



European Leadership Conference

Brussels - December 4th – 5th 2012

“What more can Europe do to Advance Human Rights?”

(Celebrating U.N. Human Rights Day 2012)



European Parliament, where the final 2 sessions of the conference were to take place

The overall topic chosen as the theme of the conference reflected the fact that its dates were chosen to coincide with and be part of the celebrations for U.N. Human Rights Day 2012, the 63rd such occasion commemorating the signing of the historic U.N. Declaration of Fundamental Rights & Freedoms on December 10th 1948 in the wake of the horrors and appalling violations of human rights wrought by World War Two. The topic chosen was ***“What more can Europe do to Advance Human Rights?”***

The 2 E.U. institutions which readily agreed to host parts of our conference were The European Economic and Social Committee (“E.E.S.C.”) and The European Parliament. The E.E.S.C. is closely connected to the European Commission and functions as a vehicle for consultation with civil society about potential legislation in a similar way that E.C.O.S.O.C. operates within the U.N. system. The European Parliament has over 750 members (M.E.P.s) from all 27 E.U. member nations and enacts legislation on the European level.

Day one – Tuesday December 4th

The first day of the conference was co-hosted by the [European Economic and Social Committee](#) UPF and WFPW and held in its airy and spacious state of the art 7th floor conference room atop its impressive Brussels headquarters.



Session One (9.15-10.45 a.m.)

The first session focussed on the overarching theme of the conference (***“What more can Europe do to Advance Human Rights?”***) was chaired and introduced by distinguished former Belgian diplomat, **Ambassador Robert Vandemeulebroucke**. He reminded all present of the tremendous support for human rights given by the [European parliament](#), situated nearby, including through its award of the [Sakharov prize](#).



The first speaker, **Dr. Aaron Rhodes**, is a former Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (1993-2007), which championed human rights among the 56 members of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (“OSCE”). He was also a co-founder of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran and of the ‘Freedom Rights Project’. He praised UPF for its ability (due to its independent standing) to bring together people who don’t normally come together and as an example of how civil society can highlight important ideas and principles and bring them to the attention of peoples and governments.

Dr. Rhodes described the significant contribution to human rights made by the European Union. For example, the E.U. insisted that if candidate countries wanted to join the EU, they had to meet well-defined criteria as regards the Rule of Law and human rights. He said that nothing has worked better to encourage positive change than the leverage afforded by the goal of EU membership,

although unfortunately once states have joined the EU, their progress slows down. One such example, he said, was Turkey, which changed its human rights policies to conform to EU standards, but when the possibility of Turkey's EU membership seemed to fade, its progress also faded. In concluding, Dr Rhodes said that one of the most serious challenges facing the European Union today is to ensure that its policies reflect the democratic choices made by its citizens, in whose name they are implemented.



The second speaker, **Mr. Doudou Diène**, is a former 'Director of the division of inter-cultural projects at UNESCO' and 'United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (2002—2008)'. In his remarks, Mr. Diène suggested that Europe needs to move from preaching human rights to practicing them, pointing to the tendency to side-line human rights since the events of 9/11. Amongst the challenges Europe is currently facing in terms of human rights, Mr. Diène cited the situation of religion, which is coming increasingly under suspicion, with the growth of islamophobia and continued anti-Semitism .

Whilst acknowledging the validity of the separation of church and state, he urged that religious believers should be allowed to practice their faith. To the problem of multiculturalism in Europe, Mr. Diène said we should look at and put together the common values of the various religions. He concluded by saying that multiculturalism is a reality and we have to recognize this, but we should not polarize society but rather avoid moving towards inter-culturalism, by recognizing the specificities of each community so that they can live together harmoniously.



