

UNITING for PEACE

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TOWARDS PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA – 2014 SUMMER CONFERENCE

A hundred and fifty people packed the ballroom at London's prestigious Dorchester hotel for the 25 June 2014 special conference 'Moving Towards Peace in Middle East and North Africa', hosted by Mr. Yasser Bin Homran of Saudi Arabia and organised by Uniting for Peace. Opening the occasion, chair Rita Payne, President Commonwealth Journalists Association, stressed the urgency of the theme: "Today the Middle East and North Africa are the least peaceful place on earth."

Event sponsor **Yasser bin Homran**, entrepreneur and Middle East peace campaigner, who funds a Peace Studies chair at Bradford University, passionately expressed his personal commitment to help building peace in the region: "I don't represent any organisation: I just love peace and want to build a better future for the new generation. What is Peace? It is the absence of war, the absence of killing to win, to achieve power." Humanity's universal desire was "to live happily together without war, in a state of peace". The terrible losses of the 20th-century global wars should have taught the world never to go to war again. "Peace is achievable - let us belong to those who say that! Let us always ask ourselves: what have we done to avert war? It is time to pledge ourselves for peace - that would be humanity's greatest achievement."... "We must guide the new generation to peace and cultivate a sense of responsibility against war."

UfP Chair **Vijay Mehta** identified key obstacles to Middle East peace: the rightwing Israeli government's refusal to adopt pro-peace policies towards Palestine; lack of international condemnation of Israel's occupation; US failure to be 'an honest broker' between Israel and Palestine; wide repercussions of the Syria, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan conflicts. Solutions to the Israel-Palestine crisis included reviving the 2002 Arab League Peace Initiative to normalise Arab-Israeli relations in return for a comprehensive peace settlement; US ceasing its military funding

of Israel [\$3 - \$5 bn per year], and applying lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process. The latter would necessitate cessation of violence, negotiations involving all relevant parties, a two-state solution and recognition of Israel's right to exist, equitable sharing of scarce resources [eg. water, land], confidence-building measures, an Arab-Israeli Council to settle disputes, and international backing for the settlement. More widely, all Middle East states should commit to dialogue and diplomacy to end war.

Wajid Shamsul Hasan, former Pakistan High Commissioner to UK, said much of today's violence in Middle East resulted from unjust treaties and peace settlements, notably imposed after two World Wars. Western promotion of ideals of democracy and human rights had been 'betrayed': "US has preferred one-man rule to establishing democracy". Its War on Terror – 'a simplistic response to 9/11' – had created a false 'us and them' dichotomy, "lumping together many disparate groups", causing much anti-Western feeling and alienating many states: "there is now a wide gap between US and the rest of the world."

Irfan Husain, *Dawn* newspaper journalist and author, identified 'three fault-lines' in the Middle East which had caused so much violence: the Israel/Palestine conflict; division and conflict within Islam between Shia and Sunni; popular aspirations for democracy struggling against autocracy. The Arab Spring had effectively been crushed in the Gulf: "democracy has been postponed." Power rivalry between Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia was having a major effect across the region, sharpening tensions. Yet historically Shia and Sunni "had been at peace for centuries", their current rivalries and conflicts only emerging after the US/UK 2003 invasion of Iraq. Predicting the division of Iraq, he urged the West not to intervene.

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Left to right: Rita Payne, Dr. Halla Diyab, Yasser Bin Homran, Rev. Brian Cooper, Vijay Mehta and Irfan Husain with Wajid Shamsul Husan

World peace is not a Utopian dream. It can be realised by overcoming forces of destruction, violence and warmongering.

Uniting for Peace, incorporating Action for UN Renewal and World Disarmament Campaign,
is a civil society organisation helping to do just that.

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Editorial: CHALLENGE OF A WORLD IN TURMOIL

Human civilisation has not progressed much when it comes to handling and solving conflicts peacefully. We are now in one of the most dangerous periods in history: from Libya through Syria and Iraq to Afghanistan and Pakistan, conflict is rife and violence a daily occurrence - with global consequences. The rise of the ultra-violent, well-resourced Islamic State aiming to build a pan-Muslim jihadist Caliphate, linked with such Islamist terror groups as Boko Haram in West Africa and Al-Shabab in East Africa, poses a huge threat to peace far beyond Middle East. Feeding on Third World deprivation and state breakdown, its religious-ideological and military challenge demands a many-facet response: UN-backed nation-building, massive humanitarian and development aid, and the voices of authentic Islam and religious tolerance, as well as blocking its flow of funding and fighters, and necessary UN-authorized military action.

