

# UPF EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST NEWSLETTER



## 20 YEARS UPF – 80 YEARS UN: WORKING TO ENHANCE WORLD PEACE

By Gudrun Hassinen, Vice-Chair, UPF Germany

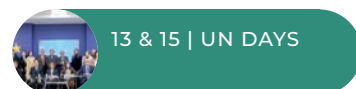
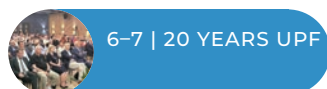
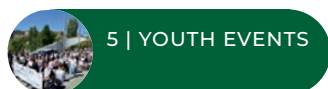
Commemorating 20 years since the founding of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), the European and Middle East (EUME) chapters continued to promote peacebuilding, education, information, and cultural and interreligious exchange via numerous events throughout the region in the second half of 2025. Faith leaders, scholars, women leaders, business leaders, and artists addressed the region's and the world's urgent challenges, building cohesion, trust and friendships. After 20 years, our principles remain unchanged: Peace begins with the family; true leadership is rooted in service and moral character; reconciliation across all boundaries is possible when we center our actions on shared spiritual values.

In November 2025, UPF EUME President Jacques Marion was part of the international UPF-delegation to an Inter-Parliamentary Speakers' Conference (ISC) in Islamabad, Pakistan. Speakers, presidents, deputy speakers and senior legislators from over 40 national parliaments gathered under the theme "Peace, Security and Development." UPF International President Tageldin Hamad addressed the gathering, emphasizing ethical leadership and principled dialogue, and highlighting UPF's pillars of interdependence, mutual prosperity, and universal values as essential to stability and inclusive development.

A week later, President Marion moderated a session at a European Leadership Conference, "Balkan

Stability and European Security," held in Brussels, Belgium, at the European Parliament. The conference was organized by UPF EUME in partnership with the office of Hon. Lukas Mandl, an Austrian member of the European Parliament (MEP). Only two days before the conference, it was announced that Albania is expected to conclude its accession negotiations by the end of 2027 and could join the European Union by 2030, alongside Montenegro.

In addition, national EUME chapters organized a variety of events around UN holidays, such as the International Day of Peace and Human Rights Day. Peace Road events took place in several countries (p. 14), and the topic of freedom and democracy in



conjunction with religious freedom was tackled at the UN offices in Geneva, Switzerland.

Coinciding with the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, UPF International President Hamad in his congratulatory address celebrating 20 years of UPF said:

"As the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly convenes in New York under the banner "Better Together: 80 Years and More for Peace, Development and Human Rights," UPF reaffirms its deep commitment to those universal ideals. For two decades, we have worked to advance the Sustainable

Development Goals through practical initiatives in education, peacebuilding, environmental stewardship, gender equality, youth engagement, and interreligious cooperation.

We know that peace, dignity, and development are inseparable and that a just, sustainable world begins with the conviction that we are one human family under God.

Today we celebrate not only an organization, but a dream. That dream was given form long before 2005, and was inaugurated in New York City when our founders, Dr. Hak Ja Han and her late husband, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, launched UPF and set out on a

historic 100-day world tour to more than 100 nations. They met presidents and parliamentarians, religious leaders and scholars, and called people across the globe to unite behind a vision of peace rooted in spiritual values and universal principles.

"UPF's mission is to renew the existing United Nations and provide a new level of leadership," Reverend Moon had said. That declaration was not merely ceremonial; it was a blueprint for action: a call to unite institutional strength with moral conviction." (p. 9)

Thank you to all Ambassadors for Peace, members and friends!



1 Session 1 (left to right): Mr. Jacques Marion, Hon. Jovan Jovanović, H.E. Albana Dautllari, H.E. Alfred Moisiu, Hon. Lukas Mandl, and H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu

2 Dr. Ján Figel, first EU special envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, speaking by video in the side event "Japan and Human Rights" at the UN Office at Geneva on September 26, 2025

3 On August 9-10, 2025, key UPF EUME leaders gathered in Paris to assess their objectives and strategies.

4 Ten European scholars and experts on religious freedom and experts on religious freedom attended the conference on "Assessing Root Causes of Contemporary Threats to Religious Freedom" held in New York on August 1-3, 2025.

## LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



Mr. Jacques Marion, President, UPF Europe & the Middle East

Dear Readers,

The final months of 2025 reminded us that peace is a daily commitment rooted in dialogue and cooperation.

This issue of our newsletter reflects that spirit through interfaith conferences, parliamentary forums, United Nations international day celebrations, and more. It also highlights a shared global concern over growing threats to religious freedom, which continue to affect minority religions and communities on every

continent, even within democratic societies. At the same time, the UPF Forum on "Balkan Stability and European Security" at the European Parliament pointed to renewed momentum for the long-standing hope of Western Balkans integration into the European Union.

