



International Day of Peace : Youth for Peace and Development

Vienna, UPF - Austria, September 21st 2010 – After participating with a delegation of Ambassadors for Peace at the UN celebration of the International Day of Peace 2010 in Vienna International Center during the early afternoon of a beautiful sunny late summer day, UPF Austria organized its own celebration on the topic of “Youth for Peace and Development” in the evening.

After few words of welcome by UPF-Austria Secretary General Peter Haider, [a video message by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon](#) set the tone for the event. Father Vahan Hovaguimian from the Armenian Catholic community read a prayer for peace in his native language and Elder Reuben Silverbird played beautifully on his flute preparing an harmonious atmosphere for the presentations of several projects of youth representatives:



[Jörg Reitmaier](#) spoke about his experience in the [Austrian Service Abroad](#), a non-profit initiative, founded in 1998 by Dr. Andreas Maislinger. The organisation provides placements for an alternative Austrian national service all over the world. It caters for three different types of services: Holocaust Memorial Service, Social Service and Peace Service. Mr. Reithmaier spoke about his experience working in Poland and the US and how working in Holocaust Memorial centers changed his life.

Ms. Daniela Zwerger reported about her visit to Israel and Palestine with a group of students from all over Europe, how she was first of all fascinated to visit all places where Jesus walked 2000 years ago. She spoke about the pain she felt meeting young people in Tel Aviv and Palestine students in Bethlehem, who can never really

enjoy an atmosphere of peace. This program was part of ongoing projects organized by the [Middle East Peace Initiative](#) of UPF and partner organizations.



Mr. Ilia Sichrovsky spoke about his experiences during and leading up to a [Muslim-Jewish Conference](#), which he and his friends organized during the summer of 2010. "Representing the University of Vienna at numerous international student conferences, I have witnessed inevitable misunderstanding and prejudices between young Muslims and Jews at first hand. The 'Muslim Jewish Conference' was called to life, to be the first step together for young people creating the power to forge a link between possibility and reality." 60 students from all over the world with a common goal of establishing peaceful relations between both religions participated. The idea for this project was driven by the desire to create cultural awareness between young aspiring Jewish and Muslim academics. Today, the 'MJC'-committee harbours over 20 volunteers from Asia, the Middle East, Europe and America, including countries like Austria, Israel, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States of America. The 'Muslim Jewish Conference' is officially endorsed by the 'United Nations Alliance of Civilisations' (UNAOC) and the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ms. [Leila Salehi-Ravesh](#) spoke about the „Green Movement in Iran“, that started during the elctions for a new President in 2009. The hopes and expectations of many Iranian young people are for a live in more freedom and without any reason to have fear. She made a clear point that nobody wants a violent revolution, but especially young people have hope to experience peaceful changes in the near future. She stressed that there is movement had from the very beginning the support from all levels of society.

To conclude the presentations Ms. Kaidi Cui, a young Chinese violinist spoke about the "Young Generation in modern China of the 21st century". The reforms of China in

1987 under Deng Xiaoping started a whole new period of modernization and opening up to Western technology and also to the Western culture. Having a chance to study in a foreign creates new possibilities. Now we have a new generation with a new outlook to life. Today's Chinese youth is open for Western influence in terms of clothing, music, food and hobbies. While getting to know new things they want their own culture to be respected.



At the end Mr. Zeki Metin representing an NGO, which organizes every year an award ceremony honoring a world oriented man and a woman introduced his work. He expressed his appreciation of the work of UPF and extended an invitation for his upcoming event. To conclude the evening everybody enjoyed a buffet with talks that lasted for another few hours.

(Peter Haider, UPF-Austria)