



USFMEP



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US Federation for Middle East Peace

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Event Report

Muslim Christian and Jewish Women Building Bridges for Peace and Understanding

The U.S. Federation for Middle East Peace (USFMEP) put that question to the test during a panel discussion which took place February 28, 2008 at the United Nations headquarters in New York. The event was part of the 52nd UN Commission on the Status of Women entitled “Muslim, Jewish and Christian Women Building Bridges for Peace and Understanding” and brought together women from the three monolithic religions who share the same vision of a world free of violence, hatred and animosity. The discussion attracted an impressive number of attendees eager to partake in the intellectual exchange, share their personal experiences and add to the pool of diverse ideas, perceptions and hopes for the future. Mrs. Sally Kader opened the discussion with a call on all women whatever role they fill in society as mothers, daughters sisters or wives to remain grounded in the hope that interfaith outreach is an essential step in bringing down the barriers that have been erected over the years between the peoples of different faiths, stressing the importance of returning to the root message of coexistence that every major religion preaches. The first Speaker, June Jacobs, who travelled from the UK, spoke about the broader human strive in a world free of violence and that those hopes are very much plausible with the firm commitment of people who share a pacifist desire to be embracive of differences, tolerant to diversity and open to dialogue.

Dr. Diane Marie Steele, president of University of Saint Mary in Kansas, shed light on the divergence between the original teachings in the Bible and the life of Jesus Christ and the prevalent human interpretations of tradition and practice. Rigid indoctrinations of the faith are, in her opinion, should matter less than the more vital principles and morals by which one lives. Correlatively, if one is to follow a strict adherence to Christianity, then the goal should be the incorporation of how Christ lived and interacted with others (whether Christian or otherwise).

The following speaker Kathleen Peratis, who is a lawyer and a member of Human Rights Watch, illuminated the discussion with an analogy about a British government’s search for the most qualified tunnel-construction firm. The

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contenders were all highly reputable and competitive conglomerates, except for a these two fellows who suggested completed the project for a fraction of the price while using primitive tools. The tunnel was to be built by having one man start in France and the other in Britain, if they meet half way, the project is accomplished and if they do not the British government gets two tunnels for the cost of one. The moral behind is that there is always bound to be a way to make things work, even in the most impractical situations. The light at the end of the tunnel is bound to appear with steadfast perseverance during hardship. She also spoke about her experience defending victims of (religious) discrimination particularly that of Muslims living and working in the United States. Ms. Peratis expressed her regret at the entrenched discriminatory patterns and mechanisms in the American system even though it contradicts the provisions of the Constitution and hopes of the Founding Fathers of America.

Ms. Souad Smiej from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Kingdom of Morocco tackled the question of coexistence between various faiths by drawing on the experience of Jews living for centuries in Morocco after they escaped religious prosecution in Spain. Morocco was a safe haven for Jewish immigrants and they lived and prospered in Morocco for generations while preserving their religious identity and heritage. After the creation of the State of Israel, many left but a lot chose to stay in Morocco which they considered as their home country. The example of Jewish Moroccans testifies to the fact that religion is only one of many dimensions that form people's identities, that there are other cementing factors that bridge the cultural divide between groups and rally people around a common cause, that 'to live and let live'. Further expounder was given by Ms. Houda Abadi, the director of the Unity Programs of Abraham's Vision organization. As a Moroccan in origin, she drew on the example Jewish-Muslim living in peace with each other and bewailed the recent terrorist bombing attacks in Casablanca, a city that has for centuries been a cultural cross-road for people from various parts of the world. Ms. Abadi pointed to the unfortunate inclination that is behind much of the violence in today's world, that of dehumanizing the other and degrading their status to a less than worthy level to justify the hate-laden agendas of annihilation.

The sorrowful state that the three Monolithic religions have reached today is by no means irreversible. There are countless people from all camps who are committed and hopeful that the similarities that Muslims, Jews and Christians share are more potent seeds of peace than the narrow agendas that are being propagated. USFMEP created the occasion to sow those seeds for peace, understanding and interfaith dialogue. The guests and attendees were all appreciative of the opportunity to participate in an event that allowed them to express their opinions, sentiments and concerns freely. USFMEP proved that bridges can be built between people of different faiths, bridges that not only unite people to stand on common ground but also connect our faiths to the original messages taught by the Holy Books and the Prophets, messages of loving respecting and embracing our differences.