As we enter 2026—the Year of the Horse in Chinese tradition, symbolizing energy and forward movement—the world faces political tension and uncertainty. History reminds us, however, that such moments also can herald meaningful change. In this UN-proclaimed International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development, we move ahead with determination, working alongside our volunteers and partners to deepen mutual understanding and build bridges across divides for a more harmonious future. Thank you for your support!

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS A GOD-GIVEN RIGHT ESSENTIAL TO HUMAN DIGNITY – IT IS NOT A POLITICAL PRIVILEGE

By UPF International

In August, UPF hosted the 2025 Interfaith Leadership Conference in Seoul, Korea, under the theme “Religious Freedom and Universal Values.” UPF President Dr. Tageldin Hamad described the conference as a response to the growing worldwide erosion of religious freedom, including censorship, marginalization, and ideological suppression of faith communities. Religious freedom is a God-given right essential to human dignity and democratic conscience, not a political privilege, he said. The 250 religious leaders

from Korea and around the world urged global solidarity to protect faith as vital to peace, justice, and social cohesion.



## RELIGIOUS LEADERS CALL FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AS A UNIVERSAL RIGHT

By Kaeleigh Moffitt, UPF-United States

Sixty faith leaders and peace advocates from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, and indigenous traditions gathered in Seoul, South Korea, from August 19 to 23 to celebrate interfaith solidarity. The participants of the



2025 Conference for World Religious Leaders, representing 16 nations, agreed that, at its core, faith calls believers to honor God by serving humanity, thus building one family under God. Topics discussed included the role of religious leaders under persecution, the erosion of religious freedom with a case study on South Korea, religious freedom as a human right, and the family as the cornerstone for learning peace, love, and respect. Interfaith prayers, cultural performances, a Worship and Water Ceremony as well as discussions created an atmosphere of shared purpose across diverse faiths.

## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN DOHA, QATAR

From a report by Sarah Ahmed

Vice President of IAYSP EUME Dr. Sarah Ahmed, also representing UPF, participated in the Second World Summit for Social Development 2025 in Doha, Qatar, in November, in order to build partnerships for youth empowerment. Over 14,000 participants from 186 countries, including global leaders, UN agencies, and civil society representatives, focused on eradicating poverty, achieving full employment, and promoting social integration, along the UN 2030 Agenda. Dr. Ahmed also participated, and spoke, in sessions of the pre-summit Doha Solutions Forum and Youth Assembly, where topics included gender equality, mental health, and civic engagement.



Dr. Sarah Ahmed (second from left) speaking in the Doha Solutions Forum about IAYSP's work

REGIONAL NEWS

# BALKAN STABILITY AND EUROPEAN SECURITY DISCUSSED IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

By Jacques Marion and Alan Sillitoe, UPF Europe and Middle East



H.E. Alfred Moisiu looks on as Hon. Lukas Mandl, co-lead member for the Western Balkans, Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group, European Parliament, Austria, and host of the conference, welcomes the participants.

The growing strategic importance of the Balkan region for Europe’s security was the focus of a European Leadership Conference held at the European Parliament in Brussels on November 19, 2025. UPF EUME organized the conference in cooperation with the office of Hon. Lukas Mandl, an Austrian member of the European Parliament (MEP).

Former heads of state, parliamentarians, diplomats, and political leaders from across Europe and the Western Balkans attended the conference amid renewed momentum for European Union enlargement – highlighted by recent European Commission statements framing enlargement as a strategic investment in stability – and by announcements that Albania and Montenegro could complete accession negotiations by 2027 and potentially join the EU by 2030.

UPF EUME President Jacques Marion emphasized the urgency of strengthening stable democracies in the Western Balkans. Host Lukas Mandl underscored the need for bold political leadership, arguing that EU enlargement is essential for a stronger and freer Europe. He lamented the lack of progress, despite revised enlargement methodologies, and called for decisive action.

Several speakers highlighted the fragile democratic landscape of the region. Croatian MEP Davor Ivo Stier



Hon. Klajda Gjoshaj, former Albanian minister of European integration, moderated the dinner session.



Session 1: Hon. Jovan Jovanović, member of Parliament (2016-2020) and ambassador to Indonesia (2011-2014) from Serbia, and H.E. Albana Dautllari, ambassador of Albania to Belgium



Session 1 panel (left to right): Mr. Jacques Marion, Hon. Jovan Jovanović, H.E. Albana Dautllari, H.E. Alfred Moisiu, Hon. Lukas Mandl MEP, H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, and Hon. Davor Ivo Stier MEP

stressed that democratic transformation requires resilience, institutional reform, and genuine conditionality. Former Albanian President Alfred Moisiu warned that unresolved Kosovo–Serbia relations pose serious security risks, criticizing inconsistent EU positions on Kosovo’s recognition and urging decisive EU engagement.

