



UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION

Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace

Conference in Geneva on Human Rights and Dignity

UPF - Europe: Saturday, March 26, 2011

Geneva, Switzerland - Under the banner of a UPF/Women's Federation for World Peace partnership, a European Leadership Conference took place in Geneva, Switzerland on March 25-26. During sessions held at the World Council of Churches and at the United Nations Office, nearly 200 participants, including legal and human rights professionals, religious leaders, grassroots activists, and UN Ambassadors representing over 30 nations were welcomed.



Session 1: "Human Rights and Dignity: A New Paradigm for an Intercultural World"

The conference was opened at the World Council of Churches by Carolyn Handschin (Women's Federation for World Peace President-Europe). "As never before in history, as we interact through our television screens and Internet sites from the other side of the globe, the calls for a bright, just, and participatory future find a resonance and bring us closer together as one human family. At this time of dramatic upheaval we need to ask what each of us can do."

The keynote speaker, Dr. Yong Cheol Song (Chairman of UPF-Europe), just back from a meeting of the UPF Peace Council in Albania, explained the commitment of UPF to advancing human rights and responsibilities in all countries.

"We cannot be complacent. It is significant that we are here at the World Council of Churches office, as religion can provide a moral and spiritual framework for how we treat each other. Human rights violations come from ignorance of these principles. We should advance the cause of all religions centered on human values. Strengthening the

institution of marriage and promoting the concept of one family under God is the best way to encourage human responsibility”.

H.E. Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani of the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations, the second panelist, spoke about the experience of Indonesia in cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation. For example, the largest mosque in Jakarta was built by a Christian. "As a secular country housing many religions, our problem is that each group wants to have its own different religious holidays! We have to promote dialogue without inciting hatred, and it must lead to cooperation and dialogue at the grass-roots level. According to an Indonesian proverb, consultation and consensus for the benefit of all is what is needed."



Dr. Yong Cheol Song, Mrs. Carolyn Handschin, and H.E. Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani

Professor Alfred-Maurice da Zayas, Professor of International Law at the Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations and former Human Rights Committee member, highlighted the role of civil society in promoting change. Input from civil society led the Human Rights Council to call a workshop on the emerging claim for a “human right to peace” as a legal framework. It has been spreading like wildfire, with concerted efforts on the part of some civil society campaigners. He is confident that such a right to peace will ultimately be instated and repercussions will be profound.

Another civil society project, initiated at the University of California at Berkeley, is Project 2048 (that will be 100 years after signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), which restates the original 44 articles of the declaration instead of the 30 articles that were adopted and would institute a world court. Switzerland has spearheaded the idea. It is in the hands of civil society to carry these initiatives through. Dr. da Zayas also pointed out that the concept of human dignity should be considered a general principle of law.

Ms. Berhane Raswork, Executive Director of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, said that many wars have been

fought because of misunderstandings about traditions, etc. "In my part of the world, women as a tradition are mutilated alive. This is done with the approval of the community, including Muslims and Christians, and even the women themselves." As the only African in a working group of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva in the 1970s and 1980s "on female circumcision," she was asked to moderate the group. Everyone thought they were crazy, but they pushed and pushed and used various entry points of the Human Rights Council to work on this issue.



Professor Alfred-Maurice da Zayas and Ms. Berhane Raswork

Paula Pace, of the International Migration Law Unit, spoke on behalf of Md. Shahidul Haque, Director of the Department of International Co-operation and Partnerships of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The opportunities offered by multiculturalism and interfaith dialogue are many, she said, and IOM has developed projects in that area. A video was shown involving youth in seeking solutions. Migration is a fact of life more than a problem. Another project, "Integration, A Multifaith Approach," was carried out in Finland and other countries to stimulate dialogue between migrants and the local population, provide civic education, and encourage the exchange of views with other migrants. In 2010, IOM held various consultations on the importance of putting migrants at the center of integration policy, based on the protection of human rights. To close, Ms. Pace quoted a report that Italy had recently refused to take some illegal immigrants. "We have to combat misunderstandings as they make integration very difficult," she concluded. "Transnational migration will continue as a fact of life and is therefore an important issue for us to deal with."

