



# Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace

...the hope of all ages is a unified world of peace

## IIFWP Conference in Jurys Ballsbridge hotel Dublin, August 30<sup>th</sup> 2003



Some of the participants gathered for a group picture.

On Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> of August, **The Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace ( IIFWP )** held a conference in Jurys Ballsbridge Hotel on the topic: *“The World at a Turning Point: Considering Innovative Approaches to Peace through Responsible Leadership and Good Governance”*. About 50 representatives from several different Christian denominations, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Quakers, Bahai and Unificationists gathered together to discuss the topics that were introduced through three PowerPoint presentations.



IIFWP Regional director Tim Read

The conference officially was opened by pastor Victor from the MC Martin Moloney introduced IIFWP Regional Director Timothy Read, who read the keynote address in place of international chairman Rev. Chung Hwan Kwak. His address was followed by a video presentation of IIFWP and the work it has been doing in more than 160 countries around the world. The conference was part of a worldwide effort to enlighten religious people about the intensive work that is presently going on centring on the UN. Recently we have all been painfully aware of the weaknesses of the UN. The UN needs more than political adjustments, it needs spiritual renewal. Therefore in the autumn session, the Philippine delegation to the UN will present a suggestion to change the structure of the organisation. Looking at the situation around the world, so many of the conflict situations have, at least as part of their cause, some religious element. The situations in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq etc. and our more local problems in the north of Ireland, are all strongly influenced by this religious factor and it is therefore difficult to see how politics alone can come up with a solution that will guarantee lasting peace. The religious problems have to be sorted out.

The suggestion that will be put before the UN is about introducing a second house to the organisation, consisting of religious/spiritual leaders. By introducing this second house, this religious part of the problems can be seriously addressed. The religious leaders would have permanent representation and the opportunity to come with their input or objections when the decisions are to be made concerning these different crises. IIFWP has already involved itself very directly in the Middle East situation through the Middle East Peace Initiative. Earlier this year a successful conference was held in Jerusalem where the three Abrahamic faiths united in signing the *“Jerusalem Declaration”* acknowledging each other and pledging to work together.

( Please see IIFWP Newsletters <http://www.iifwp.org/> )

At the conference in Jurys Ballsbridge Hotel the first presentation was on *“The Principles for Peace”*. IIFWP lecturer Mr. Thomas Pritty gave an in depth presentation of the importance of marriage and family in the process of creating individuals to be a foundation for lasting peace and to function in harmony in society. He explained how the marriage ideally should have a solid foundation in a commitment to God, who wants to see His nature reflected not only in us as individuals, but also in our human relations. Here the family is the cornerstone.

God is the source of truth and life and therefore also the true teacher when we want to know how to use our physical lives. Mr. Pritty pointed out how we can see God's nature from His creation and through that, understand what is expected of us as created beings. Since God's motivation for creating us was His heart of love, it should be possible to find fulfilment through God-centred human relationships, and the principle of living for the sake of others was repeatedly mentioned. One of the conclusions of the lecture was that God's desire on earth for peace and harmony, can only be fulfilled when man is willing to do his part, when he can accomplish his responsibility as God's independent co-creator. Religions have been trying to guide man in that direction, but man must do more than just talk. *"How must God feel if He sees some of his children praising His Holy Name – yet doing nothing to alleviate the suffering of others."*



Tom Pritty gives presentation Principles of Peace

The lecturer stressed that God does not rule by force but respects man's ability to make independent decisions for the sake of true love which can only come about by free commitment. The road to peace starts within the individual and spreads through the school of love, which is the family, to reach the society and nation. *"A society of harmonious, giving families is the foundation for a peaceful nation and a world of such nations is a peaceful world"*.

Mr. Pritty also touched the underlying problem of selfishness, its beginning and how important it is that man can grow out of this childish state of mind. In this connection the education system was mentioned. Presently all is focused on intellectual learning and acquiring of skills, while the education of heart and character is hardly mentioned. With increasing theoretical and practical knowledge and decreasing morals and concern for fellow man, we are heading for disaster.

After the presentation there was set aside about 30 minutes for group discussions and afterwards each of the groups gave a short report of the conclusions that the groups had arrived at. Though the participants came from so many different religious backgrounds, it was very clear that on these fundamental points there was little disagreement. All were very worried about the situation of the family in present day society and the consequences unqualified parents create when they try to raise their children without really knowing how to. Consequences of lack of parental love is evident in many members of the younger generation.



Pastor Arowolo reports from the discussion at his table.

The conversations continued over lunch as people got to know each other better.



Discussion at the tables

The second lecture was on the "Inter-faith Imperative" presented by Halvard Iversen, secretary general of IIFWP Ireland. It traced the relatively short history of religious co-operation and its development in recent years. To improve the present situation there is a desperate need for religious bodies to be able to reach out and love beyond their own rather narrow boundaries. It is not enough to look inwardly and just be interested in the expansion of one's own tradition and congregation. It was pointed out how a narrow-minded attitude leads to moral corruption and separation from the secular society. Religious people should take a lead in helping their fellow man even if he does not always believe as they do. The Bible was quoted,

reminding us that in the gospel of John it says that Jesus was sacrificed because God *"so loved the world"*, not just some narrow religion or denomination. Jesus also showed the example throughout his life of mingling also with the outcasts in society. His choice of friends and disciples therefore did not always go down so well with the religious leaders of the time who were more into following the letter of the law.

