

Sixty-five people including representatives of the major faith traditions, attended the 2013 Edinburgh Inter-Faith Event for World Peace, held June 27 by Uniting for Peace Churches & Inter-Faith Work, on the theme 'Reflection and Action - for Peace'. Comprising talks, prayers, readings, music and meditation on peace themes, the occasion was also the 10th anniversary of these annual summer events, which began in 2003 with an inter-faith anti-war witness in the prelude to the Iraq War.

Opening the event, UfP Churches & Inter-Faith Secretary Rev. Brian Cooper stated: "Especially at this time when religion is often portrayed as intolerant and even violent, and so anti-peace, this kind of event is vitally important. It shows different faiths can come together to affirm peace, and to challenge faith communities to be more involved in peace issues." He set the event in context of UfP's ongoing UK-wide 4D Campaign for World Peace, focused on Disarmament, Demilitarisation, Development and Democracy. His prayer for "the realisation of the vision of the New Heaven and New Earth", and a contemplative Peace Meditation by Sister Louisa Gupta, leader of Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University in Edinburgh, set the mood.

Rev. Cooper then interviewed Brian Larkin, Co-ordinator of Edinburgh Peace & Justice Centre, on its work. An anti-Bomb campaigner from a 'US Catholic peace background', Larkin said the Centre, set up by Scottish churches in 1980s, advocated non-violence, conflict resolution, alternatives to war, human rights and environmental responsibility, through its monthly magazine, lectures by peace activists, and support for such campaigns as Scrap Trident and UK Justice & Peace Pilgrimage. UfP has especially been involved in the Centre's September Peace Days events.

With a much appreciated musical offering on the clarsach (Gaelic harp) and in song, Maureen Hunter of Edinburgh Baha'i community beautifully evoked the peace of the Highlands and Islands, and also gave a Baha'i peace meditation.

The event was hosted by Edinburgh Theosophical Society at its elegant Edinburgh New Town centre: its President, Mike Hall, gave a personal exploration of the spiritual roots of peace-making, under the title "From Oppenheimer to Gandhi - a

Theosophical Reflection on Violence and Peace." His wide-ranging address stressed that all major faith traditions at their core shared a deep concern for peace - of the individual, society, humanity at large and with the natural world. This statement was complemented by the chanting in Sanskrit of the ancient Hindu prayer 'May all the Divine Powers bring us into Peace' (from the Vedas) by Neila Joshi of Edinburgh Hindu community, and Unitarian peace statements by Margery Mackay of St. Mark's Unitarian church.

The final section of the evening was devoted to the Middle East. Rev. Cooper gave a historical overview of the Israel/Palestine conflict - "running sore at the heart of the Middle East". The terrible experience of the Nazi Holocaust against European Jewry had focused the drive for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, but the foundation of Israel in violent circumstances in 1948 rendered it 'The Catastrophe - El Nakhba' for the Palestinians. Currently there was an impasse with no effective 'peace process' towards a just solution. Israel's failure to reach a lasting settlement with Yasser Arafat, a secular Muslim, and the murder of the pro-peace Israeli premier Yitzak Rabin by a Zionist extremist, had been followed by the rise of uncompromising forces on both sides. Israel's 'security Wall' against Hamas attacks divided Palestinian communities, whose lands were further expropriated for illegal settlements in contravention of UN resolutions. Such tragic events had unfolded in the lands sacred to the three Abrahamic faiths - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - whose devotees had special responsibility to help secure a just peace.

Phil Lucas (Society of Friends) gave a lecture with visuals on his experience in Israel/Palestine serving with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme, set up by the World Council of Churches at the request of Christian leaders in Jerusalem after the 'second Intefada', to monitor human rights abuses, especially in the Israeli-occupied West Bank Palestinian area. Harassment and long delays at military checkpoints, where Palestinians had to pass for their daily work, justified by Israel for its security, "caused great bitterness and resentment". The images of these cage-like checkpoints, and of Palestinian villages destroyed to make way for illegal settlements, were deemed 'deeply disturbing' by several in the audience. Rev. Cooper said he hoped to arrange a 'Christian-Jewish dialogue' to explore further this sensitive issue.

After Mr. Bashir Malik (Annandale Street Mosque) read an inter-faith Prayer for the Peace of the Holy Land, 13-year-old Zakariya Islam gave a short paper on 'The Islamic View of Peace', stressing that submission of the self in Islam means "submitting to justice and righteousness in order to reach peace and safety and being in a peaceful environment by one's free will." He said "The Koran insists 'There must be no intimidation in matters of faith' (2: 256). Constantly Muslims are enjoined to respect Jews and Christians, the 'People of the Book', who worship the same God (29: 46)." Also, peace and peacemaking in Islamic tradition are part and parcel of human development,....seen as *Godly acts worthy of praise and reward*. In Islam peace is advocated as a divine quality to be pursued." Terrorism and suicide bombing had "no antecedents in Islamic history, and no justification in Islamic theology, law, tradition or its views on world peace."

The event finale was a moving Prayer for Syria by David Fraser Harris (Unification Church), who had lived in that country for eleven years until 2011, directing Universal Peace Federation work across the Middle East, followed by all proclaiming the Inter-Faith Affirmation for World Peace and Universal Prayer for Peace.

Rev. Brian Cooper UfP Churches & Inter-Faith Secretary