In panel discussions, former Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu described Kosovo’s path from conflict to statehood while warning of ongoing destabilization efforts by Serbia. Albania’s Ambassador to Belgium Albana Dautllari emphasized EU membership as a unifying regional goal. Serbian politician Jovan Jovanović offered a critical view of democratic backsliding in Serbia, calling for stronger EU mechanisms and civil society support.

Speakers highlighted enlargement as a security imperative, warned against EU complacency and external influence, and expressed frustration over stalled accession processes, particularly in North Macedonia. UPF’s Dr. Michael Balcomb emphasized moral and civic leadership as essential foundations for peace, while Croatian MEP Tomislav Sokol concluded that the EU must act decisively during the current window of opportunity to stabilize the region and counter external threats.



Session 2 panel (left to right): Hon. Tomislav Sokol MEP, Hon. Marija Miteva, Hon. Ondřej Kolář MEP, Dr. Michael Balcomb, and Mr. Gani Rroshi

## REGIONAL NEWS

## “THE WORLD MEETS IN MITROVICA” – PRACTICING PEACE

By Ejona Icka, Executive Director, YSP Balkans



The Balkan International Youth Summit for Peace 2025 brought together 120 youth representatives from 33 countries.



The summit culminated in a symbolic Peace Road event, in which participants crossed the Ibar River Bridge to demonstrate unity and solidarity.

The Balkan International Youth Summit for Peace 2025 convened in Mitrovica, a small Kosovan town that is “divided” by the Ibar River between the historically hostile Serbian and Albanian communities. Held in the South Mitrovica Cultural Center from September 20 to 22, the summit was organized by Youth and Students for Peace (YSP) Balkans with the support of UPF. Some 120 young people, representing organizations from 33 countries, transformed this site of conflict into a bridge of connection and cooperation.

Topics of discussion included “Inclusive Governance,

Programs, and Youth as a Factor for Peace and Development”; “Youth and Integrity: Combating Corruption Through Education and Participation”; “Youth-Led Integrity Projects” with Klajda Gjoshja, former Albanian minister of European Integration; and “Mental Health & Dialogue.”

Former presidents of Albania and Kosovo – H.E. Alfred Moisiu and H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, respectively – participated in the summit and gave talks that impressed the young participants. In addition, the mayors and the deputy mayor of the two Mitrovica communities and of Preševo, the cultural center of Albanians in Serbia, participated.

## YOUNG ACHIEVERS HONORED AT CEREMONY IN THE UK PARLIAMENT

By Robin Marsh, Secretary General, UPF-UK

At the 2025 Young Achievers Awards Ceremony at the UK Parliament hosted by UPF-UK, 23 exceptional young achievers were honored in the presence of Members of Parliament Luke Taylor, Andy Slaughter, Jim Dickson, and Johnathan Hinder. Each young achiever showcased a maturity and sense of responsibility well beyond their years, whether tackling environmental sustainability, addressing mental health stigma, mentoring at-risk youth, or collaborating with law enforcement to build safer communities.

The awardees’ descriptions of their life experiences and personal breakthroughs challenged us to think bigger, care deeper, and act with greater urgency and unity. Mr Bogdan Pammer, president of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification UK, advised the awardees that lasting

peace or change can best be accomplished when motivated by the divine within us, irrespective of belief, and that this needs nurturing. More than a celebration, the event was a call to action, telling us that the future is not a distant dream, but a shared responsibility we all carry today.



The Young Achievers Awards 2025 – more than a celebration, but a call to action: The future is not a distant dream, but a shared responsibility we all carry today!

UPF & UN ANNIVERSARIES

## 20 YEARS UPF – 80 YEARS UN: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE



*Albania: More than 160 persons filled the Alfred Moisiu Hall of UPF Albania's Peace Embassy for the celebration titled "The World at a Crossroads: Principles of Peace – a Necessity."*



*Austria: Renowned Brazilian flutist James Strauss performed at a "Magic Moments" concert and a 200-year Austrian-Brazilian relations event, both hosted by UPF Austria.*



*Czechia: UPF Czechia President Dr. Juraj Lajda described UPF's guiding principles, mission and activities, both locally and internationally, at a celebratory program.*



*Hungary: UPF Hungary celebrated at the Benczúr Hotel with patron Kamilla Dévai Nagy, a Liszt Prize-winning guitarist-singer and Ambassador for Peace, along with her students from the Chronicle Music School.*



*Lebanon: UPF Lebanon brought together Ambassadors for Peace and other leaders from various fields, including the principal of a well-known high school and two official representatives from the Municipality of Beirut.*



*United Kingdom: Ambassadors for Peace, community leaders, partners, and long-standing supporters of UPF UK celebrated at a Charity Gala Dinner at the Kensington Hilton in London.*

## UPF &amp; UN ANNIVERSARIES

## VALUES PROMOTED AS SOLUTION FOR TROUBLED WORLD

By Gudrun Hassinen, Vice-Chair, UPF Germany



Lake Constance, between Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, was the meeting site.

