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The 26th biennial conference of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA) is billed to take place in Freetown, Sierra Leone in November 2016, marking the second time Africa has hosted the conference since the founding of IPRA in 1964. This was announced following the re-election of the two IPRA Secretaries-general, Dr Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (pictured) and Dr Nesrin Kenar, who co-ordinated the 25th IPRA conference in Turkey, at the organisation's administrative meeting on August 14 during the 25th IPRA conference in Istanbul to serve a second term of two years.

IPRA celebrated its 50th anniversary and the First World War Centenary in style as part of its 25th biennial General Conference on "Uniting For Peace: Building Sustainable Peace Through Universal Values" hosted by Sakarya University at the prestigious Bomonti Hilton Hotel in Istanbul, Turkey, between August 11-15 2014.

The conference brought together about 550 peace researchers and few others interested in peace research from 94 countries across all the continents with about 600 papers presented in 146 sessions. A very colourful Turkish cultural music and dance performance by the State Conservatory staff members of Sakarya University kick-started the proceedings of the conference.

In her opening and welcome address, IPRA co-Secretary General Dr Nesrin Kenar, Assistant Professor of International Relations at the Sakarya University in Turkey, told participants that this conference "is not just business as usual -- organizing plenary sessions, giving academic peace research papers, and holding administrative meetings. It is also about reflecting on all our

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achievements and challenges as an organization in the past 50 years, and what lessons we have learned during this period and how we intend to use them to build a better IPRA in the future.”



Dr Kenar lamented the escalation of armed conflicts in Turkey’s close neighbours such as Iraq, Syria, and most recently in Gaza, and in Ukraine, which she described as “an arc of violence that is tearing these regions and their people to shreds”. She noted that the fact that the conference is happening at this time shows that peace researchers have more work on their hands now more than ever before. She added that with Turkey as the host country of this conference “is all the more significant since it is the link between three continents and surrounded by hot armed conflicts in the region”.

Dr Kenar expressed hope that the stimulating discussions in the five plenaries: Peace, Conflict and Evolutions; Transnationalism, Sustainable Peace, and Human Security; Disarmament and Strategic Non-Violent Action; Political Economy of Peace, Conflict and War; and The Future of Peace Research, and research papers in the commissions, will address some of the biggest challenges to global peace. She observed that the conference theme presupposes the nexus between sustainable peace and universal values, ‘that is to say the attainment of universal values is a precondition for sustainable peace, Violations of universal values which undermine the attainment of sustainable peace can be either visible or invisible’, she said while echoing Professor Johan Galtung conflict triangle. She, however, noted that at the moment the focus of peace researchers is on visible over invisible violence.

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In concluding her remarks, Dr Kenar extended warm appreciation on behalf of IPRA to the main sponsors who made the conference possible. She singled out Sakarya University, especially its Rector Professor Muzaffer Elmas, for special praise for offering both moral and financial support in hosting the conference in such a prestigious hotel. She also expressed warm thanks to the Turkish Prime Ministry Promotion Fund, Prime Ministry Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency – T?KA, ZIRAAT BANK, TURKISH AIRLINES, IPRA Foundation and TODA Institute for their massive financial support, without which the conference would not have happened in this special way.

In his opening remarks, Sierra Leonean-born IPRA co-Secretary General Dr Ibrahim Seaga Shaw, Senior Lecturer in Media and Politics at the Northumbria University in the UK, expanded the discussion on the sustainable peace—universal values nexus to Lisa Schirch’s concept of justpeace, which is a hybrid of human rights and peace. He argued that justpeace goes beyond efforts to reduce direct violence: “Justpeacebuilding efforts prioritise the proper transformation of principles and values over a long period of time through an organised system of distributive justice where resources and decision-making are shared”.

Dr Shaw approached the concept of justpeace from the perspective of what he called the indivisible First Generation Political and Civil Rights and Second Generation Economic, Social and Cultural Rights thereby emphasising the importance of the two sets of rights. He, however, lamented that the reason why we are seeing a vicious circle of violence, especially in the developing world is because most of the time focus has been placed on taking care of the Political and Civil Rights of all parties to the conflict but ignore their Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.



Drawing on examples in the escalation of conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians, and in Syria and Iraq, Dr Shaw said: “In this way it is often easy to dismiss the weak and the poor as monsters trying to create disorder for the strong and rich as victims, without trying to find out the extent to which these so-called ‘monsters’ may have been created by the very unjust structures set up by the so-called ‘victims’ ”, He argued that in order to avoid a situation of a vicious circle of violence and achieve a kind of sustainable peace, interventions to prevent or resolve conflicts

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must be based on the principle of justpeace for all parties to the conflict be they ‘victims’ or ‘monsters’.

Dr Shaw concluded his remarks by expressing hope that “by the end of this conference participants will return home better equipped with knowledge on how to use their peace research work to address the topical issues of the conference such as those related to post Cold War political ideology, geopolitics, geo-economics’, international and regional cooperation on intra-state and cross-border conflicts, climate change, inequality, poverty, arms race etc.”