The third speaker was **Dr. Yong Cheon Song**, Chair of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in Europe. He thanked the E.E.S.C. for co-hosting the conference to mark Human Rights Day and reminded everyone that this year the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the European Union for having contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe over six decades. In referring to the vision of the founder of UPF, the late Reverend Sun Myung Moon, Dr. Song said that, "human rights violations can only ever be finally eliminated by connecting our lives to God, so that we have the ability to love. The more connected we are to the love of God, the more unlikely we are to violate the human rights

of others." He described how Reverend Moon felt responsible to set an example in this respect, by forgiving those who tortured him and going to North Korea to meet Kim Il Sung, the very man who had sent him to almost certain death in a prison camp decades earlier. Dr. Song issued a poignant plea that, "the time has come for human rights to be connected to God and religion", and that, "this is the single most important step which has to be taken to advance the cause of human rights in Europe". Citing Reverend Moon's previous proposal for the creation of an inter-religious council at the United Nations, Dr. Song suggested that such an assembly be created also at the heart of European Institutions to bring the wisdom of the world's faiths to bear on their deliberations. He concluded with an appeal for anyone concerned with preserving human rights to also protect marriage and family as these 2 institutions, more than any others were God given ones for educating us all about love and, by extension, how to respect the human rights and dignities of all peoples. - [link to speech](#)



Session Two (11.15-12.45)

The second session addressed the question “how can Inter-religious cooperation prevent racial, national and religious prejudice” through the understanding of the three Abrahamic faiths, Christianity, Judaism and Islam? It was chaired by **Dr Lydia Bonte**, Professor of Afro-American Religion and Biblical Exegesis at The Faculty for the Comparative Study of Religions (FVG), Antwerp. In her introduction, Dr. Bonte mentioned that their faculty is unique in that different faiths are taught by believers of the religions, e.g. Judaism is taught by a Rabbi and Islam by an Imam. She went on to explain that she is very happy that each year Philippe Jacques is coming to the faculty to teach the principles of the Unification Church, which their students like very much."

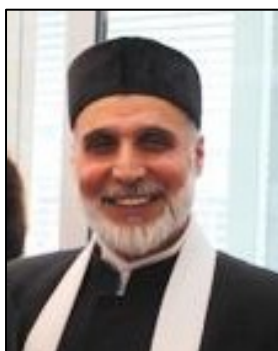


As the first speaker she introduced **Rev. Dr. Christiaan Vonck**, Rector of the Faculty for the Comparative Study of Religions (FVG), Antwerp, in partnership with the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and a leading figure in European inter-religious circles who concurred with Dr. Song's presentation in saying that religion plays an important role and that inter-religious dialogue is very important if conflict is to be addressed. He cited a motion from the World Council of Churches stating that *"we need new ways to understand universality and to learn to live our faith in dignity while respecting each other"*. Dr. Vonck described new religions as manifestations of the truth and said that if people do not respect those from other religions, this leads to problems and can lead to extremism. They are

positive manifestations of what he called "inter-religion". Theology divides while religion unites. Dr. Vonck praised Reverend Moon for presenting a way of life in which people can work together while retaining their own religious traditions and affiliations.



The second speaker, **Rabbi Joseph Abittan**, is a Rabbinical Professor and Interfaith Coordinator for the 'Alpes Maritimes' Rabbinical district in France. Rabbi Abittan set the stage for the following day's debate at the European Parliament by declaring that "the conscience must distance itself from ideas incompatible with the unique God, such as hatred and torture, and must be rooted in the ethics of justice and freedom". He said that secularism is a legal framework favourable to freedom of religion. However, the Bible's ideals must be introduced into the secular institutions of democracy. If we restore the memory of religion we can open a way to a meaningful life for ourselves. Europe must reject a communitarian process of group education based on specific identities and rights, which results in isolation, as this would be contrary to the European Community's ideas, which are defined as a common memory, common values, shared beliefs, and a high degree of mutual solidarity.