Session 2: "Interreligious Cooperation and the Prevention of Incitement to National, Religious, and Racial Hatred"

Mr. Peter Zoehrer, Secretary General of the Forum for Religious Freedom (FOREF) based in Austria, introduced the topic of the session. Dr. Antonio Stango, Secretary General of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Italy and a member of UPF's Global Peace Council, gave a very informative summary of religious freedom in international law. The next five speakers each presented a "snapshot" of their engagement in the prevention of incitement to hatred and other human rights violations in their countries of origin:

Ms. Tseten Zochbauer, from Austria/Tibet, said that she met UPF in Vienna while on a hunger strike for more than 12 days for Tibet. Her country after 52 years is still fighting to keep the culture and language alive. After Tibet was occupied by China, she was exiled and sent to a foster family in Switzerland, attending high school here in Geneva. In 1989, she founded the Tibetan Community of Austria and in 1992 the SAVE TIBET Austrian Association. Since then has continued her efforts to support the people of Tibet and is currently the President of SOS Tibet in Austria. "There is a new generation of Tibetans

coming up, and the Dalai Lama is stepping down from his political role. It's the struggle of the Tibetan people, not just the Dalai Lama. He teaches about how to be democratic without violence. I represent Tibetan women in the exiled Tibetan Parliament, and my colleague in that Parliament, a Tibetan monk from Spain, is also here today. It is a race against time, since in Tibet there are three times as many Chinese as Tibetans. If nothing changes in the next five years, it will be lost. We have gained many famous friends. If we don't succeed, how can others with even less support succeed? It would be the first time for a nation to get its sovereignty back by non-violent means. In Tibet, people are ready to die for this cause."



Ms. Tseten Zochbauer and Ms. Naima Serroukh

Ms. Naima Serroukh, from Switzerland/Morocco, is a lawyer who serves on the Integration Commission in Biel, Switzerland, and is president of the association "Pont de Communication." She is originally from Morocco and her husband is Tunisian; they have three children. She and her husband have initiated numerous projects related to integration and human rights. When she came to Switzerland she thought this would be the country of democracy and true freedom, but she found that there are sometimes chains of hatred and discrimination. "I'm talking about my personal experience. Do I need to compromise to be accepted, stop going to church or the mosque? Should I not have too many children? I can break these chains if I go back to the Qur'an, which has a universal message. In the first verse it says that we should learn from and go toward others and liberate ourselves from ignorance. When I make the effort to understand the person in front of me, I can develop. That's universal, not just for Muslims."

Mr. Alex Ntung, from the UK/Democratic Republic of Congo, has been working in the area of peacebuilding and conflict resolution for the past 13 years. He is currently adviser to the Brussels-based International Peace and Development Initiative for Central Africa. Since independence, DR Congo has been going through civil war and has benefited from UN intervention. "In eastern Congo, peacebuilders have to be escorted by UN troops. There are five major antagonistic ethnic groups. Conflict is associated with identity and victimization. There is a lot of sexual violence used as a weapon of war. Peacebuilders seek to bring these five ethnic groups together to talk and find representative leaders to come up with an action plan. There is a lack of dialogue between the leaders. This is a sensitive issue and there is a lack of trust. These people usually never meet, but we were able to bring them together and come up with an action plan." Mr. Ntung showed a photo of him shaking hands with the head of a group responsible for killing many of his family members. Various projects were launched, such as a peace conference to combat racial hatred. The major outcome was that one rebel group became integrated into the national army after ten years of rebellion. They also had a meeting where prayers of forgiveness were offered among the different tribes. "Action speaks louder than words," he concluded, "so don't hesitate to be an activist."

Ms. Manal Timraz, UK/Palestine, was born a Palestinian and worked for many years for the United Nations on projects relating to the welfare of women and children in Palestine. She grew up believing in the dream that one day there would be no more "us" and "them," but only a place where all Arabs and Jews can live peacefully side by side. She found a model of this dream in Coventry, in the United Kingdom, where people are living side by side as neighbors, regardless of their differences in race or faith. During the bombing of Gaza in December 2008, Manal lost 15 members of her family; 11 were children under the age of 12. "This was the greatest test for any human being to go through, let alone a peace activist." She asked herself, "am I really a peace activist or will I seek revenge like everyone else?" She refused to grieve and instead launched the "Millions Candles for Peace Campaign," with the candle as a symbol of peace. She flew with her children to the Holy Land, carrying a million candles donated from the people of Britain for the sake of humanity. "It was the little voice of Mohammad in my head, the youngest of my family members who were killed, which led me to start the campaign," she explained. "Before he died, he asked me one favor over the phone, that is to come and take him to England to watch a football match, but it was impossible for him because this would require a UN resolution. I said to him that one day he would be able to come and watch any match he liked. His voice which had been filled with hope came to me. I felt like I stepped out of my own existence. It was the voice of the victims that motivated me."