The West must also be held to account for fuelling turmoil. Its interventionism and power-play, exploitation of scarce resources, promotion of neo-liberal globalisation, world arms trade and many unethical policies, have caused suffering, resentment and nihilist reaction. The West needs to re-align its policies to accord with its professed democratic values.

In Europe, US-EU geo-political ambitions in Ukraine prompted Russia's forceful assertion of its security: a new pan-European system recognising the legitimate security interests of all parties is needed to avert a mutually damaging new Cold War. Diplomacy can surely achieve that. In East Asia, Sino-Japanese rivalry interplaying with a resurgent India promises turbulence in a region already beset by a many-sided arms race.

In the face of these and other problems and dangers to global peace and security - not least big-scale refugee flows from conflict zones and migration due to climate change - the resources of UN and its whole gamut of institutions for global co-operation, human unity and peace-building, need to be deployed with wisdom, morality and practical effectiveness. On 25 November the Uniting for Peace annual conference at the House of Lords [see rear page] will bring together experts to inform and reflect on these issues, helping to point the way forward. Please join us then.

Vijay Mehta [UfP Chair] & Brian Cooper [UfP Co-ordinator]

Please note: for economy, this is a 4-page issue with computer links for full reports: www.unitingforpeace.com

Edinburgh Events Focus Pakistan and Syria

Edinburgh events on June 11 and July 3 2014 focused respectively on Pakistan and Syria. **Mr Shahid Farooq** (Edinburgh Pakistan Association), surveying Pakistan's recent history, stressed US War on Terror had "pulled Pakistan down very badly", with resultant anti-US feeling driving Islamist radicalisation. **Mr Sandy Sneddon** (Church of Scotland World Mission Council) agreed extremism and terrorism menaced many sectors of society - also afflicted by poverty, corruption, politicisation of the bureaucracy, militarisation of the economy, and misuse of the Blasphemy Law against Christians. Initiatives for inter-faith co-operation, education, women's rights and better relations with India, were signs of hope. **Rev. Brian Cooper** (UfP Inter-Faith Secretary), noting the resurgence of Pakistan



Left: David Fraser Harris

Taliban, urged more UK aid. At the Syria event, he stated the call by Patriarch Gregorios III of Damascus (London May 20) for a 'Geneva 3' peace conference, but "all peace efforts must be Syrian-led". Solving Syria's crisis was key to Middle East peace, Arab unity, Christian-Muslim toleration and ending Islamist radicalism. **David Fraser Harris** (Universal Peace Federation) reported on key NGO conferences which had urged: priority of ceasefire and humanitarian aid, civil society involvement in peace-building, faiths' contribution to national reconciliation - and danger of Shia-Sunni Muslim civil war. US, Russia and regional powers had to be involved in any peace settlement.

TOWARDS PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST and NORTH AFRICA 2014 SUMMER CONFERENCE *continued from front page*

Dr. Halla Diyab, Syrian film maker and TV commentator, described the scale of Syria's tragedy: over 160,000 dead, 9 million refugees, 100,000 asylum-seekers in Europe, 60% of infrastructure destroyed and 'mass impoverishment': "it will take 30 years for Syria's economy to recover its 2010 level." 120,000 al-Qaeda type rebels including 10,000 foreign fighters were engaged, but arming the 'moderate rebels' would only worsen the situation: the fall of the Assad regime would lead to more internecine killing. Changing rebel loyalties was helping extremists. The advance of ISIS - Islamic State of Iraq and Levant - was the new threat to Syria's future. "Terrorism is now a territory. If the war goes on, Syria-Iraq will become the hub of global terrorism." The only answer was a 'multilateral settlement': UK 'should promote political reconciliation'.

Rev. Brian Cooper, UfP Churches & Inter-Faith Secretary, saw 'rejection of secular ideologies' and their replacement by various Islamist political agendas, as the major shift in Middle East. Noting 'significant parallels' between 16th-17th century Europe's

destructive Catholic-Protestant wars and current Shia-Sunni struggles across the region, he said its Muslim peoples should learn from Europe's "terrible experience of religion-fuelled conflict" and avoid repeating it. For religion to be "an effective force for peace and harmony, not discord and division", full religious freedom with toleration for all Christian, Muslim and other faith minorities across all Middle East countries, was vital - and would accord with the prophet Mahomet's teachings. Islamic unity was the best hope for lasting Christian presence in Middle East, but ISIS' sudden rise posed a major threat. The Muslim Common Word document, and statements by Popes Benedict XVI and Francis I, offered the basis for Christian-Muslim accord, co-operation and reconciliation, with rejection of violent misuse of faith a key concern.