The third speaker, **Sheikh Dr Hojjat Ramzy**, chair of the education committee for the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and Professor of Islamic Studies at Oxford Brookes University in The United Kingdom, pleaded for better inter-religious cooperation to prevent conflicts. He said that such cooperation faced three main obstacles - namely the idea that such

cooperation will block one's own faith, inter-religious hatred and the misunderstanding of other religions passed down through the generations. He described how in the migration to Medina in 622, there was a constitution drawn up between the Jews and Moslems which put an end to the conflicts between them, and suggested that the contents of this constitution could be used today to help solve inter-religious conflicts. Echoing Reverend Moon's call for an inter-religious council, Dr. Ramzy stated that religion today straddles continents, whereas borders are man-made, and so a formal international body is perhaps needed for the meeting of different religions across the world which could intervene in areas of conflict. Such a body, he said, could overcome the obstacles preventing religions from working together and demonstrate that religion is a force for good.

Session Three (14.30-16.00)

The third session of the day and first of the afternoon focussed on the topic, ***"The Future of Democracy in Europe: Why are Women Important to Leadership and Decision-making?"*** and was chaired by **Corinna Pummer**, a Ph.D. student at the University of Graz in Austria and President of 'Aufwind', an association conducting educational activities and promoting children's rights in Peru.



The first speaker was **Ms. Angela Melo** who has been 'Director for the Division of Human Rights and Philosophy in the Social and Human Sciences Sector at UNESCO' since March 2009. She was previously Commissioner and Vice President of the African Commission for Human Rights from 2001 to 2009 and Special Rapporteur on Women's Rights in Africa from 2001 to 2007, as well as President of the 'Working Group on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights'.

Ms. Melo reminded us that UNESCO also has an award for human rights, the 'Bilbao Prize' for the Promotion of a Culture of Human Rights, and that the award ceremony for 2012 would take place on December 10th with Archbishop Desmond Tutu being the laureate. She reformulated the question of "what can Europe do more for human rights?" as "what strategy should we have to improve the reality of human rights, so as to make it our way of life?". She said that "democracy must allow us to make reforms without violence and requires good governance. This was the exclusive role of men in the past, but women have gained their place in the workplace but not yet in positions of social responsibility, and a social change is needed. This change must come from women. They are the catalysers of a new conception of human life and human dignity, even if this change is not yet visible." In concluding, she asked, "Could women be the motor of economic growth?" Women could influence the economic structure and have a direct influence on the control of access to resources. In speaking of human rights, we should look at inherent values. UNESCO's program of education for all and education first is considered to be a leader in this domain."



The second speaker was **Mrs. Carolyn Handschin**, President of Women's Federation for World Peace in Europe. She started by citing the courage of the Mirabal sisters, who were four Dominican political dissidents who opposed the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. On November 25, 1960, three of the sisters were assassinated. In 1999, the sisters received recognition from the U.N. General Assembly, which designated November 25 each year as the 'International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women' in their honour. These sisters did not consider themselves as leaders, she said. Leadership does not demand a title, but is a mind-set to act when things need to be done. Citing U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325, which

"reaffirms the important role of women and calls for their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security". She said that what women should bring to the table is their specifically feminine qualities in order to complement the masculine ones contributed by men. She called for a paradigm shift to a system of shared leadership from matriarchy and patriarchy to what she termed, **"Familiarchy"**, in which, citing UNESCO, she said that ennobling the relations between men and women, partners in development and peace, would involve charting a new depth of intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions of masculinity and femininity.



The third speaker was **Ms. Aslihan Tekin**, a legal and policy consultant on E.U. Affairs and an expert on human rights at the International and E.U. level. She also represents different civil society organisations at the E.U. level and is the Brussels Representative of KAGIDER (The Turkish Association of Women Entrepreneurs). She pointed out that human rights makes no distinction between women and men. In a democratic society, we expect the government to respect all the citizens' rights, but, in reality, women are discriminated against at all levels. The ratio of women in decision making positions is very low, even in the EU commission where only 9 out of 27 representatives are women. To solve this problem, we must use existing legislation. Many countries have legislation which can be used by women,

but the implementation process is too slow, so we have to follow up on the implementation of this legislation at all levels. In conclusion, she pointed out that women's participation is of crucial importance to Europe's economy, so there is also a business case for women's participation. The European GDP could be greatly increased by increasing women's participation.