Afsharpur Yazdan, Switzerland/Libya, works as a journalist with a Libyan NGO based in Switzerland since 2000: Human Rights Solidarity. He explained that he'd like to give a snapshot of how the critical situation that the world is watching in Libya began and described the hopes of the people there. "The beginning of the uprising for democracy, which we hope won't be derailed, came from the overdue need for changes in the Arab world. It was inspired by the uprising in neighboring countries. There was a call for a demonstration on the anniversary of the events on that date in 2006. Prior to that date, the Libyan regime always arrested those deemed dangerous. One hundred and fifty members of the central committee demanded the release of the detained activists. On February 16, demonstrations started in various places including in Benghazi. The regime's security forces withdrew from the areas where the demonstrations took place. On February 17, munitions were shipped to begin killings, which outraged the police who then switched sides. In Benghazi, where the people held peaceful demonstrations, 257 people were killed, went missing, or were injured. Following this, there were huge demonstrations in Tripoli, and the security forces disappeared from the scene. It was peaceful on the side of the demonstrators until then. On the evening of February 27, Gaddafi's son launched the state terror machine on the people. As a result, the demonstrators were forced to arm themselves. This led to resolution 1973 of the UN and now the NATO-led intervention. There is still much to tell, beyond what can be seen on the television, but please know that the Libyan people need your support!"

Three more detailed interventions followed the snapshots:

Professor Dr. Christian Brunner, University of Graz, Institute for Austrian, European and Comparative Public Law, Political Sciences and Public Administration, is a member of UPF's Global Peace Council and President of FOREF in Europe. "We have a problem with religious freedom in Europe," began Dr. Brunner, speaking on the "function and dysfunction of religion in secular states." Religion is not purely a private matter; our European institutions, policy, and public space are being influenced by the convictions of citizens. "In my city of Graz (230,000 inhabitants) there are over 70 active religious communities, yet more than half of the population considers themselves without a religious confession. The European Court for Human Rights speaks about positive and negative religious freedom. The consequences of modern pluralist society tensions are far-reaching. Proposals to promote social cohesion include self restraint in use of language and articulation, and refraining from presenting Christianity as the leading culture, because this gives the green light to discrimination and denies the contribution of other cultures. The issues of crucifixes in schools could be solved if non-religious pupils

could place their non-religious symbols on the wall beside the crucifix. Recently, the Archbishop of Vienna called for an acceptance of multiple religions. Proclamations be followed by concrete actions, such as the closing of anti-sect bureaus in Austria. We seek binding law-embedded values that are coherent for both the religious and non-religious people and an 'eternity clause' for our European constitution(s) as found in US, French, and German documents, stating that human dignity and fundamental human rights are inviolable and inalienable."



Mr. Dan Fefferman has been the executive director of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom since 1984. He came from Washington DC to speak about the problem of forced conversions in Japan in violation of article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (This theme had been decided prior to the earthquake and tsunami struck and was presented with respect and deep concern for Japan and Japanese citizens). "The phenomena of forced conversion had been briefly manifested in Europe and the USA in the 1970s and 1980s but comparatively rapidly recognized as illegal and largely eliminated. In Japan, more than 4300 religious believers have been confined in connection with their forced conversion through the actions of Christian ministers. These victims are mainly Unification Church members but also include Jehovah Witnesses and others. The police often refuse to help the victims. Missing persons reports are usually denied unless they are submitted by family members, but in these cases it is the family members who are the perpetrators. There is also racial discrimination, especially between Japanese and Koreans spouses. There have been no criminal prosecutions in the 16 to 20 cases in which the victims have tried to bring charges. Tactics include confining a person to prison-like apartments, forced renunciation of faith as a condition of release, and sometimes starvation and rape. Some victims were held in mental hospitals. This is a violation of article 18 of the UDHR and in some cases of articles 5 and 19 concerning torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Mr. Toru Goto was held for over 12 years. After the police refused to help her husband seek her release, Takako Fujita she committed suicide during confinement. We are appealing to the World Council of Churches and the US National Council of Churches to look into this as it is committed by Christian ministers. We are calling upon the UN and related institutions to put pressure on Japan, since it has signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Dr. Aaron Rhodes, an international human rights activist, university lecturer, and essayist based in Hamburg, Germany, served as Executive Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights between 1993 and 2007. He was also active in the Human Dimension of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. "In the International Helsinki Federation, we had many debates about how much freedom of expression should be limited in order to prevent hate speech. The Russian government passed laws against incitement to hatred under pressure from the Council of Europe. However they were at times used to convict human rights activists, and in one outstanding case forced the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society out of existence. The Russian-Chechen Friendship Society was accused of being racist, because it dealt with

racial problems, but it was a humanitarian organization. European laws against incitement to hatred originated as a consequence of the Holocaust. Europe is struggling with its multicultural reality. This is with us whether we like it or not." He referred to the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. "For civil society, the best prevention of hate crimes is respect for other people. Many non-democratic states have jumped on the anti-hate speech legislation bandwagon, because it gives the state the right to do things coercively. The reality is that crime has gone up in countries with anti-hate speech laws. We should not expect coercive laws by states to eliminate these kinds of problems."