More than 50 participants from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein met in Meersburg on Lake Constance on 1 and 2 November for a UPF conference titled “The World at a Turning Point – What Values Will Secure Our Future?”

Speakers from politics, academia, religion, and civil society discussed challenges facing the United Nations, the impact of power-driven politics, and the need for dialogue and cooperation. Presentations examined human dignity from Christian, Islamic, philosophical, and historical perspectives, as well as the social importance of family structures. UPF representatives emphasized ethical responsibility and spiritual perspectives in international relations.

## UPF FRANCE DISCUSSES UN’S FUTURE

By Jacques Marion, President, UPF France

The French UPF chapter in November discussed the theme “At 80 – What Future for the UN?” The Paris event examined the UN’s founding principles, evolving goals, and future challenges amid global tensions, conflicts, and environmental crises weakening multilateralism.

Professor Emmanuel Dupuy, president of the Institute for European Perspective and Security Studies, highlighted the rise of non-alignment and multipolarity as potential responses to institutional stagnation. He criticized the anachronistic veto system and advocated openness to alternative governance models.

Jacques Marion stressed the role of religious diplomacy,

noting its historical exclusion from the UN and its growing relevance in addressing ethnic and religious conflicts. The conference ended with a constructive debate among participants.



Professor Emmanuel Dupuy (seated, center) was the keynote speaker.

## UPF SLOVAKIA CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY

By UPF Slovakia staff

Slovakian UPF members and friends remembered the inauguration of their chapter, when Rev. and Mrs. Moon

visited Bratislava on October 31, 2005. A video and slide show showed the numerous activities since then, greatly enhanced since the opening of a Peace Embassy in 2021.



New Ambassadors for Peace (left to right): Pranjal Milovník, leader of the Sri Chinmoy Meditation Centre; MP Dr. Marek Krajčí; and prominent religious liberty advocate Dr. Ján Figel’

Dr. Ján Figel’, former Slovak politician and religious liberty advocate, and Member of Parliament Marek Krajčí lauded UPF activities; interfaith activist Robert Leskovjanský described interreligious efforts; Mr. Raghunatha from the Hare Krishna movement quoted from the Vedas. Albanian Ambassador Dr. Artem Hanku, Renata Poláková from the AllatRa movement, and journalist Igor Cibula also expressed their appreciation.

UNITED NATIONS

# “NO PEACE WITHOUT WOMEN” AND “NO MORE WAR – CAN WE?”

By Mara Probst and Mariia Anapreichyk, WFWPI UN Geneva



Session I (left to right): UNESCO Artist for Peace Ms. Giulia Clara Kessous, Ms. Patricia Elias, Ms. Carolyn Handschin, Ms. Asya Varbanova, and Ms. Olivia Le Poidevin



The event at the United Nations Office at Geneva was very well attended.

Together with the Swiss Women’s Federation for World Peace, UPF Switzerland in October hosted half of a two-session conference at the United Nations in Geneva about women’s role in peacebuilding. Under the title “No More War: Can We?” UPF Switzerland President Mr. Heiner Handschin described the mainly untapped faith-based and educational approaches to peace processes. He pleaded for greater inclusion of world religions’ wisdom and efforts, in combination with political, economic, and social perspectives.

Ms. Frédérique Seidel of the World Council of Churches (WCC) reflected on the importance of healing as a prerequisite for sustainable peace. Ms. Paulette Lacroix, representative of the International Office of Catholic Education (OIEC), explained that education is “a lever for reconciliation and equality.” She stated: “Peace is built in classrooms. Teaching is already sowing the seeds of hope.”

From a youth perspective, Ms. Ejona Icka, director of the Youth and Students for Peace office for UN relations, reported on YSP’s recent peacebuilding project in the conflicted town of Mitrovica, Kosovo.

Mr. Stefano Bosco, director of public and international affairs of the LDS community, drew on studies linking faith, purpose, and psychological well-being, emphasizing that the foundation of peace lies in finding meaning through faith.

Mr. Jacques Marion, chairman of UPF EUME, also

emphasized the spiritual side of peace. Although the United Nations was established without a religious chamber, it is time to introduce an Interreligious Council alongside political bodies, he said. “Religion has too often divided humanity,” he said, “but if it can divide, it can also reconcile.”