Session Four (16.30-18.00)

Session Four was chaired by **Mr. Peter Zoehrer**, Secretary-General and Chief Editor of FOREF (Forum for Religious Freedom in Europe), and focussed on the theme **'Human rights in Europe: Fundamental Freedoms in a Multicultural and Multi-religious Society'**.





The first speaker, **Dr. Aaron Rhodes**, is an international human rights activist, university lecturer and essayist based in Hamburg, Germany. He served as Executive Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) between 1993 and 2007, during which period the IHF was engaged inter alia in human rights challenges in the Balkans, in Chechnya, and in Central Asia, and the organization expanded significantly. He is also co-founder of the Freedom Rights Project and in 2008 was made an honorary citizen of Austria for his “contributions to the Republic.”

Dr. Rhodes explained that he started the Freedom Rights project to look into the way human rights are being treated now, because of his concern about the proliferation of human rights instruments. He said that, “the UN human rights system has doubled in size and is becoming a bureaucracy. In the Universal Periodic Review (“UPR”), so many claims are referred to as human rights claims. Dictatorial states are given an easy time because they talk about services they give to their citizens and real concerns are overlooked.” In his intervention on the subject of Multiculturalism in the Framework of Human Rights, he explained that the human rights documents were designed to work in a multicultural environment, and the question that we should ask is “*whose culture is being violated when rights are said to be violated on the basis of culture, such as in Iran?*” Incitement to violence is outlawed for a good reason, but incitement to hatred and discrimination are much more vague terms. Russia cited religious hatred to punish the music group “Pussy riot”. In his concluding remarks, Dr. Rhodes said he feared that in a rush to deal with diversity, European societies are retreating from the very principles that ensure that citizens can freely deal with deep differences among them, and that peaceful dialogue in civil society requires a principled stand for freedom of expression. He said he firmly believes that preserving peaceful co-existence in a multicultural society depends on respecting human rights above all.



The second speaker was **Johannes Cornelis "Hans" van Baalen**, a Dutch politician of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). He was a Member of the Dutch House of Representatives from 1999 until 2002 and from 2003 until 2009. He has been a Member of the European Parliament since July 2009, where he is leader of the Dutch VVD Delegation and generally seen as one of the party's “heavy-weights”. Mr. van Baalen explained that the E.U. was founded after World War Two, but that Europe was not able to unite politically. Europe started therefore as an economic union and the EU Parliament was initially only an advisory body and it focused on human rights, instituting the Sakharov prize for example. Today,

the EU parliament is based on the Treaty of Lisbon and has a real position as a parliament and the European Union has taken human rights as part of their concerns, so the parliament really has something to say about human rights. In the European parliament, we try to bring human rights together with international trade treaties. Mr. Van Baalen explained that he is the chair of the EU parliament’s Japan delegation in which he holds discussions with his Japanese counterparts on many issues. They are currently entering into negotiations on free trade and therefore also discuss the issue of human rights.



He said that it was important to defend freedom of speech, rather than being politically correct and, echoing Dr. Rhodes’ comments, he said that “the right not to be tortured is very different from having good housing. If you broaden human rights too much, you lose the essential nature of human rights. Freedom of religion is also closely related to freedom of speech. Freedom of religion is also a basic human right.” In closing and asking to be excused due to other pressing commitments, he said he looked forward to future participation in ELCs.

The third speaker was **Mr. Jura Nanuk**, Founder and President of the Central-European Religious Freedom Institute (CERFI) based in Budapest,

Hungary. He spoke on the topic of “Religious Freedom in Hungary and the New Law on Minority Faiths”. Mr. Nanuk said he was inspired to start his institute by an anonymous quote, *“Sometimes I want to ask God why He allows poverty, famine and injustice in the world, but I’m afraid He may ask me the same question.”* He explained that many religious groups lost their status as churches as a result of the new law passed in the Hungarian Parliament earlier this year. Many voices were raised against this law and a programme was started in which different religious groups came together despite the fear of losing their positions. Under international pressure, some improvements have been made, but the struggle is still on for many minorities. He reminded us that many Jews were deported during World War Two. The Jews were told that they didn’t have enough members to be registered.

