Chang Shik Yang February 22, 2025



# February 2025

The first week of February is designated by the United Nations as **Interfaith Harmony Week.** UPF chapters around the world held programs on this important theme, which resonates with UPF's core values. Some of those and other activities are highlighted here.



## Thai Youth Visit Religious Sites for Interfaith Harmony Week

Bangkok, Thailand – To promote understanding of different faith traditions among young people during UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, UPF-Thailand partnered with Youth and Students for Peace (YSP) to organize a Religious Youth Service Camp on February 15, 2025.

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# **Interfaith Leaders in Montreal Share Views on Social Harmony**

Montreal, Canada – In support of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Montreal chapter of UPF-Canada hosted a meeting at its local headquarters on February 1, 2025, to explore ways that religious leaders can promote social harmony and a confluence of values among various sectors of society.



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## Interfaith Program in Nepal Upholds Shared Spiritual Values

Kathmandu, Nepal – To mark the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, UPF-Nepal organized an Interfaith Breakfast, in collaboration with the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), on February 9, 2025, in Kathmandu. This event brought together prominent religious leaders and representatives from various faith communities to promote interfaith harmony and mutual understanding.

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## **Experts Consider Impacts of Turmoil in South Korea**

IMAP, USA – South Korea is currently facing political turmoil, with its president impeached and detained and its people deeply divided. How is this impacting the country's neighbor to the north? The International Media Association for Peace (IMAP) USA held a webinar on January 28, 2025 focused on North Korea's reactions to the political crisis in South Korea.



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### "Canvas of Cultures" Celebrates Art, **Poetry and Music in London**

**London, United Kingdom** – The "Canvas of Cultures: A Celebration of Art, Poetry, and Music" held in London on January 25, 2025, brought together talented artists, poets and musicians to celebrate the transformative and unifying power of creativity across cultures. The program was organized by the International Association of Art and Culture for Peace (IAACP), and highlighted how art, poetry and music transcend boundaries to foster dialogue, empathy and peace.

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#### THAI YOUTH VISIT RELIGIOUS SITES FOR INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK



Bangkok, Thailand - To promote understanding of different faith traditions among young people during UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, UPF-Thailand partnered with Youth and Students for Peace (YSP) to organize a Religious Youth Service Camp on February 15, 2025.

Seventy participants, including junior high school, high school, and university students, as well as members of the public, gathered at the UPF Peace Embassy in Bangkok for the opening program. The opening ceremony began with welcoming remarks by Mr. Kamol Thananoppawan, secretary general of UPF-Thailand. Then Mrs. Ursula McLackland, secretary general of UPF-Asia Pacific, gave an inspiring lecture on the topic "Interfaith Harmony through Service Learning."

Following the morning program, participants visited three different religious sites nearby to learn about that Following the morning program, participants visited three different religious sites nearby to learn about that

First, they visited Mary Help of Christians Church, where Father Suphot Riungam welcomed the group and gave a talk on the teachings of Christianity and its religious customs. Then he led a prayer for harmony among religions.

Next, the group went to the Wat Ban Thung Seri Buddhist temple, where the abbot, Ven. Phra Khru Sathit Pariyattikit, explained the history of the temple and outlined Buddhist customs and practices. He also chanted blessings and encouraged the young people in their spiritual pursuits.

Finally, participants moved to the Foundation of the Islamic Center of Thailand, where Professor Shafi'i Naphakorn, imam of the center's mosque, gave the welcoming remarks. The participants watched a video about the history of the center, and important Islamic traditions such as fasting during the month of Ramadan and praying five times a day. Then the Imam took them to the prayer hall, which has separate prayer

Afterwards, the participants enthusiastically engaged in cleaning the center and collecting garbage in the neighborhood, as an act of volunteer service.

After their return to the Peace Embassy for the closing session, participants shared their experiences. Many affirmed that they had learned a lot during the day, and valued the opportunity to make new friends from different backgrounds. Ms. Kewalee Phangphan, a student at Sarasas Witaed Suksa School in Bangkok, said, "The camp helped us to know more about different religions. In the past, we joined tree planting and other volunteer camps, but we never joined a camp that introduced us to religious sites and religious practices."

