, generally affirm a more traditional view of the family.

### UN Women’s Conference Opens a Door

The annual event of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) focuses on feminist perspectives that rightfully promote women’s rights and combat discrimination and violence against women, but ignore the value and impacts of family, marriage, sexual integrity, motherhood and fatherhood.

During this year’s CSW, the UPF Office of the Family collaborated with several other pro-family NGOs to organize a two-day event that presented family-centered strategies to improve women’s lives.



Lynn R. Walsh (far right) joins pro-family panel at the CSWF event.

Almost 14,000 people, primarily women, came from all over the world to attend the CSW at UN headquarters in New York from March 11 to 22, 2024. Thanks to a new initiative, the Conference on the State of Women and Family (CSWF), this year's program included sessions on the family, marriage and parenting. The conference emphasized that family cohesion directly impacts the well-being of women and girls around the world.

The steering committee members included representatives from UPF, United Families International, the Heritage Foundation, and the Center for Family and Human Rights. UPF sponsored a session on "Irreplaceable Motherhood and Fatherhood for Children and Society." It stressed infants' fragile dependence on their mother's responsive care for healthy neurological development, and the unique impact fathers have in the formation of girls' good judgement and confidence, as well as an avoidance of victimhood.

Nine other NGOs also organized sessions on issues related to women, such as preventing abuse, entrepreneur empowerment in poor rural areas, the importance of fathers and parenting. There was also a critique of the devastating effects of sexualizing children, as is occurring with widespread use of comprehensive sexuality education.

The CSWF organizers were encouraged by the positive response to this new forum. It is hoped that the synergy of family-focused experts, researchers, policymakers, grassroots practitioners and faith-based organizations, as well as people from small villages and cultures all over the world, will bring new empathic depth and insight to analyzing the serious and often inhumane circumstances of women and girls, but also of boys and men.

### Population Decline Raises Red Flag

At an annual event by the UN Commission on Population Development (CPD), the main subjects addressed are birth control and abortion, despite the fact that over three-quarters of the world is alarmed by plummeting fertility rates, beyond the replacement level. Even countries with replacement level rates are in steady decline. Unaddressed, this will lead to a reduction in economic productivity, essential services, and overall population.

This year, UPF's Office of the Family and NGOFCF, New York collaborated to organize a Research Forum on Family Policy and Population, to present member states with current research on demographics and pro-natal policies. This was held on May 1, 2024 and sponsored by the Mission of Hungary to the United Nations.

Hungarian Deputy Amb. Anita Kokai said that her country's fertility rate has seriously declined to 1.25. The shrinking number of working-age citizens cannot sustain an economy productive enough to provide for the expanding aging population.

Hungary offers couples many generous benefits, such as forgivable loans for homebuyers and increasing tax breaks as their family grows. Women who stop working to care for children are guaranteed their jobs if they want to return. Childcare and maternal and parental leave are also plentiful. Hungary has invested almost 5% of its GDP in pro-natal policies, increasing the rate of female employment and gender employment parity. This has raised their fertility rate to 1.65, and increased their marriage rate. These results are significant and encouraging.

Mr. Lyman Stone, a research fellow at the Institute for Family Studies and PhD candidate in sociology at McGill University, noted that women around the world are having fewer children than they desire. He said this fertility

gap is largest for highly educated women in developed countries. The average woman in the United States believes she would be happiest having two or three children, but the birthrate now is 1.6.

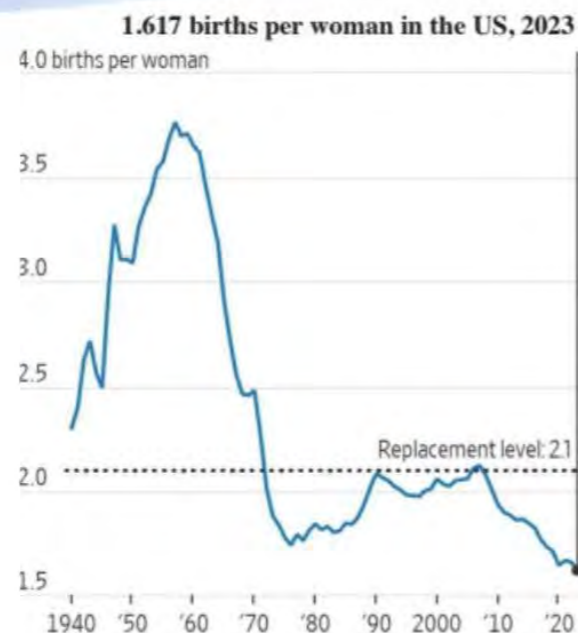
These recommendations, and those presented by other speakers, can be useful for UN member states' pro-natal policy development.

**“ The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection from society and the State. ”**

– Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16

The UPF Office of the Family will continue to engage with like-minded partners to promote pro-family policies and strategies, in the belief that fostering cohesive and stable families builds a stronger base of social capital and enhances the overall quality of life for everyone.

– Lynn R. Walsh is director of the UPF Office of the Family in New York, United States.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States





# Toward an Asia Pacific Union

By Ek Nath Dhakal

During a 2019 public speech in Nagoya, Japan, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon proposed the establishment of an Asian Pacific Union: "I ask that the Asian continent, where the spiritual civilization of mankind was born, once again become a beacon of truth and fulfill its mission to illuminate the darkness of the world."