Mr. Nanuk thanked UPF for enabling him to raise this issue at a previous [European Leadership Conference in the UK parliament](#). After the publication of an open letter, the question of religious freedom in Hungary was raised in the European parliament and a complaint was filed to the Hungarian ombudsman. All these actions combined culminated in Hungary starting to reconsider its law in October, after receiving pressure from various sources.



The final speaker was **Mr. Willy Fautré**, Director of Human Rights without Frontiers, who spoke on the topic of “Sects or Religions? – A Human Rights Perspective”. He started by saying that the closing words of Jura Nanuk made an appropriate transition to his topic of “sects” versus religions, because in many countries a distinction is made and bodies are put in place to deal with these so-called “sects”. He explained that the term “sect” has a pejorative connotation and is considered to be different from a religion and, thus, its members are not entitled to the same protection. This kind of approach is indicative of a propensity to lump things together, to discriminate and to exclude, which is hard to justify and harder still to excuse, and so is injurious to religious freedom. He said that the UN does

not make any distinction between religious communities on the basis of their number of members or historicity. The UN never endorses the term “sects” or “cults” and he always refuses to fight on the battlefield of the journalists who use this terminology, but relies instead on international law, which rejects these terms. *“National laws should be consistent with international law”*, he affirmed, explaining that in the Western world, the state first gives a bad name even to a legally registered religion by labelling it a “sect” and then discourages people from joining it. In his concluding remarks, he mentioned the problems faced by religious minorities in Japan, whose members have been kidnapped and confined against their will in an attempt to “deprogramme” them. He said that this problem has been ignored by the Japanese authorities, who treat it as a “family matter” and by the international community and added that his organisation was probably the first to investigate this issue. He illustrated the fallacy of this attitude by pointing out that 20 years ago a man beating his wife was considered a family matter and therefore the police did not intervene. He concluded the final session of the first day of the conference with a quote, asking “What is a religion? It is a “sect” which succeeded!”.

Evening walk and meal in the old town

Later in the evening most participants journeyed together into the centre of old Brussels to enjoy the Christmas spirit present there in the old town area with its Christmas market and lights and to dine at a restaurant on Belgian cuisine of various kinds. This social and cultural element was much enjoyed by all and enabled participants to bond more closely and more personally in a relaxed and informal way.



Day two – Wednesday December 5th

The morning sessions (5 & 6) of Day 2 were held in Hotel Leopold, close by the European Parliament Building.

Session 5 (09.00 – 10.30)

was entitled *“Youth Perspectives: the Right to Information for Young People and Human Rights Education – Foundations for a Democratic Europe”* and was chaired by **Mr. Robin Marsh**, Secretary General of UPF UK.



The 1st speaker was **Mr. Tobias Troll**, Advocacy Officer with ‘*Developing Europeans’ Engagement for the Eradication of Global Poverty*’ (“DEEEP”) and ‘*the Confederation for Cooperation of Relief and Development NGOs*’ (“CONCORD”) explained that his organizations work both in developing countries and in education in their home nation. The relationship between human rights and education is based on the UN framework on ‘the Convention on the Rights of the Child’ approved in 1989 to which all countries except Somalia and the USA are signatories. This means that it is legally binding on states everywhere. Also, its provisions are quite ambitious. For example, it states that children (18 years old and above)

should have the full rights of citizenship and are not citizens to be. They therefore have something to contribute. He then went on to explain about the 3 aspects of human rights pertaining to education - namely rights **through** education, rights **to** education and rights **in** education.