Ms. Sirikan Suwanich, director of the Bangkapi District Office, said she was moved by the participants' reflections, and offered words of encouragement to the youth. She said, "I would like to commend everyone who is a part of the Religious Youth Service Camp for coming to learn and exchange ideas with each other. This is an important step for creating understanding and harmony between religions, which is important for a peaceful and strong society."

Ms. Suwanich presented certificates to the participants and assured the organizers that the district office is interested in conducting further youth programs with UPF and YSP. The program ended with closing remarks by Mrs. Ursula McLackland. Though it was a long day, participants stayed on and kept chatting with their new friends.

By Kanchana Suebsingh, UPF-Thailand February 15, 2025

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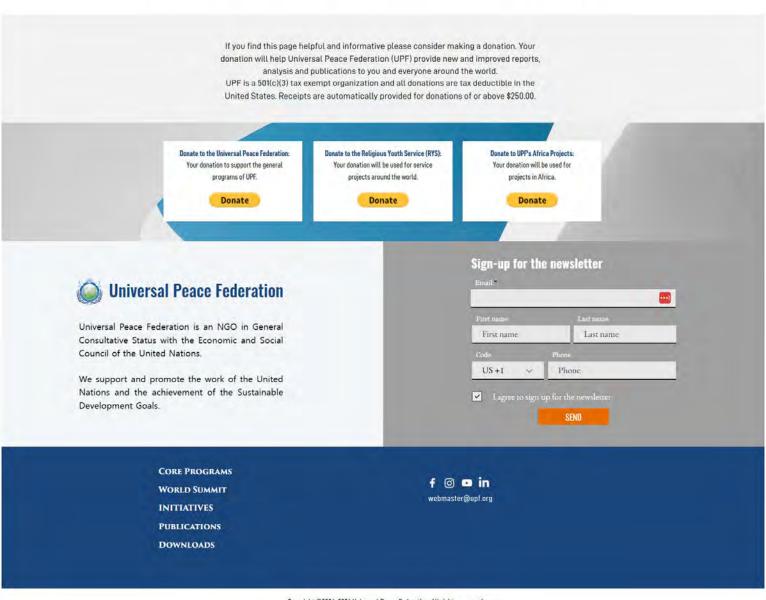
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### INTERFAITH LEADERS IN MONTREAL SHARE VIEWS ON SOCIAL HARMONY



Montreal, Canada - In support of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Montreal chapter of UPF-Canada hosted a meeting at its local headquarters on February 1, 2025, to explore ways that religious leaders can promote social harmony and a confluence of values among various sectors of society. Religious leaders of different faiths, community leaders, scholars, and one political representative joined several UPF members at a luncheon meeting to discuss "The Role of Religious Leaders in Building a World of Peace."

Mistress of Ceremonies Ms. Chantale Viau opened the program by introducing the president of UPF-Canada, Dr. Franco Famularo, who gave an overview of the UPF principles and efforts to promote religious harmony throughout the decades since its founding.

Ms. Viau then introduced the keynote speaker, Mr. Eric Le Reste, recently retired, who spoke about his spirituality in the context of his dual career as a highly successful Radio Canada (CBC) host of social commentary programs and as a yoga master and coordinator of the Brahma Kumaris Centres in Canada. His message, often punctuated with humor, was that spirituality, which requires one to be a living example of belief through self-discipline rather than merely believing, begets wisdom - the ability to navigate life well.

Two respondents followed, giving commentaries to the theme based on their faith perspectives:

Dr. Denitsa Tsvetkova, coordinator of the Canadian Center for Ecumenism, spoke of interior peace as the precondition for outward peace, the need for courage in interfaith dialogue, and her concern that political instrumentalization of religions and religious people may lead to the denial of religious expression in a secularized society. She urged religious leaders to pay attention to their religious neighbors and make lasting relationships with them.

Mr. Boufeldja Benabdallah, co-founder and spokesperson for the Quebec City Mosque, extoled the five principles of UPF, saying they should be adopted by leaders of all faith communities because of their universal character. He concurred with the path to wisdom expressed by Mr. Le Reste, and reiterated the need for courage to follow the path iterated in the Islamic axiom that people of different communities were created as such so as to get to know each other, learn from each other, and live in peace.

In attendance for the entire session was Mr. André Morin, member of the National Assembly for the district in which UPF headquarters is located. He gave some very encouraging words from the perspective of his role as shadow minister for justice in the Quebec government.

