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UPF-Lebanon

Istanbul, Turkey — More than 50 Ambassadors for Peace, civil society leaders, and religious figures from more than 12 countries in the Middle East dedicated three days of their busy lives to discussing vital issues from the perspective of the region. The Middle East Leadership Conference in Istanbul May 6 to 8, 2011 coincided with momentous and surprising developments across the Arab countries and the world. It was themed “Divine Winds of Freedom: New Opportunities and New Responsibilities for the Middle East.”

The Universal Peace Federation’s vision for peace leadership through alliances of religious principles and values was the platform for the deliberations. The wisdom of the three major living faiths that have their origins in the Middle East — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — was a focus of attention in the deliberations.

On the first day, an address by Islamic scholar and researcher, Dr. Hamdi Murad, set the conciliatory tone of seeking mutual values and providing common guidance in shaping the region’s future and keeping the dangers of extremism and mindless violence at bay. The topic was expounded further by the UPF International Chairman, Rev. Hyung Jin Moon, and then deepened through sessions of interfaith dialogue that filled the second day of the conference.

The stunning events of the Arab Spring were the topic of several presentations. Young leaders described how they saw the events of change unfold in their countries, Egypt and Yemen. Participants from Jordan, Palestine, Kuwait, and Tunisia contributed their experiences, evaluations, and insights to the conference’s quest for better understanding. Voices from the host nation, Turkey, and Israel added importantly to the understanding.

The conference addressed crucial needs in education, communication, and collaboration across the Middle East region, and Ambassadors for Peace elaborated on strategies for ongoing activities and sustainable outcomes. The program on the second day highlighted the value of interfaith harmony, as participants explored way points where shared religious wisdom can serve as key performance indicators for building a better Middle East for all its peoples. Group sessions afforded ample opportunity for every participant’s voice to be listened to.

The Middle East Leadership Conference was rounded off by a Legacy of Peace ceremony, following which all participants had the opportunity to hear the UPF founder, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, convey his urgent message to Turkey and the entire Middle East. He explained that even the great changes witnessed in the region in recent months were but symptoms of a more fundamental transition to come.

“We are living in a historic time of great cosmic transition,” Dr. Moon said. “It is a time for a great cosmic revolution to change history, to unite the spiritual and physical worlds and to create the ideal kingdom of heaven that God has longed for since the beginning of time.”

Dr. Moon anchors his vision of the coming world of peace in a philosophy of the importance of a moral change on personal and family levels that provides the foundation for societal transformation, likening such a time to a “noon-time” culture where there are no shadows or hidden transgressions. “If we can all shine as we live such glowing lives, there will be no chance for the shadow of sin to be cast,” he said.

Following the conclusion of the Istanbul program, the tour returned to Western Europe, with programs in the coming week scheduled for London, Geneva, and Berlin.

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