In a written endorsement sent to the conference, H.E. Ambassador Mxolisi Nkosi of South Africa stated: “South Africa’s own journey from oppression to freedom has taught us that peace is never the mere absence of war, but the presence of justice, dignity, and inclusion. Women were at the heart of our liberation struggle, and they remain central to our ongoing efforts to build a democratic, equitable, and peaceful society.”



Session II panel (left to right): Mr. Jacques Marion, chairman, UPF Europe and Middle East; Ms. Ejona Icka, director, Office for UN Relations, Youth and Students for Peace; Ms. Frédérique Seidel, senior advisor on child rights, World Council of Churches; Ms. Paulette Lacroix, International Office of Catholic Education, UN Office; Mr. Heiner W. Handschin, president, UPF Switzerland, and director, Office for UN Relations, Geneva; Mr. Stefano Bosco, director, Public and International Affairs, LDS Charities, Geneva

FOUNDERS' MESSAGE

## THE UNITED NATIONS AND WORLD PEACE

*From its inception, the United Nations was established to promote a set of universal values: peace and security, self-determination of peoples, social progress and development, and human dignity. In the preamble to the Charter, its founders pledged “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to uphold human rights and justice, and to advance living standards for all.”*

### Dr. Sun Myung Moon during the World Tour to Inaugurate the Universal Peace Federation

*“I have always prayed sincerely that the United Nations would be an institution of peace, and that it would uphold God’s will for the realization of eternal world peace.*

*True love is the spirit of public service; its essence is to give, to live for the sake of others and for the sake of the whole. True love has the power to dissipate the barriers fallen human beings created, including national boundaries and the barriers of race and even religion.”*



*After the UPF inauguration at New York’s Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts on September 12, 2005, Dr. and Mrs. Moon embarked on their first UPF world tour.*



*Dr. Moon is welcomed to Albania by President Alfred Moisiu.*

### Dr. Hak Ja Han at the National Assembly Hall, Seoul, Korea, on 15 February 2006

*“The UN was established after World War II and is already celebrating its 70th year. And whereas there are UN Headquarters Offices in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, there is no such office in Asia. Yet, when we observe the current state of the world, the geopolitical, economic and political center of gravity of our world is shifting toward Asia. With this in mind, UPF and other affiliated organisations of our movement are advocating that the establishment of a fifth UN Office in the land where, 66 years ago, the UN intervened, shedding blood, sweat and tears for peace, be considered.” (2006.02.15, National Assembly Hall, Seoul, Korea)*



*1 In Georgia, Dr. and Mrs. Moon, with Dr. Joon Ho Seuk (second from left), receive a gift from Armen Azizian, Armenia’s deputy minister of culture and sport (left), and Rahim Huseynov, former prime minister of Azerbaijan (right), in recognition of the South*



*Caucasus Peace Initiative. 2 Philippines President Gloria Arroyo greets Dr. and Mrs. Moon. 3 In Uruguay, Dr. Moon is welcomed by President Tabaré Vázquez.*



### “The United Nations at 80 – A Partner for Peace and Sustainable Development” Dr. Tageldin Hamad, President, UPF International

*“In accordance with the UPF charter, we will continue to strengthen the culture of peace through peace education, family strengthening, and development initiatives. UPF will remain aligned with UN priorities, contributing moral,*

*spiritual, and interfaith perspectives that complement and reinforce the political and humanitarian work of the United Nations.”*

REGIONAL NEWS

## THE UN'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST – WITH MAJOR-GENERAL PATRICK GAUCHAT

By Hod Ben Zvi, Chair, UPF Israel



Major-General Patrick Gauchat with moderator Chantal Chételat Komagata of UPF-Switzerland; Dr. Shelley Elkayam, a professor of intercultural theology; and Dr. Eldad Pardo, research director

Major-General Patrick Gauchat, a Swiss national and chief of staff for the UN Truce Supervision Organization, was the main speaker at a UPF Switzerland webinar on the UN's peacekeeping mission in the Middle East – first begun in 1948. Despite ongoing challenges, he envisions sustainable peace and harmony in this conflict-torn region. His strong hope for future peace lies in his experience with the fundamental goodness of the people he has met and his belief that a culture of peace is possible.

of the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education

## INTERRELIGIOUS SUKKOT CELEBRATION IN JERUSALEM

By Hod Ben Zvi, Chair, UPF Israel

UPF Israel partnered with Jerusalem's Reform Jewish community in October to celebrate the Sukkot festival. With Rabbi Ada Zavidov in the Har-El Synagogue, participants sang praise songs and reflected on peacemaking. With interfaith openness, they welcomed all guests with respect and love – Jews, Arabs, Christians, Unificationists.