Open Forum discussion stressed religious tolerance, 'maximum freedom', 'democracy in some form', and more social and economic justice, as keys to a lasting Middle East peace.

Report by Brian Cooper

ERSKINE CHILDERS LECTURE 2014 – HUMAN RIGHT TO PEACE

Dr. Alfred de Zayas, leading UN human rights expert, addressed one hundred and forty people at London Euston Hilton on October 9 on 'The Human Right to Peace - Foundation for a Just International Order' for UFP's 2014 Erskine Childers Lecture. Former Secretary of UN Human Rights Committee and ex-senior lawyer for UN Human Rights High Commissioner, he spoke inspiringly on rights and realpolitik, peace 'a continuous work-in-progress', punishing aggression, legitimate use of force, obstacles to peace, disarmament and peace as a human right.



Left to right:
David Wardrop, Marjolijn Snippe, Alfred de Zayas, Vijay Mehta and Shanti Mehta

"Modern Realpolitik has instrumentalised human rights rhetoric to pursue traditional geopolitics and economic imperialism": the power of the military-industrial complex and transnational corporations made 'meaningful change' towards peace 'ever more difficult'. Yet global civil society was urging UN formally to recognise 'the human right to peace' at the highest level. Peace entailed "a state of harmonious national and international relations based on rule of law, justice and solidarity" - absence of structural violence, economic pressures and unilateral coercion, and promotion of an equitable global order of fair trade and cooperation, with legal structures against aggression. Yet post-1945 the crime of aggression had 'enjoyed general impunity' despite Nuremberg: US-led 2003 assault on Iraq ranked among "the most shocking violations of international rule of law". He cited two legitimate justifications for using force: self-defence, with reference to Security Council and precluding pre-emptive use, and Security Council-authorized action under UN Charter Chapter VII. 'Responsibility to Protect' did not "replace Charter-mandated non-interference in internal affairs of sovereign states." UN must

develop actions against pro-war propaganda; General Assembly could consider a special neutral 'de-escalation committee' to bring parties back to negotiations even after adversaries had 'burned their bridges'.

UN Human Rights Committee condemned nuclear weapons as 'among greatest threats to the right to life', and undermining respect for human rights. General Assembly 1984 Resolution 39/11 proclaiming "the peoples of our planet have a sacred right to peace", echoed in some constitutions, had been partially codified in such Covenants as on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights. Military expenditure [\$ 1.75 trillion in 2013] menaced humanity - so global civil society had to campaign for "significant reduction in military spending, reorienting the workforce from war industries to peace activities..[and] disarmament."

After immediate comments by Marjolijn Snippe [Netherlands UNA] and David Wardrop [Westminster UNA], de Zayas answered UN-related questions. 'UN badly needs reform': it too 'is under international law'; it should ban 'outsourcing of war' eg. US and UK using private military companies; veto power must be weakened.

(See UFP website for full text of Lecture).

Report by Brian Cooper, Gill Morris & Anthony Russell

Audience response very appreciative: typical were young women Lara & Sowjeya: "The lecture was inspirational and we took a lot of new ideas and thoughts with us. We hope the younger generation takes the necessity of peace for all as a serious precondition for a better future."

BURMA'S CIVIL-ISATION

The sanctions have gone; international money now pours into Burma and with it economic advancement and hope for democratic development. But anyone in the West bothering to consider this knows the spirit of democracy is not synonymous with capitalism. During two months lecturing in the Far East I heard widespread concern for recent developments in Burma. Human rights organisations such as the Burma Campaign have always urged incremental removal of sanctions – but to no avail. Under international pressure the regime has made some concessions but, for example, as soon as they have released one political prisoner another has been arrested in a constant game of commitment breaking.

The big issue is a new constitution without which Aung San Suu Kyi – cunningly denied ability to stand for president as the wife of a foreigner – must remain simply an MP and thus containable. That is exactly where she should not be as without radical constitutional change the presidency could turn into a poisoned chalice.

Suu Kyi recently reiterated that progress is not up to the government alone but requires widespread cooperation. Because a 'state is vast' as Gandhi agreed, 'people don't realise their acts of daily co-operation sustain it' and therefore their moral responsibility. Only Suu Kyi has the moral authority and influential

power to build national cohesion and fulfil her father's dream as Burma's founder. While she has recently headed independent government inquiries and plans for educational reform, still appearing politically partisan risks losing that moral capital. Her power can only now be effectively utilised as constitutional head of state and more than anything that requires the people's mandate.