In his warm welcome address, the Rector of Sakarya University, Professor Dr Muzaffer Elmas noted that crises can happen at any time in any where in the World. “Today, in many parts of the world, civil society suffers because of violent conflicts and war. We condemn all kind of violence all over the World and recently in Gaza”. Professor Elmas referred to education as the key to uniting nations, bringing human beings closely together, and above all contributing to building a culture of peace. He emphasised that education is important in combating poverty and promoting peace and human rights. He added: “Education for peace implies an active concept of peace through values, life skills and knowledge in a spirit of equality, respect, empathy, understanding and mutual appreciation among individuals, groups and nations.”



Professor Elmas wrapped up his speech by emphasising how Sakarya University supports peaceful resolution of conflicts and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation. “Sakarya University gives high importance to the agenda of internationalisation to create unity among cultures and implement universal values in its education policies to contribute to more peaceful environment in Turkey and in the World”, he added.

In another welcome speech, member of the Turkish Constitutional Court Prof. Dr. Engin Y?ld?r?m spoke extensively about the principles and instruments within the international

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Human Rights Charter of the United Nations that provide legal safeguards against violence.



However, he was quick to acknowledge the shortcomings when it comes to the political will of nation states to implement these principles and instruments for the benefit of the global culture of peace.



In her keynote video address screened at the opening ceremony, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence Against Women in Conflict, Mrs Haja Zainab Hawa Bangura reminded participants that one of the causes of armed conflicts is often the marginalisation of women, and yet when there is an outbreak of conflicts they are often on the receiving end of the worst human rights violations. Mrs Bangura, who formerly served as both Foreign and Health minister in Sierra Leone, recalled her experience working to empower women victims of the 1991-2002 Civil War in Sierra Leone, and in post-conflict Liberia where some women victims of human rights violations became very successful peace activists.

In his keynote speech, Professor of Peace Studies, Johann Galtung said: “We have come of age, at 50; and I am the only surviving founder from 1964 in London, capital of a foggy island in

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the North Sea. Now we meet in the sunny capital of another empire; bridging three continents. One cloned itself all over; the other was more an Islamic *umma*, a community of togetherness-and-sharing, with

*millet*

islands of tolerance. And now: the superb IPRA program.”

Professor Galtung said what they wanted in 1964 when they founded IPRA was to push for peace research to be recognized as a social science, member of the UNESCO International Social Science Council, and to do this they needed to by pass opposition from Western universities. “We got it. Elise Boulding—role of culture, women—very active at the founding, saving IPRA several times afterward. Her husband Kenneth—the Image, stable peace, economic evolution—was in the background and Bert Røling—the youngest judge at the Tokyo Tribunal, disarmament, law for peace—became the first IPRA Secretary General. And then Galtung—at the time the health studies parallel and positive/negative peace.” Professor Galtung said he and others who started IPRA were from the Northwestern part of the world; however, he acknowledged that IPRA has, “like the world, moved East and South, with a Turkish Delight and a Sierra Leone Diamond as secretaries, with a Prognosis: we will move on to Islam and China—India still needs time to grow with our Guiding Spirit: Gandhi. Then back to a more modest Northwest, circling on, as we should”.



On the issue of *Uniting for peace*, part of the theme of the conference, Professor Galtung cautioned: “But we differ, disagree? Incredible how far we can come if we identify and focus on the good and the positive in Kiev, Donetsk and Moscow, or husband and wife in broken marriages rather than what is wrong, and build new relations on that. Peace is a relation, not attributes of the parties. So also for conferences: focus on the best in paper, praise it; not on the dubious and missing.”

Turkey, the host country of the conference, is geographically located at the centre of Afro-Eurasia where both opportunities and risks interact profoundly. Turkey is committed to preventive diplomacy and the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means. Turkey also intends to host a center in Istanbul which can be used by the UN for its mediation-related activities.

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Turkey's support and extraordinary contribution to the 25th IPRA General Conference is a symbol of Turkey's peaceful foreign policy and the efforts for the preservation of peace and stability at the regional and international levels. It is important to note that in the past 50 years of IPRA history, this is the first time an IPRA conference has been fully funded by a government.

Turkey is a candidate to one of the two non-permanent seats allocated to the Western European States and Others Group (WEOG) at the United Nations Security Council for the term 2015-2016. The elections for this term will be held during the 69th session of the UN General Assembly in 2014.

Following their re-election in Istanbul, IPRA co-Secretaries-general Dr Ibrahim Seaga Shaw and Dr Nesrin Kenar made commitments to work together to continue the restructuring of IPRA and organise the next IPRA conference in November 2016 in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The IPRA conference in Freetown will be jointly hosted by Northumbria university in the UK, Fourah Bay College-University of Sierra Leone, and Sakarya University in Turkey.