The second speaker was **Ms. Illaria Esposito**, a member of the Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth and a trainer in Human Rights Education. She began by showing one of the Council's videos dealing with human rights (see www.coe.int/enter). She explained that in terms of human rights education, the Council of Europe speaks about all the issues that young people are facing today. This video attempts to link the grass roots work with the decision making authorities, in order to improve the lives of young people, using a rights based approach. Young people elected by NGOs contribute to the decisions made in the Council of Europe. In some countries there are youth councils which are recognized by the member states. This contributes to the right to participation of young people. *"Living, learning, acting for human rights"* is a programme currently under way. There is also a program on intercultural dialogue, which includes a Roma youth action plan.



The third speaker was **Mr. Bogdan Pammer**, Youth Director of UPF Europe, who spoke about how UPF youth committees around Europe are dealing with these issues. He first quoted the so-called "Böckenförde" dictum: *"The liberal secular state lives on premises that it cannot itself guarantee"*. He mentioned that it is human beings that violate human rights and that human rights violations are often committed *"along the borders of identity"*. He said that, *"our practical focus is to work with those people who want to make a difference but feel that they don't have the power to do so"*. This involves providing practical skills and sustainable tools which go beyond the initial excitements. According to him, the "universal" in UPF doesn't refer to "peace on Mars", but to something "holistic"! *"When we talk about Human Rights, we always refer to something higher and in UPF we have the concept of "one family under God", which is not a theological concept"*, he added. And he concluded by saying that *"a lot of power springs from the power of conscience. Young people have a lot of power but can easily become disillusioned. Hatred and revenge give so much energy, but we have to develop the same kind of energy for the sake of goodness,"*.

Session 6 (11.00 – 12.30)

was entitled **"Towards Peace loving Global Citizenship"** and was chaired by **Mr. Patrick Jouan**, director of UPF's UNESCO office.



The first speaker was **Mr. Peter Zoehrer**, Secretary-General of "Forum for Religious Freedom" ("FOREF") who spoke about Reverend Moon's autobiography, *"As a Peace Loving Global Citizen"*. He began by asking why a religious leader would get involved in human rights at a time when many people accuse religions of being the cause of war? He said that this was because that was not the original purpose of religion and explained that Reverend Moon's view of the role of religion in human rights was that it emphasized the spiritual nature of man and rejected hatred and violence and should advocate the practice of love and bring about reconciliation. He then went on to describe the path of suffering that Reverend Moon had gone through in his attempts to bring about a world of peace, which included spending almost 3 years in a North Korean prison camp. He went on to establish the Unification Church in a mud hut he created in Busan in South Korea when he was a refugee with just one set of clothes. Even at that time, he preached that many people would come to Korea to learn about peace. He went on to

establish an international movement and is particularly well known for his “Marriage Blessing” ceremonies, based on the belief that inter-religious and intercultural marriage is the key to world peace. He concluded by saying that based on Reverend Moon’s vision, UPF is campaigning for the establishment of an Inter-religious Council at The U.N. which would provide spiritual guidance for the politicians.



The second speaker was **Mrs. Carolyn Handschin**, president of WFWP Europe, who spoke on the topic, *“Towards an era of participation: family culture as a paradigm and tool for prevention and cure”*. She explained that WFWP was founded in 1992 with the motto that humankind is one family sharing one home, the earth. She said the deeper side of working for peace is not just to have *housing*, for example, but to have *homes*. She said that one of the key programmes of WFWP is the ‘bridge of peace’ ceremony in which women from different backgrounds, even enemy nations or groups, come together to overcome differences. She said that there had been many deep experiences stemming from these ceremonies. Currently, WFWP is involved in humanitarian programs and is getting into government advocacy. Mrs Handschin said that, *“in terms of human rights, we are thinking more about peace making and conflict resolution, but from the viewpoint of Eleanor Roosevelt, we are dealing with human rights in terms of dealing with the person next to us”*. She went on to explain about the many conferences WFWP was organizing, frequently with the active participation of numerous UN agencies.