Ms. Isabelle Laurin, coordinator of UPF-Quebec, led a lively Q & A session, which was followed by an equally lively lunch prepared by members of UPF-Montreal. Many participants lingered to extend the period of exchanges and networking.

By Robert Duffy, Secretary General, UPF-Canada February 1, 2025

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#### **INTERFAITH PROGRAM IN NEPAL UPHOLDS** SHARED SPIRITUAL VALUES



Kathmandu, Nepal - To mark the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, UPF-Nepal organized an Interfaith Breakfast, in collaboration with the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), on February 9, 2025, in Kathmandu. This event brought together prominent religious leaders and representatives from various faith communities to promote interfaith harmony, mutual understanding, and efforts to advance world peace.

Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, chairman of UPF Asia-Pacific, warmly welcomed all participants, emphasizing the significance of interfaith dialogue and collaboration in fostering global harmony and understanding. He explained UPF's dedication to supporting the mission and objectives of the United Nations, working tirelessly to promote peace and cooperation among all faith communities

He highlighted the remarkable vision of Father and Mother Moon, the founders of UPF, who have supported many interfaith gatherings and conferences as a foundation for achieving lasting world peace. "From the very beginning, they believed that true societal development must be rooted in spiritual principles, with religious communities working together in solidarity rather than in competition," he said.

He referred to the vital role of religious leaders as ambassadors for peace, with the responsibility of guiding their communities toward unity, compassion, and shared prosperity. "As religious leaders, you are not just representatives of faith but also messengers of goodwill," he said. "Let us all stand together, upholding the values of peace, respect, and interfaith harmony."

Dr. Narendra Pandey, of the Bahai faith, emphasized that UPF has long prioritized interfaith dialogue. He noted that World Interfaith Harmony Week serves as a platform to bring people together and reduce societal conflicts and violence.

Mr. Achyut Subedi, a presenter for Radio Kandipur, cited Hindu scriptures and the importance of satsang and cooperation, stressing that working together is essential for peace. Mrs. Namrata Pandey, principle of Oshodhara Mystery School, stated that peace resides within every individual. "Religion is the path and the goal; we must move forward together," she said. Christian leader Rev. Tulsi Prasad Shrestha stressed the necessity of an interfaith commission to ensure equal rights for all.

Sheikh Nahida Baina, an interfaith activist, emphasized the need to combat the spread of atheism, asserting that spiritual values should be preserved. Mr. Ram Chandra Bhandari, representing the Hindu community, said that while Nepal is religiously rich, a shift in mindset is required for true harmony. He recommended studying the fundamental principles of Sanatan Dharma. Jain leader Sri Naman Upadhyaya spoke of peace and harmony as universal desires and advocated for integrating interfaith values into daily life.

Ven. Bhikshu Dharma Murti, a Buddhist monk, called for expanding the scope of interfaith dialogue to include more community members. Mr. Narayan Sharma Gajurel, vice president of UPF-Nepal, expressed concern about the declining interest in religion among the youth and emphasized the need for proper religious practice to bring about positive change in life.

The religious leaders and participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening interfaith harmony and unity amid diversity. Mr. Santosh Kumar Paudel, president of UPF-Nepal, expressed his gratitude to all attendees and expressed the hope that religious leaders would take the initiative in organizing more interfaith events. Leaders of UPF, including Rev. Prakash Thapa, Rev. Binod Dangi, Hon. Milan Rajbanshi, and Mr. Krishna Prasad Dhakal, also delivered important remarks, contributing valuable perspectives to the discussion

At the conclusion of the event, the participating religious leaders and representatives expressed their commitment to strengthening interfaith harmony while maintaining unity in diversity. They resolved to address misconceptions and conflicts arising from religious differences through community-based initiatives. They also vowed to encourage youth participation in religious and interfaith dialogue, to ensure the transmission of spiritual values to future generations.

Dr. Plya Ratna Maharjan, the program coordinator, extended a heartfelt vote of thanks and reaffirmed his commitment to interfaith unity beyond Nepal, at a global level.





