

**Health, Transformation, & Spirituality** presents a symposium on **UN at 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Partnering for Dignity, Faith in Action: Transforming Extremism into Peace and Harmony; Interfaith, Interdisciplinary, and Youth Perspectives**

Dr. Ani Kalayjian and Lorraine Simmons

The Week of Spirituality at the United Nations was packed with inspiring weeklong events organized by the Committee on Spirituality, Values, and Global Concerns (CSVGC-NY). On the last day, 29 October, the Health Transformation & Spirituality (HTS) Working Group of CSVGC-NY presented a symposium on Partnering for Dignity, Faith in Action: Transforming Extremism into Peace and Harmony; Interfaith, Interdisciplinary, and Youth Perspectives.

Lorraine Simmons, Vice President of Education and Training for Meaningfulworld, welcomed the audience with a moment of silence to set the intention for the day. She then introduced Rabbi Jill Hammer, Director of Spiritual Education at the Academy for Jewish Religion, to offer an Invocation. Rabbi Hammer's invocation was a poetic prayer focusing on peace and the flexibility to embrace everyone.

Lorraine then introduced Dr. Ani Kalayjian, the President and Founder of the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention, Meaningfulworld, Vice Chair of CSVGC-NY, and the Founder and Chairperson of the HTS Working Group.



*Lorraine Simmons*

*Rabbi Hammer*

*Rick Ufford-Chase*

Dr. Kalayjian first introduced Rick Ufford-Chase, Co-director of Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Co-director of Stony Point Conference Center, and Co-Founder of the multifaith Community of Living Traditions. Mr. Ufford-Chase's focus was on what happens when people of any religion take part in their own healing. He asked the question: How do people of faith become protagonists? He spoke of his experience with the Presbyterian Church where the congregants and the clergy were taught a theology that was accepted in the history of the church, which is: If you experience evil or any atrocity, you put up with it, deal with it in this lifetime, and you will be granted a better afterlife—suggesting that these people remain victims, rather than taking on the responsibility for their own lives and well-being. In Columbia Rick had experienced firsthand a congregation that challenged this theology and started to take more action to stop the violence and to heal the people. Guerrilla warfare has had an impact on the safety of the people, and to complicate things, the way in which the government responded to the

warfare also endangered the people. But when the Presbyterians of the Columbia church started to take a stance on stopping the violence, they essentially became targets of the guerrillas and the government too. As their nonviolent protests were wrought with danger, they began reaching out to Presbyterian churches in the United States to help protect them, as they have become allies—their relationships have grown and flourished. To be a protagonist is to participate actively in healing, and as part of their healing they went through tremendous turmoil and danger but they ultimately became stronger and empowered.

Dr. Kalayjian stated that dignity is nurtured through Emotional and Spiritual Intelligence, through learning to cultivate our positive emotions and transforming the negative ones, and through spiritually grounding ourselves to embrace Mother Earth and humanity at large fully and unconditionally. She encouraged us to align ourselves with the solution and not the problem. Dr. Kalayjian addressed the Model UN Club students from St. Peter's Prep, asking them to learn about the UN Declaration for Human Rights, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Sustainable Developmental Goals, since a strong United Nations equals a more peaceful world.

Iman Syed, Religious Life Advisor at Columbia University, shared a story of how he experienced his commute to the event—how he had the opportunity to offer dignity to others by offering his seat, and it was as simple as using positive body language, smiles, and kindness. Offering people dignity is possible in micro moments throughout our daily experience. Iman suggests that these experiences of compassion need to happen frequently, an individual must present his feelings and actions in such a way that another human being will feel they are brothers—with the thought: I honor and love this person, and all are worthy of dignity. He suggested that we all can be individual NGOs every day and that we are responsible for being kind, compassionate individuals and contributing to a compassionate, loving humanity. He spoke of building a relationship of respect, love, and honor regardless of any pain or disagreement between individuals. He likened it to that of the mother and child during childbirth: There is much pain and unpleasantness, but with the birth of the new human being the newborn learns to respect and love the parents and the mother learns to love, respect, and honor the newborn human despite the pain.