The final speaker was **Mr. Mark Brann**, Secretary General of UPF Europe, who provided an overview of UPF’s vision, projects and activities, with a special emphasis on human rights. He started by explaining that UPF is not a membership organization, but rather a network of like-minded people based on 5 principles of peace which he explained in detail. He described some of the many peace initiatives that UPF has initiated around the world, including in the Middle East and its successful contribution to bringing to an end the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, when that faction accepted the idea that we are all *“one family”*, although not necessarily *“under God”*. Since

Reverend Moon’s visit to North Korea, as previously described by Peter Zoehrer, there have even been many cultural exchanges and a World Peace Centre has been established in Pyongyang with freedom of religion accorded to Unificationism. Mr Brann conveyed the exciting news that UPF hopes to hold a European Leadership Conference (ELC) there next year and concluded by explaining how UPF had become a major U.N. NGO dealing with interfaith matters and had had meetings with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon and had held many E.L.C.s throughout 2012 in various parts of Europe.



The morning concluded with the appointment of several new Ambassadors for Peace and testimonies from two pairs of “roommates” at the hotel who came together in unity thanks to the conference, namely Sheikh Dr Hojjat Ramzi (Islam) and Rabbi Joseph Abittan (Judaism) and two young ladies from Nigeria - one from the Islamic north and one from the Christian south. Whilst holding each other tightly, they explained how when they had first been paired together in one room they had experienced fear and mistrust. However, gradually they felt drawn to speak together the whole night long and ended up as inseparable as twins.



Sheikh Dr Hojjat Ramzi (Islam) and Rabbi Joseph Abittan (Judaism) and two young ladies from Nigeria - one from the Islamic north and one from the Christian south.



After a delicious lunch at the Hotel Leopold participants walked together to the nearby European Parliament, where the final two sessions of the conference were to take place in the afternoon. These sessions were co-sponsored by the NGO Freedom from Torture and hosted by **Dr Charles Tannock**, a British Member of the European Parliament from the Conservative Party and formerly a practising Psychiatrist. Dr Tannock was also previously Vice-President of the Human Rights Subcommittee of the Parliament from 2004–07 and is currently Vice-President of the European Parliament Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly as well as UK Conservative Party Foreign Affairs Spokesman and Co-ordinator

(Spokesman) on the Foreign Affairs Committee for the European Conservative Group. He was also appointed a Commissioner for Human Rights of the British Conservative Party in 2011.





Session 7 (14.00 – 15.00)

was entitled “**Prevention & Eradication of Torture**” and was chaired by **Dr Charles Tannock**.



As its first speaker it featured **Mr. Keith Best**, a former U.K. Conservative Party Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom. He has held many key positions in national level bodies safeguarding the rights of ordinary people and is currently the Chief Executive Officer of ‘[Freedom from Torture](#)’ which helps the victims of torture. Mr. Best explained that Freedom from Torture is designed to care for torture survivors and help them get to the UK, as well as to campaign against torture in the UK. He explained that his organization deals with torture as defined in the UN convention against torture of 1985, a definition that was later extended by the World Health Organization to include perpetrators of organized violence. Rape, he said, was also torture

and fitted this pattern of abuse and he explained that multiple rape is widely used in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as a social tool.

Freedom from Torture deals with as many as 1,500 torture victims every year and Mr. Best said he is amazed by their courage when giving evidence, which is the only way to bring change. In answering the question why torture remains so widespread, in spite of the many international protocols banning its use, he explained that there are still those who argue that torture can elicit valuable information. Recently, he said, there has been some controversy in the UK about the extradition of Mr. Abu Qatada to Jordan, because the evidence against him may have been based on torture. Baroness Manningham-Buller, former Director General of MI5, stated in the BBC ‘Reith lectures’ that torture is never justified. One State that still tortures is Sri Lanka, he said, and in recent high court injunction proceedings, 2 cases of people being returned to that country were overturned, because any perceived association with the Tamil Tigers is taken as an indication of the risk of torture. In conclusion, he said that “torture still exists because of a lack of political will. The fight against torture is like the fight against slavery. William Wilberforce came up against similar opposition. We must continue the fight. Will it ever wholly disappear? I fear not, but we can hope for the universal condemnation of such abuse.”