Rev. Fursan Zumot, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Palestinian Christian town of Beit Jala, testified about his journey from hatred to love for his Jewish brethren. Dr. Shelley Elkayam, poet and translator, recited two poems about peace.



Mr. Hod Ben Zvi, chair of UPF Israel, spoke of UPF's vision of "one family under God."

Knesset Member Dr. Ofer Cassif praised the deeply rooted Jewish ethos evident in the gathering. Mr. Hod Ben Zvi of UPF Israel elaborated on their shared vision to advance peace as "one family under God."

## INTERRELIGIOUS COOPERATION IN LEBANON

By Hermine Schellen, UPF Lebanon



Thomas and Hermine Schellen join religious leaders at a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday.

UPF Lebanon was invited to join a special event in Saida in September celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad. A thousand people, including many religious leaders, participated. Musical performances alternated with speeches given by various leaders, including Lebanon UPF President Thomas Schellen.

As often before, we prepared 70 food boxes (thanks to donations from Germany) as humanitarian aid. To our joyful surprise, our host Sheikh Sohayb, together with his Olfah Association team, had prepared 70 small UPF logos to be put on the boxes.

## REGIONAL NEWS

## THREE-NATION SEMINAR FOR AMBASSADORS FOR PEACE

By Gani Rroshi, Secretary General, UPF Balkans



The seminar was held at the Ęmbla Hotel in Struga, North Macedonia.



The meeting brought together around 70 people from Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia.

Some 70 local Peace Council leaders and Ambassadors for Peace from Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia convened in the North Macedonian town of Struga from 19 to 21 December 2025, for a seminar titled “Love God, Love People, Love Nation.” The weekend became a beautiful human and spiritual experience with people feeling united by common values and the goal of contributing to building peace. There was an introduction to UPF’s philosophy, the Fundamental Principles of Peace, and discussions on the importance of applying these Principles. The participants liked the morning meditation and the time set aside for reflection and exchange, and there were festive evenings with songs and dances. All agreed that peace is not just a concept but a daily commitment that starts with oneself, family and community. The mayor of Struga and several other attendees were awarded the Ambassador for Peace title.

## UPF ALBANIA AT 20TH INTERNATIONAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE IN SHKODRA

By Gani Rroshi, Secretary General, UPF Albania

For the third consecutive year, UPF Albania participated as a partner and active contributor in the 20th International and Interdisciplinary Conference in the city of Shkodra, organized by several Albanian and foreign scientific institutions. The November conference, titled “Development in Troubled Times,” brought together researchers, lecturers, professionals, and institutional representatives from 26 countries.

Speeches were delivered by Professor Dr. Tonin Gjuraj, rector of Luigj Gurakuqi University of Shkodra; Mr. Skënder Durmishi, ambassador of Kosovo to Albania; Professor Dr. Lekë Sokoli, chairman of the Albanian Institute of Sociology, and others. On behalf of UPF, greetings were presented

by Mr. Ali Laçe, coordinator of the Albanian Peace Council, and Mr. Gani Rroshi, UPF Balkans executive director. Five distinguished lecturers from various universities and institutions, nominated by the Albanian Institute of Sociology, were honored with UPF’s Ambassador for Peace award.



Organizers and contributors of the Shkodra conference



### UPF Albania Signs Cooperation Agreements with Albanian municipalities

Ms. Majlinda Cara, mayor of the town of Kurbin, and Mr. Dëfrim Methasani, president of UPF Albania, on 9 October sign one of the many cooperation agreements between UPF and Albanian municipalities made in 2025.

## REGIONAL NEWS

**“DO NOT FORGET THE BURMESE PEOPLE”**

By Francesca Radaelli, online newspaper *Il Dialogo di Monza*

This is the appeal by Mr. Kim Aris, son of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, a Burmese politician and author. He spoke in the Italian city of Monza at a roundtable promoted by UPF and the Italy-Burma Friendship Association.

Mr. Aris described the suffering in Myanmar under the military regime since its coup in 2021: “The numbers show 6,000 people killed; the resumption of capital punishment; 20,000 political prisoners, including my mother. Two people die in prison every month; others are tortured and denied medical care. Cities and refugee camps have been bombed; more than 3.5 million people are displaced into the forests. Over 20 million people—about half the population—need humanitarian assistance.” Mr. Aris also voiced grave concern for his mother, now 80, whose place of detention is unknown and whose health condition is serious.



Mr. Kim Aris, son of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, with interpreter Mr. Mauro Sarasso

Ms. Albertina Soliani, former senator and longtime friend of Aung San Suu Kyi's, placed the crisis in a broader geopolitical frame. Mr. Roberto Rampi, a two-term member of Parliament, maintained the hope that despite the crisis of democracies, new generations will display a radical commitment to justice.

