

## **Conference on “Family-Centered Policy for Sustainable Development” Held in Vienna in Collaboration with the Iranian Wisdom House**

On Saturday, May 17, 2025, coinciding with International Family Day, a conference titled *“Family-Centered Policy for Sustainable Development”* was held in Vienna, the capital of Austria. The event, which took place from 16:00 to 20:00 local time, was organized by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) Austria and the Austrian Women’s Federation for World Peace, in collaboration with the Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna.

The opening ceremony was hosted by Marinella Stefank, who served as the event’s moderator, and featured a performance by the Vienna Family Federation Choir. The choir performed two pieces, *“You Raised Me Up”* and *“Von guten Mächten”* (“By Gracious Powers”), creating a warm and uplifting atmosphere. Following the performance, Peter Haider, President of UPF Austria, welcomed the guests and officially opened the conference.

During the keynote speeches, distinguished speakers shared their insights. Ms. Elisabeth Koch, President of the Austrian Family Federation, spoke about the importance of family-centered policies. Dr. Reza Gholami, a member of the Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna, delivered a speech titled *“Intercultural Philosophy for Embracing Cultural Diversity in Family Policies: A Path Toward Sustainable Development.”* Dr. Wadih Maalouf, a Program Officer in the Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation Section of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), provided an overview of the UN’s efforts in this area. Additionally, Derwin Murillo and Juro Wong-Peters, members of the Vienna Family Federation, shared their perspectives on the topic.

Dr. Reza Gholami began his speech by saying, *“I am deeply honored to be among you today as we celebrate International Family Day.”* He emphasized the family’s role as the cornerstone of society and its guarantor of survival, expressing regret that the family unit has rapidly weakened in recent decades. He stated, *“In my view, saving and strengthening the family requires making it a central pillar of sustainable development. Events like this provide a valuable opportunity to explore ways to support the family, and I would like to sincerely thank Mr. Haider and Ms. Koch for organizing this seminar.”*

Gholami then elaborated on the concept of intercultural philosophy, explaining that it involves sharing ideas and learning from different cultures to foster understanding, respect for differences, and the discovery of common ground. He cited thinkers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Buber, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Raimon Panikkar, and Wolfgang Welsch as pioneers in this field.

He further highlighted the importance of cultural diversity in today’s world, stating, *“Cultural diversity is key to sustainable development and global growth. It sparks creativity, helps us adapt, and generates fresh ideas. However, the challenge is that certain powers may impose their culture and lifestyle on the entire world, which can harm cultural diversity and make it harder to find new solutions to global issues.”* He stressed that intercultural philosophy teaches

us that dialogue and mutual understanding, rather than conflict and confrontation, are the best ways to address this challenge.

Dr. Gholami also addressed the concept of cultural diversity within families, explaining, *“Cultural diversity in families means accepting that families around the world live in their own unique ways, with different values, structures, and lifestyles.”* Drawing examples from Iran, he noted, *“In Iran, we have nomadic families who live in harmony with nature, urban families that blend tradition with modernity, families who adhere to religious values, and families in border regions who have blended various cultures. This diversity shows that families can constantly evolve while preserving their identity.”*

He warned against the imposition of a single culture on the world, stating, *“Imposing one culture reduces cultural diversity, weakens local traditions, and makes sustainable development more difficult. The loss of indigenous knowledge and lifestyles, which are crucial for addressing global challenges, is one consequence of such imposition. Intercultural philosophy cautions that this can lead to resistance, tension, or even conflict.”* He provided examples of communities resisting the imposition of lifestyles by certain dominant countries.

Gholami then outlined the benefits of cultural diversity for sustainable development, saying, *“Cultural diversity contributes to sustainable development by generating new ideas to solve problems, preserving traditions and indigenous knowledge, and fostering collaboration among people. Even within the concept of sustainable development, we must pay attention to diversity and differences, avoiding the imposition of a single development model or closing the door to diversity.”* Quoting Gadamer, he added, *“The existence of different cultures is not a problem; rather, it enriches our ideas and helps us connect better with the world.”*

He also provided examples of family diversity in Iran, stating, *“Nomadic families care for the environment through their traditional practices, urban families blend positive traditions with modern conditions, and multicultural families in border regions like Kurdistan or Sistan and Baluchestan harmoniously combine cultures. These examples demonstrate how diverse families can contribute to sustainability and adapt well to change.”*

In the concluding segment of his speech, Gholami addressed the role of policies in supporting cultural diversity, saying, *“Policies must recognize and support different types of families. Flexible laws, education, and local and global engagement can strengthen diversity and prepare communities for a sustainable future.”* He suggested that education in multiple languages or support for local traditions could help preserve diversity.

In closing, he remarked, *“Cultural diversity is a treasure for building a sustainable and just world. We must prevent the imposition of any culture on others and support diversity to preserve indigenous traditions and encourage global collaboration. Diversity in families, paired with respect for human rights, justice, and individual freedoms, contributes to sustainable development.”* He also cautioned against allowing certain small cultural groups to violate the rights of family members, particularly women and children, or restrict individual freedoms that enable personal growth and talent development under the pretext of tradition. He added, *“To*

*prevent this, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves as a vital guide, though it too requires updating and refinement.” Quoting Martin Buber, Gholami concluded, “Valuing differences is a path to a peaceful and balanced world. Let us work together to protect diversity and build a brighter future for all.”*

The event continued with a musical performance by Lifa and Atsuko Otsaki, renowned musicians, which created a delightful experience for the audience. Additionally, the “*True Family Awards*” were presented to individuals from various nationalities who have worked to strengthen family values.

The conference aimed to facilitate discussion and exchange of ideas on family-centered policies and their impact on sustainable development. The Universal Peace Federation (UPF), recognized as an NGO with General Consultative Status in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, played a key role in organizing the event. This conference, held in collaboration with the Austrian Women’s Federation for World Peace and the Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna, was considered a significant step toward reinforcing family values and promoting sustainable development.