In conclusion, Peter Zoehrer stated, "There can be no world peace without human rights. We should build a network and make our experiences count."

Session 3: "Towards an Interreligious Council at the United Nations"

Hotel Warwick, Geneva, March 25

This session dealt with the particular issue of reforming the United Nations in light of an empowerment of religious leaders to become part of the solution for the world's problems. Heiner Handschin gave a short introduction to the original statement of UPF's founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon, at the time of the Assembly 2000 in New York, where he suggested the creation of such a council, as a body comparable to a "senate" of religious leaders. These delegates would deal with all the major issues, such as fulfilling the MDGs, but based on their wisdom, experience and influence as religious and spiritual leaders. After the initial launching, the Philippine government began to take concrete action steps in the direction of an Interreligious Council. Min. Gary Domingo of the Philippine Mission to the UN in Geneva, reported about the history and current state of this initiative.



Parallel to governments, UPF and its partner organization, the Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance, launched a Model UN program with religious youth of different faiths at the UN in Geneva, showing the importance of bringing in religion as a factor for peacebuilding and reconciliation. Between 2008 and 2011, six conferences took place at the UN in Geneva and in diverse parts of the world under the general theme of "Interreligious Cooperation, Human Rights and Dignity." These conferences tackled specific issues such as the need for creating alliances among stakeholders that included religious leaders, education in rights and dignity, family values, disarmament, mediation, reconciliation. Niraj Pabari, a senior college graduate at Webster's and leading member of this Model UN program, presented an overview of his experiences with the program.

The evening concluded with a light potpourri of songs and flute performances of two young Geneva artists, Claire Millet and Julia Handschin.

Session 4: "Human Rights based on Universal Principles: A New Paradigm"

Hotel Warwick, Geneva, March 26

Mr. Peter Zöhrer gave an overview of the fundamental core principles and values that UPF leadership conferences promote and related them to notions of human rights. As nothing exists for itself in nature but everything serves the whole and lives for the "other," human rights solutions can be more deeply understood. He also explained that

the way these Principles are exemplified in the life of the UPF founders, Dr. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon.

In a very passionate response, Dr. Emmanuel Bezzina paid a tribute to the UPF founders and their total dedication to bringing about a world of lasting peace.



Mr. Peter Zöhrer, Dr. Emmanuel Bezzina, and Mrs. Carolyn Handschin

Session 5: "Human Rights and Dignity, Gender Roles in a Culture of Peace"

Following this, Mrs. Carolyn Handschin addressed the audience with a presentation on "Human Rights and Dignity, Leadership, and Gender Roles in a Culture of Peace." The presentation is part of a "Knowing Our Rights, Living Our Responsibilities" series being developed by WFPW-Geneva. It uses the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a benchmark for human dignity and a natural course of empowerment of both women and men.

Responding to the presentation, Prof. Mohan Gautam of the Netherlands lent further insight as an anthropologist about the benefit to society when women achieve their potential.

Session 6: "Causes and Resolution of Conflict"

Mr. Tim Miller, Vice-Chairman of UPF Europe, addressed the issue of Root Causes of Conflict and Resolution. In this very poignant lecture, Mr. Miller reminded us that just as peace starts in our minds, human beings are often conflicted within themselves and this manifests itself on a broader scale, such as ethnic conflicts. It isn't enough to search for just a political solution to problems of conflicts in the world. The world's religions address this, heal-ing the world starts with my own conduct. Mr. Miller went on to explain UPF's vision and concrete steps on conflict resolution and reconciliation, showing in a very concrete and practical way that to get rid of an enemy is by getting rid of enmity within ourselves. The great saints and sages in history have shown such an example of sacrificially embracing the enemy with a heart of a parent.

In response to Mr. Miller's lecture, Mrs. Aline Afazali of Birmingham, UK, gave a very touching testimony of her experience of the Rwanda genocide, where she lived as a daughter of a Congolese mother and a Rwandan father through the terrible drama of losing her own father at the hands of brutal criminal gangs. Despite going through such a shattering experience, she chose to actively pursue forgiveness and reconciliation through creating a website memorial for those former childhood classmates who perished and reconnecting to several hundred classmates throughout the world who all managed to survive.

Session 7: "Closing and reflections"

The closing session featured a very lively line up of statements and reflections of many participants of the conference. Many expressed their deep realizations during the past two days for the need to rededicate themselves for the great cause of peace and serving humanity in these most turbulent times in human history. At the closing there was a nomination of a new Ambassador of Peace in the person of Dr. Krishna Ahooja Patel, former deputy director of INSTRAW and current Vice-President of the NGO CSW-Geneva.