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### **EXPERTS CONSIDER IMPACTS OF TURMOIL IN SOUTH KOREA**



IMAP, USA - South Korea is currently facing political turmoil, with its president impeached and detained and its people deeply divided. How is this impacting the country's neighbor to the north? The International Media Association for Peace (IMAP) USA held a webinar on January 28, 2025 focused on North Korea's reactions to the political crisis in South Korea

The panel included Dr. Joseph Terwilliger, professor of neurobiology at Columbia University and former visiting professor at Pyongyang University of Science and Technology; Ms. Jenny Town, senior fellow at the Stimson Center and the director of Stimson's Korea Program as well as co-founder and director of 38 North; and Mr. Jacco Zwetsloot, host of the popular NK News Podcast in South Korea. The panelists explored the impact of the crisis on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the implications for regional stability and the reactions in North Korea to the ouster of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Ms. Town reminded listeners that this is not the first time a Korean leader has been impeached, President Park Geun-hye having faced the same situation in 2016. Although all panelists agreed that anything that makes South Korea look bad is good for North Korea, they pointed out that the crisis has been scantly reported in the DPRK, which has taken a hands-off approach, seeing no benefit in disrupting the process. Although South Korean President Yoon initially accused his political opponents of being anti-state and pro-North Korea, this narrative failed to gain traction, Instead, there has been a shift to blaming China and the Chinese Communist Party for interfering in elections, which has resonated with members of President Yoon's party.

Mr. Zwetsloot suggested that North Korea may not have a desired outcome in the current situation. He noted that North Korea's leadership prefers stability and is more interested in the relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin than with South Korea's president, Dr. Terwilliger agreed, stating that North Korea doesn't really care what happens in the South as long as it doesn't bother them. Ms. Town put forth the possibility that a new South Korean government, less closely aligned with the U.S. administration, might open up gaps in that relationship that the DPRK could seek to exploit.

On the topic of North-South unification, Ms. Town noted that North Korea has given up unification as a goal and is focused on its own sovereignty. Mr. Zwetsloot added that, having sent troops to support Russia's war in Ukraine, North Korea's leaders are focused on that and are not interested in renewed negotiations with the South. Ms. Town emphasized that the South Korean vision of unification, rapprochement and gradual democratization, is incompatible with North Korea's desire for peaceful coexistence. Therefore, by disavowing unification, the North is eliminating an existential threat. Also, the bonds between South and North Koreans are rapidly diminishing due to the aging of those with living relatives in North Korea, Mr. Zwetsloot added.

Dr. Terwilliger emphasized that more interchange of information between North and South on a people-topeople level could do much to reverse the dehumanization of their neighbors that exists on both sides of the border. Ms. Town pointed out that before the first summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean President Kim Jong Un in 2018, the DPRK took very substantial steps such as returning American detainees, partially demolishing nuclear facilities and removing anti-U.S. propaganda from the media, but that this resulted only in disappointment and a lack of progress

In conclusion, Dr. Terwilliger suggested that the conversation between the United States and the DPRK be restarted, and that the United States not simply demand irreversible abandonment of nuclear capabilities, but also offer some kind of lasting benefit in return. Ms. Town agreed that the United States will have to be more agile in its negotiations if any progress is to be made.

Both Ms. Town and Mr. Zwetsloot emphasized the importance of a speedy return to normalcy in South Korea, as the current political crisis is destabilizing and may have lasting impacts. Mr. Zwetsloot also suggested that the United States and North Korea open liaison offices in each other's capitals to ensure ongoing dialogue between INTERFAITH LEADERS IN

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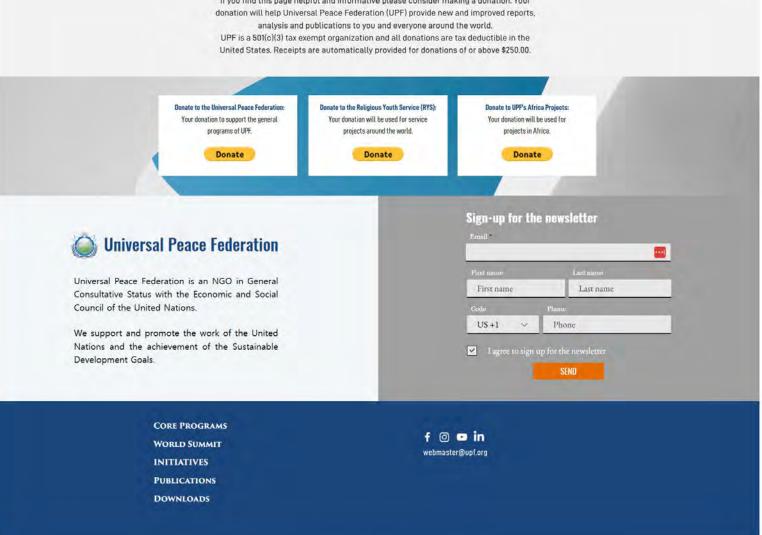