**200 YEARS OF AUSTRIA-BRAZIL RELATIONS**

By Peter Haider, President, UPF Austria



H.E. Eduardo Paes Saboia, ambassador of Brazil to Austria



Cutting the cake celebrating 200 years of Austria-Brazil relations

Celebrating 200 years of Austria-Brazil relations, UPF Austria hosted an event together with ABRASA (Casa do Brasil na Austria) under its initiative "Austria-Brazil Bilateral Forum in Movement." Speakers included UPF Austria President Mr. Peter Haider; H.E. Eduardo Paes Saboia, ambassador of Brazil to Austria, who summarized the 200 years of Brazil-Austria diplomatic relations; H.E. Dr. Stefan Scholz, former Austrian ambassador to Brazil; ABRASA Institute Vice President Mr. Luis Roberto Malheiros; Dr. Uwe Christian Plachetka, an Austrian historian and anthropologist who discussed how culture, historical memory, and a

long relationship can sustain long-lasting alliances and strengthen trust, mutual recognition, and cooperation; and Ms. Maria Umbelino, CEO of Brasil Mata Viva, who spoke on “Environmental Preservation Through Sustainable Practices, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance),” reflecting on Brazil as a biodiversity powerhouse and strategic actor within the South American trade bloc Mercosur. Brazilian flutist James Strauss introduced his performance by saying that musical diplomacy, art and culture are central pillars for integration and dialogue.

UN DAYS

## UN HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

### HUMAN RIGHTS DAY EVENT HIGHLIGHTS FREEDOM OF FAITH

The Italian chapters of UPF and the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) observed Human Rights Day in the European Union offices in Rome on December 11, 2025. Speakers from institutional, media and academic fields addressed the widening gap between human rights principles and present realities. They highlighted freedom of faith, belief and conscience as a cornerstone of peaceful coexistence and European integration.

Ms. Elena Grech of the European Commission Representation in Italy stressed that human rights are central to the EU's identity and credibility, as are the Rule of Law, press freedom and judicial independence. Journalist Mr. Marco Respinti cautioned against turning commemorations into empty rituals and defended rights as being inherent to human nature.

Ms. Raffaella Di Marzio addressed discrimination against religious minorities and coercive "deprogramming"



Human Rights Day event panelists, Ambassadors for Peace, and audience members

practices, while Mr. Angelo Lucarella distinguished constitutional recognition from real implementation, identifying populism and fundamentalism as converging risks. Mr. Riccardo Burigana traced Catholic teaching up to the Vatican's declaration of *Dignitatis Humanae* and the "Spirit of Assisi," and Mr. Matteo Luigi Napolitano discussed the diplomatic tension between the 1948 Declaration and the 1990 Cairo Declaration.



Geneva, Switzerland: During the 60th session of the UN Human Rights Council, UPF hosted its fourth side event in Geneva this year to discuss religious freedom and related concerns. Participants spoke on developments in Japan affecting members of the Unification Church.

Left to right: Mr. Jacques Marion, Ms. Patricia Duval, Ms. Yoshiko Nishi, and Mr. Norishige Kondo



The Netherlands: Observance at the Antonius van Padua Church in Nijmegen, "Human Rights, Our Everyday Essentials"



France: Conference on "Human Rights and Our Responsibility" in Paris



Czech Republic: "Human Rights as an Essential Part of Our Daily Lives" conference at the Association of Scientific and Technical Societies in Prague



Slovakia: The panel discussion "Media and Religious Freedom: Do They Protect, Ignore, or Endanger Religious Minorities and New Religions?"

PEACE ROAD



PEACE ROAD  
2025

*“Peace Road” is a project that promotes peace and interdependence. It originated in the International Peace Highway project first proposed by Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon at the 10th International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences in 1981 in South Korea. Here is a selection of photos from Peace Road events in this region.*



*Ireland: Participants in a Peace Road walk in Dublin offered interfaith prayers at the Famine Memorial and continued with a forum titled "An Gorta Mór" – The Great Famine – Creating a Successful Nation by Overcoming Famine Legacy.*



*Belgium commemorated the 190th anniversary of Europe's first passenger railway with a Peace Road event beginning at Schaerbeek railway station, built in 1887 and now part of the Train World Museum.*



*Helsinki, Finland: A Peace Road walk featured three-term MP Rev. Lauri Oinonen and priest Teemu Toivonen of the largest Orthodox church in northern and western Europe, Uspenski Cathedral.*



*Stockholm, Sweden: The Peace Road march was combined with a conference organized by interfaith activist Nathan Söderblom to commemorate 100 years since the first ecumenical conference in 1925.*



