

## UNITING for PEACE

2014 Spring Conference - March 29 - at Wesley's Chapel, London, 10.30am - 4.45pm

Theme: 'A New Momentum for Peace: No Syria Intervention: What Next?'

UfP Chair **Vijay Mehta** welcomed some 100 members and supporters attending, explained the work of UfP and the role of its 4D Campaign for World Peace promoting 'a global framework for disarmament and democracy'. The key conference issues were: how to stop the violence in Syria, how UN institutions could more effectively make the world more peaceful, how UK could use soft power for world peace. He introduced conference Chair, Rita Payne, President of the Commonwealth Journalists' Association.

**Rita Payne:** The language of moderation was not strong enough in global affairs today. People felt a sense of helplessness when considering world problems. It was necessary for occasions like this to find possible ways forward, especially on Syria. She introduced the first speaker:

**Tim Llewellyn**, former BBC Middle East Correspondent & Author, who had covered several major Middle East conflicts: If people starting the Syria uprising had known the terrible toll in human life 3 years on, they would not have begun. The West should certainly not intervene, but should provide humanitarian aid. Syria was 'an uprising waiting to happen'; its roots were deep in history. In 1918 Greater Syria was divided by League of Nations mandates: Iraq and Palestine came under Britain, Syria and Lebanon under France. France truncated Syria with 'divide and rule' policies for its various communities eg. Alawites area given autonomy, but left Syria in 1945, bankrupt. Creation of state of Israel was a disaster for Syria. With rise of Arab nationalism in Cold War era, West incorrectly saw Syria as ally of Communism. The 1960s coming to power of the Baath Party brought Syria welcome stability, but various opposition and Islamist uprisings were ruthlessly suppressed eg. 1981 massacres. "The people of Syria have

experienced great instability since 1920s, so today many still fear instability. Minorities like Christians and Alawites, and many Sunnis too, want the status quo." The alternatives to Assad are seen as dangerous and incoherent, so support for the regime had grown. West had welcomed the uprising because it wanted to break the link between Iran, Syria and Hezbollah, which would help Israel, but this has not happened. Thawing US-Iran relations offered hope for possible diplomatic breakthrough, but US-Russia crisis over Crimea had made Putin more determined to support Assad. In Middle East, the forces against dictators were mostly not coherent and lacked united programmes. Llewellyn concluded by posing the question: 'how

would the West react if there were a Palestinian uprising against the Israeli government?"

Rita Payne, noting there were now over 1000 different rebel groups in Syria, said it was clear "there are no simple answers". She introduced:

**Baria Alamuddin**, Foreign Editor, *Al Hayat*, a Lebanese British. "My life has been much affected by Israeli aggression against Lebanon." The Syria conflict affected all neighbouring countries, focused all regional issues and showed the weakness of the world community. Over 200,000 deaths yet no solution so far, showed world politics today lacked any morality. She thought no one wanted Assad to remain in power. The conflict was complicated by the ever-deeper divide within global Islam between Shia and Sunnis, which "threatens the whole fabric of society in Middle East." Iran was interfering in Syria with big financial support to Hezbollah, a 'state within a state' in Lebanon and with pro-Assad fighters in Syria. Syria's future looked grim, as there was no end in sight to the conflict. UN aid convoys urgently needed free access inside Syria. The fundamental issue was 'how to restore world order?' [Responding, a young Iranian in the audience stressed intervention in Syria by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other states].

**Dilip Hiro**, journalist, Middle East expert & author of 34 books eg *Dictionary of the Middle East*: since 1945 Middle East had been torn by many conflicts and foreign interventions; Israel had twice attacked Lebanon, which Syria regarded as its 'younger sister'. Lebanon's civil war had gone through fifteen phases; it had ended with a Syria-US deal over the Iraq-Kuwait crisis. Iran supported Assad "because Syria has never been under US control". Iran sees Syria's civil war as anti-Israel, but Saudi Arabia sees it as a Sunni-Shia conflict. In Syria, "the army is fully behind Assad" because 70% of the professional soldiers were Alawites. Syria was no longer just a civil war but also one between powers in a multi-polar world, in which President Obama recognised the limits of US power [2/3 of Congress were opposed to US 'surgical strikes' against Syria]. US would not get involved in Syria, and West would not fight alongside Jihadists against Assad. The war would eventually end 'with exhaustion' - but could go on another 2-5 years.

**Dr. Thomas Daffern**, philosopher, Director of the International Institute of Peace Studies: rather than discussing intervention or non-intervention, "we should articulate peace policy." It was not a soft option, but involved soft power, required hard will, and would be in all states' interest. In 17th century King James I & VI had tried to stop war in Europe by mediation. Today there was need to set up an EU Mediation Service and peace office to deal with EU border disputes. For Syria, UK could offer to arrange neutral mediation to all parties. It was important to engage with Syrian intellectuals. Syria needed: access for aid, disarmament on all sides,

local security arrangements, elections, a 'truth and reconciliation commission'; UK should advocate all this. A UK warship could become a neutral facility as a 'peacemaking ship'. Such a peace policy could succeed where 'foreign' and 'defence' policies fail. It was in no one's interest for Syria's civil war to continue. Generally, a Peace Policy made good moral sense, fostered human solidarity and made people more virtuous, converted enemies into friends, and benefitted civilisation making for a happy and enlightened world.

.....speech by **Vijay Mehta**.....Read full text of his speech on the latest news underneath conference report:

**Anthony Russell**, founder of the Chandos Foundation [Friends for Peace]: At the heart of peacemaking should be the spirit of unconditional love, which ran through all the great religions. Real love was a force coming from beyond us, was groundwork of peace, "sets you free" and enables understanding "of what real peace is". The problem in the world now was "this genuine love is treated like a commodity - exactly what it is not." Knowing genuine love as unconditional meant there was no need to judge other people, only situations. The world needed to find this one spirit around which it could unite. "We are in denial that there is no retribution in nature, that humanity is becoming more civilised, and that understanding, co-operation and compromise are always preferable to confrontation and reciprocal violence. We are in denial of the true spirit of love we know from birth, but are subsequently seldom shown by example". This had caused profound confusion in the individual and a global schizoid culture, with mass media and nation states' propaganda declaring hate, greed, violence and retribution as necessary evils, even acceptable in daily life. The world needed fundamental mind-set change based on the primacy of unconditional love, which would affect the international level, and bring world peace through international law.

**Leena Patel**, Inspirational Leadership Adviser: 'We must overcome the Us and Them mentality; moral outrage should not be partial.' Continuing along this path of pointing out the defects of 'the other' could lead to the end of civilisation. It was essential to restore compassion into world politics. "We need to awaken individually and collectively" to create a new chapter in UK politics by giving up 'the mentality of separation' and finding a new unity affirming the goodness in all.

#### **KEY ISSUES raised in OPEN FORUM:**

- : Need to oppose the 'normalisation of violence' in the media
- : Need to move towards an economy based on 'people matter', rather than a 'war economy'.

: Ending Syria's civil war required a peace conference with all parties present, including Assad. If peace settlement required him to step down, then he would have to have a 'safe haven' and not be under threat from International Criminal Court - otherwise he could opt to 'fight to the last'.

: Need to overcome gap between people and decision-makers at international level by setting up a 'UN Parliamentary Assembly'.

: Need to address issue of world population increase.

: Peace-making must address issue of dynamics of human group behavior.

UfP Chair **Vijay Mehta** concluded the conference by thanking all speakers and everyone attending, urging everyone to 'spread the word of peace' and support UfP, and reminding everyone of the power of private citizens to achieve change.