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#### "CANVAS OF CULTURES" CELEBRATES ART, POETRY AND MUSIC IN LONDON



London, United Kingdom - The "Canvas of Cultures: A Celebration of Art, Poetry, and Music" held in London on January 25, 2025, brought together talented artists, poets and musicians to celebrate the transformative and unifying power of creativity across cultures.

The program was organized by the International Association of Art and Culture for Peace (IAACP), operating under the UPF umbrella, and highlighted how art, poetry and music transcend boundaries to foster dialogue,

Special guest Mr. Ian Pelham Turner, an international TV broadcaster, graced the event, along with Duchess Nivin ElGamal of Lamberton, patron of UPF-UK, who gave the welcoming address. From UPF-UK, Mr. Robin Marsh, secretary general, and Ms. Margaret Ali, director, spoke about UPF's activities and the role of the arts in Marsh, secretary general, and Ms. Margaret Ali, director, spoke about UPF's activities and the role of the arts in building bridges of understanding.

The chair of IAACP, Dr. Sangita Swechcha, said: "This event takes us on a journey through the transformative power of art. We are privileged to hear from extraordinary individuals whose works transcend boundaries and speak to the universal values of peace, resilience and unity."

She continued, "Today, we are not merely spectators; we are participants in a collective celebration of creativity and culture. Together, we are making a difference."

The event featured a discussion with Ms. Amina Art Ansari, a celebrated British Pakistani artist with works in Windsor Castle's Jubilee collection, and Ms. Rhoslyn Singh, a 20-year-old artist from Nepal whose work reflects

Poets from around the globe, including Ms. Shahd Karaeen from Palestine, Dr. Rupak Shrestha from Nepal, Ms. Nayeema Mahjoor from India, and Britian's Ms. Catherine Tuitt, shared verses on resilience, heritage and unity. Musical performances by Italian opera singer Ms. Marisa Di Muro and oud player Mr. Saife Al-Naffak from Iraq captivated the audience with their unique talents.

The IAACP and UPF-UK thanked all attendees and participants for their support in making this event a success, demonstrating the profound impact of art, poetry and music in fostering peace.

By Dr. Sangita Swechcha, Chair, IAACP-UK January 25, 2025

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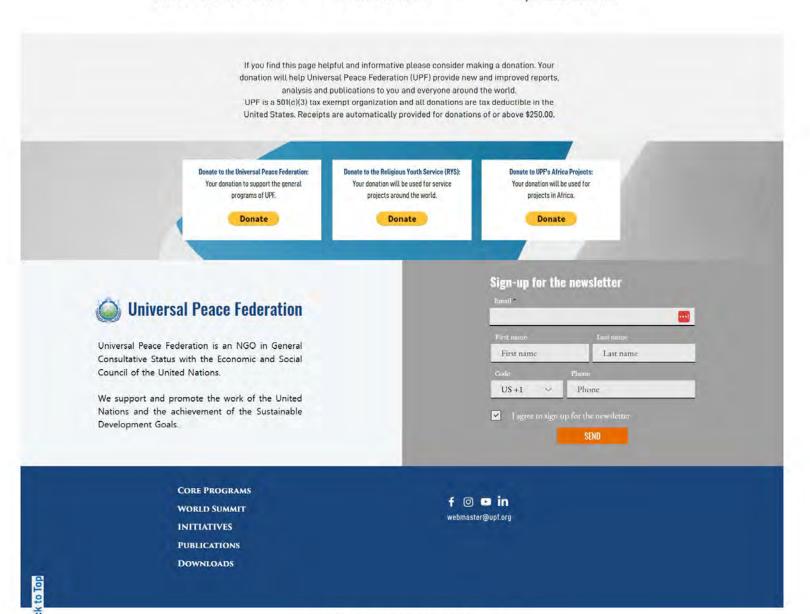


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