

## Joint annual conference of UPF-Canada and WFWP-Canada in Toronto

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Toronto, Canada—"Encouraging Social Engagement and Loyal Citizenship among Disaffected Youth" was the theme of the joint annual conference of UPF-Canada and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP)-Canada. The event was held at the Ontario Legislative Building in Queen's Park in downtown Toronto on October 27, 2016.

The conference consisted of two panels:

"Exploring Root Causes of Youth Radicalization" and

"In a Family Context, Do Mothers Play a Pivotal Role in Preventing Youth Radicalization?" (or the "Pivotal Role of Mothers in Preventing Radicalization")

Members of the Ontario Provincial Parliament (MPPs) were in session and some MPPs as well as other government leaders, including Attorney General of Ontario Yasir Naqvi, took time from their busy schedules to participate in the conference.

The gathering began with introductory remarks by Mr. Daniel Stringer, who served as the emcee for the event, and an Indigenous Welcome to Sacred Land conducted by two mothers who are indigenous advocates in Ottawa. A stirring rendition of Canada's national anthem was sung by well-known Juno Award-winning R&B/Soul singer, Ms. Liberty Silver.

In his welcoming remarks, UPF-Canada chair, Dr. Moonshik Kim, spoke about UPF Founders Rev. Sun Myung Moon's and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon's vision of and efforts for peace, as well as presented the guiding principles of UPF. A brief video about UPF's global activities was shown afterwards.

The first panel discussion, "Exploring the Root Causes of Youth Radicalization," was moderated by UPF-Canada's secretary general, Mr. Franco Famularo, and featured four speakers. Mr. Paul Tamale, who assisted a former attorney general and a speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario with a report on the roots of youth violence, said that poverty and attitudes of people in authority, such as teachers and law enforcement officials, are factors that can lead to youth disillusionment that leads to violence—but it is family instability that is at the root of this issue.

Mrs. Meriem Rabbani-Gosselin of the Center for Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence in Montreal was the next speaker. In 2015, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visited the organization and recognized its efforts as a model for other nations to follow. Ms. Rabbani-Gosselin presented research that shows that youth radicalization is not limited to a certain economic class or gender. In addition, she provided concrete examples of youth radicalization, including a cell of Canadians, who had committed themselves to travel to Syria to join ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), that was uncovered in Montreal.

Each panel consisted of representatives from the black, indigenous and Muslim communities. The indigenous perspective in the first panel was presented by Ms. Jocelyn Wabano-Iahtail, a doctoral candidate at Carleton University in Canada, who has witnessed the abuse of her people on First Nations territory. Her mother recently received an apology from the Canadian Parliament for the systemic abuse First Nations children experienced in the residential school system. She shared how indigenous

spirituality contributes to the healing process and, through an interactive exercise with the audience, put emphasis on the sacredness of each person.

Dr. Jooyoung Lee, an assistant professor at the University of Toronto who is an expert on youth gangs and gun violence, emphasized the role the arts, music and culture can play in preventing youth from engaging in violence. He explained the pitfalls of punitive policing and suggested a public health approach to gang violence.



The second panel, “In a Family Context, Do Mothers Play a Pivotal Role in Preventing Youth Radicalization?,” comprised a teacher, minister, indigenous lawyer and representatives of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police’s (RCMP) Integrated National Security Enforcement Teams.

The session was moderated by Mrs. Lilly Tadin, president of WFWP-Canada, and began with an insightful presentation by Ms. Sameen Affaf, a teacher with a graduate specialization in social exclusion and marginalization. Ms. Affaf referred to six ways in which mothers can help prevent radicalization: (1) provide recognition through providing a sense of identity; (2) provide connection through a sense of belonging; (3) intervene through nurturing; (4) create a culture of love with education; (5) give voice to disaffection through validation; (5) and provide a sense of awareness through taking notice.

Rev. Sky Starr, a trauma specialist and grief counselor, shared several of her experiences working with victims of youth violence and their mothers. Mothers have the added burden of continuing to nurture their families despite their grief, she said.

Ms. Deniseanne Boissoneau, a representative of the Anishinaabe and Ojibway indigenous communities, and a practicing lawyer, said a mother builds a child and that for restorative justice to be incorporated into the criminal justice system, the system will need to be reformed.

Sergeant Mia Poscente and inspector Don Halina of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Integrated National Security Enforcement Teams provided a perspective from Canada’s police force on the topic of the panel discussion. They both said that the police force is proactive in dealing with youth radicalization and that the police are willing to collaborate with every community to prevent youth violence and radicalization.

Mufti Aasim Rashid, a distinguished Islamic scholar and educator from Vancouver, explained the challenges of radicalization for the Muslim community in Canada. Mufti Rashid is also the founder of Al-Ihsan Educational Foundation and recently launched Islam Unraveled, an initiative committed to educating Canadian institutions about Islam. He said that radicalization cannot be defeated from only within the Muslim community, and also said that Muslims must find their place within Canadian society, yet retain their identity. Mufti Rashid expressed his frustration with the media for offering a very limited perspective through their reporting. Devoted Muslims are not extremists; through education, stereotypes and misunderstandings can be dispelled, he added.

A lively question and answer session followed each panel discussion, and the conference concluded with the appointment of new Ambassadors for Peace.