The second speaker was **Ms. Philomène Uwamaliya**, a torture survivor from Rwanda, who gave a moving and courageous testimony of her own experience. She said that according to Manfred Novak, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture from 2004 to October 2010, torture is still practiced in 90% of countries worldwide and the current Special Rapporteur, Juan Mendez, has said that in more than half of these countries, torture is systematic. Ms. Uwamaliya said that during genocide in her country, torture was part of the day to day life and that she lived in fear and learned to close her eyes to it. Her own experience left her with an overwhelming feeling of guilt and shame which caused her to lose trust in people and organized institutions. It was only a few years later when she went to Freedom from

Torture that she was able to come to terms with her experience and begin to talk about it. With

therapy, she began to rebuild her life and was able to understand how much torture had affected her. She and other former clients from Freedom from Torture have since established the Survivors Speak Out Network to help other victims and bring the criminals to justice. She urged participants to press their respective governments to become signatories of the optional protocol of the Convention against Torture. All governments say they oppose torture, she concluded, but in order to put through legislation on a European level much effort will be required.

Amongst the comments from the floor, Carolyn Handschin thanked Philomène for her courage in speaking about this issue and said that *“her intervention had completely changed the place that this issue had for her”*. In answering the question of how participants could support this campaign, Mr. Best advised visiting [Freedom from Torture’s website](#) which details their activities.

Session 8 (15.20-16.30)

entitled, '**The Prevention of Sexual Violence Especially in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**', was chaired by the host, **Dr Charles Tannock** MEP.



The first speaker **Humphrey Hawksley**, the BBC World Affairs Correspondent and author, in a call for new legislation in the EU, compared the efforts of the United States in this matter with the inadequate response of the EU to the 'conflict minerals' that are to be found in many of our laptops and mobile phones. Most of these are sourced from the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and fund and give rise to the war torn region's violence and notorious rape statistics. (for more information see Hawksley's [article](#) in Yale Global Online).



Following this, **Chris Yates, Vanessa Bateson and Kate Downey**, all employees of one of the world’s largest banking groups who have formed their own pressure group on this issue, described the link between the coltan used in most high tech gadgetry in most homes in developed nations and the violent oppression of the mining communities in eastern DRC that is a major global source of the mineral. ([link for more information](#)) The staggering number of rapes and the impunity felt

by the perpetrators in this lawless region make the area one of the worst places for human rights abuses in the world. Chris Yates stated that the eastern DRC is commonly described as the 'rape capital of the world'. They, as a group said, that pressure on a corporation's shareholders and consumers, could lead to a more rapid reduction in the mining of conflict minerals than legislation. They quoted the four years taken to bring in the U.S. 'Dodd Frank law' that has still not been implemented.



The final speaker was **Charlotte Simon**, who originated from the eastern D.R.C. but who now lives in the UK, gave a personal testimony of her hometown when there was an invasion by Rwandan troops in the 1990's. She spoke passionately of the need to stop the killing, rape and torture in the region that occurs with impunity. She emphasised that between 5 and 10 million people had been killed in eastern DRC in the last 40 years conflict. Charles Tannock MEP later raised this question with senior EU officials who agreed with the need for legislation. Subsequent meetings on this topic are being planned. (If interested please contact pa@uk.upf.org)

Concluding remarks for the session and for the conference itself were offered by UK UPF Secretary-General Robin Marsh and included a warm vote of thanks to Charles Tannock MEP for his willingness to host the last 2 sessions of the conference in the Parliament and

for his excellent, sensitive and inclusive chairmanship of proceedings, which drew a warm round of applause from the 100 or so participants. Robin Marsh explained that from a civil society perspective, UPF's slogan is that the world is one family under God, so we have to care about those that are suffering the most. Re-education is also a big issue for the young men involved in this conflict, so that they treat women in a better way.