*Armenia: Celebrating both the country's Independence Day and International Day of Peace by hiking to the summit of 2,597-meter Mount Azhdahak.*



*The border between Germany, Austria and Czechia: To commemorate International Day of Peace, participants hiked to the mountaintop border triangle after an interfaith breakfast with Mayor Michael Leitner in the nearby town of Schwarzenberg, Austria.*



*At the second Bulgaria-Romania Peace Road event in Giurgiu, Romania, families spent time bonding and building stronger and deeper connections.*



*Athens, Greece: Peace Road participants, accompanied by a police escort, walked to Pnyx Hill, where Athenians as early as 507 BC held popular assemblies.*



*Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Peace Road activists informed passers-by about the international Peace Road project.*

UN DAYS

# UN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE 2025

*“Perhaps the world’s turbulence is not what disturbs our hearts — perhaps our inner chaos disturbs the world. Peace begins within us: in our hearts, our breath, our words, and the way we listen to one another. Maybe the world is not falling apart—it is being remade.”*  
 – Sebene Selassie, meditation teacher

## Danish Meeting Expresses Peace in Action



Under the theme “ACT NOW for a Peaceful World,” UPF Denmark celebrated the International Day of Peace in the historic Landsting Chamber of the Danish Parliament, now its largest meeting room. The 150 participants included Ambassadors for Peace, politicians, religious and community leaders, scholars, artists, and NGO representatives. Inspired by UN Secretary-General António Guterres’ message that “Peace cannot wait—and it begins with us,” the event encouraged reflection on how individuals, civil society, and Denmark can take meaningful action for peace. The gathering was a living expression of peace in action — a time of presence, insight, and hope, genuine dialogue, mutual respect, and the spirit of unity.



1 Hon. Yildiz Akdogan MP hosted the conference.

Photo © Alan Thagaard.

2 The conference took place in the historic former Landsting Chamber of the Danish Parliament.

Photo © Alan Thagaard.



Munich, Germany: Interreligious breakfast



Düsseldorf, Germany: Special guided tour through the Garden of Religions in Recklinghausen.



Reykjavik, Iceland: Commemorative event with representatives of Iceland's interfaith community



Chişinău, Moldova: A vibrant event for more than 140 children, parents, and volunteers



Oslo, Norway: A celebration with eight faith communities in the Oslo main library



Lisbon, Portugal: The symposium “Bridges of Peace, Sustainability, and Global Solidarity” promoted a vision of peace and responsibility.

## INTERNATIONAL

# UPF TAKES PART IN DEBATE AT INTER-PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKERS' CONFERENCE (ISC) IN ISLAMABAD

By UPF International

The Senate of Pakistan convened an ISC on 11 to 12 November 2025 in Islamabad under the theme "Peace, Security and Development." Speakers, presidents and senior legislators from over 40 national parliaments attended. A UPF International delegation under the leadership of Chairman Dr. Tageldin Hamad was also invited and offered input at the general debate.

Chairman of the Pakistani Senate H.E. Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani introduced the ISC as a new platform for structured inter-parliamentary engagement, enabling parliamentary diplomacy to build trust and develop coordinated approaches to shared concerns.

UPF Chairman Dr. Hamad in his address highlighted ethical governance, interdependence with cooperation,

and mutual prosperity that will protect human dignity. Dr. Hamad emphasized that service to others is the basis for social stability and that parliaments convert values into legislation, oversight, and institutional practice.

The conference concluded with the adoption of the Islamabad Communiqué, which reaffirmed parliaments' responsibility to strengthen international law, support inclusive development, and advance cooperation among legislative bodies. It highlighted reconciliation, mediation, implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, climate-resilient development, digital governance, and stronger institutional capacity. Delegates stressed coordinated action on global risks, including terrorism, climate change, food and water insecurity, poverty and cyber threats.



Dr. Tageldin Hamad, international chairman of UPF, addresses the conference.



Left to right: Dr. Tageldin Hamad, international chairman of UPF; H.E. Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, chairman of the Senate of Pakistan and founding chairman of ISC; and Hon. Ek Nath Dhakal, secretary general of ISC

## UPF Europe & Middle East Newsletter

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

- |         |                                                                                                                    |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15 May  | <i>International Day of Families</i><br><i>Events at the UN in Geneva and the Senate in Rome</i>                   |
| 1 June  | <i>Global Day of Parents</i>                                                                                       |
| 30 June | <i>International Day of Parliamentarism</i><br><i>Conference on Media Freedom and Democracy in Western Balkans</i> |

See the calendar of events at [www.eume.upf.org/agenda/events](http://www.eume.upf.org/agenda/events)