Fortunately the regime's small concessions are far outweighed by the 'spirit' of democracy constantly growing in Burma as in China. This is and always will be the slow process of 'civil-isation', as people awaken and throw off their fear and apathy. Such understanding and co-operation is worth far more than any government action. The international community should therefore respect this process by supporting education as Suu Kyi requests, while insisting on transparency in the way our governments provide international aid. This aid is currently a scandal because it undermines the very democracy we preach. Used to win UK contracts, it only shores up both 'regimes' instead of reaching organisations on the ground attempting to help those most in need.

Anthony Russell

Anthony Russell, a UFP Committee member, is founder of The Chandos Foundation and author of *Evolving the Spirit – From Democracy to Peace*. [www.thechandos.com]

2014 September Peace Day Events

UfP supporters marked September 21 UN International Peace Day and churches' Peacemaking Sunday with events across UK, eg.as follows. In London EC member Mary Hale helped arrange activities centred on Pax Christi's Peace and Reconciliation Icon in the Peace Chapel at historic St.Mary's church, Harrow; Pentecostal-tradition Full Gospel Tabernacle, Camberwell, held Peace Prayers.

Edinburgh saw members take part in a Climate Peace march and UfP follow-up seminars on Middle East. An ecumenical Peace Vigil at Brechin Cathedral's Peace Pole led by Rev. David Mumford, a



Kirkcaldy church peace service, and a 'Right of People to Peace' Glasgow event convened by UfP supporter Ann Breslin [Glasgow Peace Federation], were among other Scotland occasions. Malvern's focus of observance was an ecumenical Peace & Justice vigil at Friends Meeting House Peace Pole, while Chislehurst saw a Methodist 'Harvest Peace Service'. In Oxford, UfP member David Partridge led the Peace March. In Republic of Ireland, the Infant Jesus Sisters community in Mallow, Co. Cork [Sister Brieda a member] held a dedicated Peace Mass.

Rev. Brian Cooper – UfP Churches Secretary

Review: 'Benefits' of War Pleas Unconvincing

Two books on war demand peace activists' attention. Nigel Biggar's *In Defence of War* (Oxford: ISBN 978019-9672615) deploys theology, philosophy and history in scholarly but deeply flawed rejection of anti-war thinking to favour 'moral justification' for warfare, arguing more evil may result from not going to war than waging it. Oddly, he does not cite the anti-Hitler conflict, but recent 'liberal' military interventions, justifying NATO's illegal 1999 war on Serbia over Kosovo and equally illegal US-UK 2003 Iraq war. Yet Iraq shows 'balance of evils' is impossible to forecast correctly, and moral judgements must evaluate consequences – in Iraq, catastrophic and long-term – no less than intentions and actions. Further, the global community failed to halt Rwanda's genocide not from pacifism but lack of political will. Describing

soldiers' attitudes in war, Biggar yet fails to confront the intrinsic immorality of institutional militarism. Ian Morris' *War: What is it good for?* (Profile: ISBN 978178 – 1252963) surveys 15,000 years of human development, controversially concluding warfare, while inflicting the greatest suffering and destruction, has by "creating larger societies, stronger governments and greater security" overall been a force for good; so much so, "war is now putting itself out of business." Building on Azar Gat's monumental *War in Human Civilisation* (2006) he argues violence has massively declined in the modern era – but Stone Age comparisons are surely irrelevant as chaotic violence erupts from Libya to Afghanistan and humanity's most violent 20th-century is soberly recalled? Peace activists should sharpen their arguments on these publications.

UNITING for PEACE 2014 ANNUAL CONFERENCE • House of Lords 'Who Rules the World?'

Flashpoints & Power Rivalries from Europe to Far East

Speakers: Lord Frank Judd – former Int. Dev. Minister • Luckshan Abeyesuriya – International Relations Expert
Guy Arnold – North-South Relations Specialist • Mary Dejevsky – Journalist *The Independent*
Humphrey Hawksley – BBC Foreign Affairs Correspondent

25 November 2014 • 18.00–20.30 • House of Lords (Committee Room 4a)

AGM and SPRING CONFERENCE 2015

'UK General Election 2015: Britain's Global Role'

Hustings Event: Conservative, Green, Labour, Liberal Democrat & UKIP speakers

SATURDAY 21 MARCH 2015: 10.30am – 4.30pm WESLEY'S CHAPEL – CITY OF LONDON

49 City Road, London EC1Y 1AU – Old Street & Moorgate nearest Tube stations

Registration/information for above events: vijay@vmpeace.org • 0207-790-1999 • 0131-446-9545

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