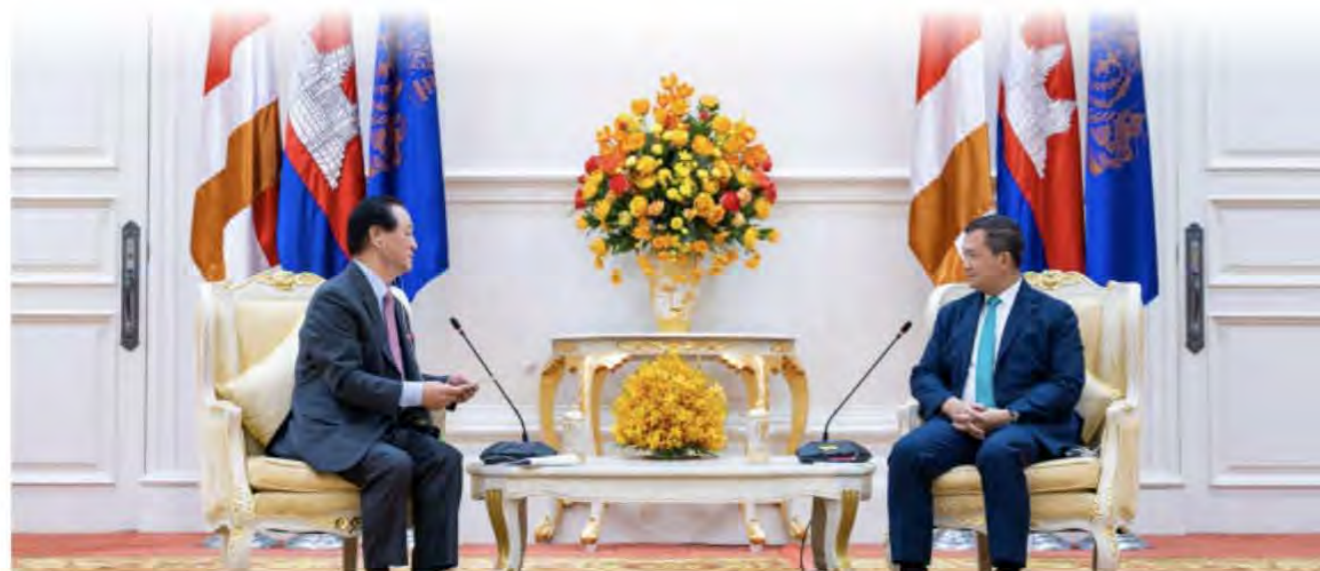
She envisions a wide-ranging, non-political organization comprised of like-minded individuals and organizations from nations in the Asia-Pacific region, broadly defined to include over 60 nations in Asia or bordering the Pacific Ocean, that will promote a culture of peace in the region. To further this vision, the theme of UPF's upcoming World Summit 2025 will be "Contemporary Challenges to Global Order and the Asia Pacific Union Initiative."

UPF Chairman Dr. Charles Yang has made numerous visits to Asian nations to introduce this concept to their leaders. On November 20, 2023, he visited Cambodia and met with Prime Minister Hun Manet. The two promised

to strengthen cooperation between Cambodia and UPF, based on a shared vision of peace, to mediate world conflicts and work toward building a peaceful global village. On the same day, Dr. Yang met with Cambodian National Assembly Speaker Khuon Sudary, who also affirmed a shared vision for peace.

The next month, on December 6, 2023, Dr. Yang attended an International Leaders' Conference at the Parliament of Sri Lanka in Colombo, organized by UPF. The meeting was attended by approximately 200 national leaders, including Sri Lanka's current and former presidents, the speaker and members of the National Assembly, as well as leaders from 12 Asian countries.

At this event, Dr. Yang explained the purpose of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon's proposal to establish the Asia Pacific Union. He encouraged them to work together through this organization to encourage economic growth, promote tourism and advance peace.



Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet meets with Dr. Charles Yang in Phnom Penh on Nov. 20, 2023.



Dr. Yang visits former Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at her residence in Manila on May 14, 2024.



Dr. Yang with Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe (center) and Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana at the Sri Lankan Parliament on Dec. 6, 2023.

To the same purpose, leaders from UPF, ambassadors for peace, and representatives of affiliated NGOs gathered at UPF-Philippines headquarters in Manila on May 13, 2024, to discuss plans for advancing the proposed Asia Pacific Union.

Dr. Yang delivered a compelling presentation detailing his work with the leadership of both Israel and Palestine through the Middle East Peace Initiative, as an example of a positive approach to conflict resolution. Dr. Yang also shared his hope that the Asia Pacific Union will be instrumental in contributing to peace on the Korean Peninsula.

During his visit to Manila, Dr. Yang led a delegation in paying courtesy calls to two respected figures who have contributed greatly to UPF initiatives over the years.

On May 13, the group visited five-time speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, Hon. Jose De Venecia Jr. Mr. De Venecia, who is also the founding president of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP) and co-chair of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), warmly welcomed the UPF delegation. He reminisced about past events with UPF and its affiliated organizations, and

expressed his profound gratitude to the co-founders of UPF, Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, for their efforts in raising leaders to be peacebuilders. He also encouraged the UPF representatives to persist in their efforts to promote a culture of peace. He was delighted to learn about the UPF proposal to establish an Asia Pacific Union, which he wholeheartedly supports.

On May 14, the UPF delegation visited former Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at her residence. Dr. Yang invited the former president to join the advisory board for World Summit 2025, which she enthusiastically accepted. Dr. Arroyo, who is currently a member of Congress, also welcomed the proposal of an Asia Pacific Union, which aligns with her campaign to highlight the Asian approach to peacebuilding and reconciliation.

These are but a few examples of Dr. Yang's work to enlist the support of high-level leaders throughout the region for this project. These leaders have expressed a strong interest in working with UPF based on a shared vision of peace, to mediate world conflicts and work toward building a prosperous global village. They also hope to advance economic growth and promote tourism in the Asia-Pacific region.

– Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal is a member of the Federal Parliament of Nepal and president of UPF-Asia-Pacific.



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