Religion is not meant to be the goal in itself. It is for the purpose of helping to develop each person's ability to love unconditionally to enable them to directly experience the true love of God. People of faith have to take a lead in relieving human suffering and the religious council in the UN is an important step in the direction of taking on that responsibility. This would restore the presently declining moral authority and dignity of religious people. IIFWP has previously shown the way by inviting different religious people to participate in practical projects to improve the situation by serving society. The Religious Youth Service ( RYS ) was active in Belfast a few years ago, where a group of young people from



Councillor Jian Fan ( Chinese embassy ) makes a point

different religious backgrounds created a peace garden where people can go to meditate or pray. RYS is very active all around the world and has arranged hundreds of practical projects, serving people in need.



As a response to a theoretical presentation, Mrs. Mary Catney from Belfast gave a hands-on experience from her life growing up in a society where religious tensions made life insecure and unsafe. She spoke about the need to solve the different resentments coming from injustices through many generations and begin with reconciliation with the closest neighbours of a different religious orientation. Her presentation was from the heart and made many of the participants reflect more deeply over the topics of the need to solve the inter-religious strife that exists in so many places.

**Mary Catney from Belfast gives her response.**

The third presentation was about the situation of the UN and the role it should play in today's world. Timothy Read was tracing the history of the organisation and the ideal it was born to represent. He showed the participants the tasks the UN is facing today of peacekeeping and famine relief, Aids prevention, combat of illiteracy and environmental pollution. He asked how the organisation could improve its performance.

With the new problems of global terrorism that became even more in focus after the 9/11 incident in the US, the UN has to find a way to solve the grievances different groups have around the world and help balance the human situation. How do we change the many different attitudes of nations seeking mostly only their own self interest? Some newspapers already declared the UN dead, but the lecturer did not agree with this point of view. There is, however, great room for improvement. An amendment of the UN charter is needed, but this seems difficult to accomplish, though originally it was the intention that after 10 years this should be done.

In the same way as the human body is guided by the invisible human spirit, the external UN politics has to have a solid foundation of spirituality. The weapons for peace have already been pioneered by people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa. Effective methods to resolve past grievances have to be developed and the attitude of service for the sake of others should be the ruling motto. This has to come on a basis of a convergence of fundamental religious principles, and mutual respect and co-operation.



**Dr. Nooh Al-Kaddo Exe. Dir. of Islamic Cultural Centre explains.**

He also laid out certain principles that should be the foundation to help define the “invisible” spiritual yet necessary dimensions to lasting solutions. He stressed God’s involvement, man’s responsibility and the protection of the family. The introduction of an inter-religious council is the first step in that direction and the participants were asked to support the creation of such by writing to the national representatives to the UN to express their hope they would respond to and support the upcoming resolution.



**Buddhist teacher Kelsang Donyo and Quaker representatives Gordon Pearson and Claire Counihan.**

the idea of a religious council in UN and asked how such a council would be able to function since he doubted it would have much power and would probably be ignored by the present political community.

An opportunity was given for a response to the presentation, and Dr. Fathi Akkari from the Islamic Cultural centre gave his opinion. He was questioning



**Prof. Dr. Alakh Pandeya ( Hindu )**

These questions were the topic for a discussion and the participants generally agreed we could not expect a miracle even if the idea of the Council was accepted. It was an important step in the right direction. To change the general attitude is a matter of education and that is not done over night. More serious emphasis on character building and education of heart and personality in the schools was stressed. Some also mentioned courses preparing young people for the responsibility of family and raising children before marrying.



**Ambassador of Peace awards to Betty Lynch, Catherine McHugh, Mary Catney and Dr. Jasbir Puri.**

The IIFWP is giving a special recognition, “**Ambassador for Peace**” to people who try to uphold the principle of "living for the sake of others" found universally in the world's great spiritual and moral traditions. Calling us to look beyond personal or special interests toward the well-being of the larger community, they seek to lead us beyond barriers that divide people, particularly barriers related to differences of race, religion, nationality or culture. Around the world there are presently thousands of people from all kinds of backgrounds that are creating a force for good in the society. Also here in Ireland the numbers of these peace ambassadors are increasing. This time we could recognise four people that we felt should be specially mentioned. They received an enthusiastic applause from conference participants when they were called to the front to receive their certificates.



**Dr. Puri ( Sikh ) and Dr. Satardien ( Muslim ) sign the conference declaration.**

As a conclusion to a successful conference, people were asked to sign a resolution where they committed themselves to work for the ideals the conference had presented and support the UN initiative. Those who wanted, gathered for a group photo with the conference banner. Though the organisers were very pleased with the participation, accomplishment and atmosphere, an evaluation form was passed out to be able to understand if anything could be improved for future conferences. Many of the participants explicitly expressed their desire to attend future events and those who gave their e-mail address will receive the IIFWP newsletters that are following the world-wide activities.

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