*Iman Syed*



*Paul Jaffe*

Dr. Kalayjian then introduced Paul Jaffe, Buddhist Teacher, Intercultural Consultant, and Founding Board Member of Clear Sky Meditation and Study Center. In Buddhism the ultimate

goal is to achieve nirvana. Some of the blocks to achieving nirvana are unconscious anger, hatred, grief and confusion. How do we deal with it, how do we clear the negative emotions? Individuals must look deep inside ourselves, to examine our body and emotions holistically. We must recognize our own needs, and then make a shift of awareness to study deeply the body and mind of the “me.” What we all have in common is; we all share the place of “me.” It is the root of every individual. How can we hold a space of togetherness as individuals? How do we transform our own pain into compassion to create peace?

Dr. Kalayjian encouraged people to turn to their right and engage in talking to one another and saying something that is dignifying and uplifting, then to share this with the larger audience and share how it made them feel. Someone remarked that the other person is important and will make a difference. It made people feel good, important, empowered, and validated. Iman suggested that looking in the eyes for a couple seconds is a way to respect and honor. It doesn't have to be a long conversation; just a mindful look can be filled with respect, honor, and dignity.

The last panelist was Justin Koroglu, a 14-year-old student at St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City, NJ. He addressed the importance of youth engagement. He shared the Catholic perspective on Human Dignity: “Human dignity is something that can't be taken away. Catholic Social Teaching states that each and every person has value, is worthy of great respect, and must be free from slavery, manipulation, and exploitation,” which is consistent with the UN charter “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Justin shared that he achieves dignity through his volunteerism: being part of the Model UN Club, volunteering at Meaningfulworld, helping the underserved, working with faith-based organizations while learning about other faiths, and taking care of himself through sport, healthy lifestyle, and creative engagement.



***Justin Koroglu, Youth Representative***

***Chairperson Dr Kalayjian***

In the Q&A session that followed, Dr. Kalayjian shared an observation on how all religions share a similar message of love, mercy, and peace. At the same time, most violence is also conducted in the name of God/Allah and religions. She asked how religious practitioners could deter violence, promote peace, and stand up with responsibility.

- Iman: People belonging in faith engage in things that are wrong, evil, etc... It's human nature; I must talk about myself, though, and each one of us should focus on our behaviors, thoughts, and actions.

- Rick: 1. Lunacy abounds, and manipulations. 2. Complacency reigns, leaders don't stand up to say things are being misinterpreted. 3. Violence sells in the media—when violence is opposed by peaceful people, to quote the sacred writings, the media doesn't give these instances attention.
- Paul: State-sponsored violence—who is going to stand up to the government's elected officials?

Dr. Gergerian, the Kreiger Essay Contest benefactor, shared the great news that the archives will be open for student research by next year at Clark University, and his uncle's lifetime of research on the Ottoman Turkish Genocide of Armenians and other Christian minorities will be available to the public. Student winners from Midwood High School shared the conclusions of their essays and then received certificates and monetary awards. The winners were: 1st place, \$100, Oksana Pligina and Gary Shum; 2nd place, \$50, Arfa Qadeer and Angel Peregrina; Honorary Mention, \$25, Zainab Cheema and Mathew Correa.



*Dr Gergerian*

*Winners of Prevention of Genocide Essay Contest*



*Winners of Krieger Genocide Prevention Essay Contest, Midwood High School, Brooklyn*



***Krieger Genocide Prevention Essay Contest Winners, with AASSSG Members - 2015***

The event culminated with a Heart-to-Heart Circle of Love and Gratitude with drumming by Ohstonha Ohskennonoton, and Dr. Kalayjian guided the group to extend the energy of love from one individual to another, one heart at a time, expanding this circle of love and gratitude to the whole of humanity, and all living things.



***Dr Kalayjian's Heart-to-Heart Circle of Gratitude & love, with drumming by Ohskennonoton***

Chair of CSVGC-NY Genie Kagawa was invited to deliver the concluding remarks for the Week of Spirituality events at the United Nations. She thanked the committee members for their commitment to the UN.

A reception of light snacks, vegetables, salads, and healthy nuts was provided, while warm and enlightening networking and follow-up continued.

