UPF France and UPF Belgium Peace Road Recalls WWI History in Northern France and Belgium

Chantal Nga Onana and Johann Colleter
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Arras, France - In the morning of October 3, 2026, about thirty people from northern France and Belgium met on Vimy Ridge, near Arras in northern France, where bloody battles took place in April 1917 between the Germans, who were occupying the ridge, and the forces of France, the United Kingdom and Canada, who wanted to liberate it.

The group first visited the Canadian Museum, which depicted the trenches in which soldiers huddled, the lack of hygiene and sanitation, and the challenges to their physical and psychological health. The guide, a Canadian student, presented all the horror of the fighting on Vimy Ridge, which was an important strategic position as it gave a wide view over much of the region.





The Germans on the ridge could anticipate any movement or attack; several French and English soldiers had already fallen trying to advance towards the ridge. The student explained how a French battalion, composed of Moroccans, bravely charged towards the ridge, and all lost their lives. However, their heroic action significantly opened the way, allowing a large Canadian battalion to launch the final assault.

The battle was bloody; on April 9, 1917, many of the 60,000 Canadian soldiers who lost their lives during World War I were killed on this day, but Vimy Ridge was liberated.

Out of gratitude, France gifted these lands to Canada. The entire property constitutes a vast estate, belonging to Canada, within France. Beside the Battle Museum, which is a few steps away, there is an

impressive monument, representing the Canadian motherland mourning her children, the 60,000 soldiers who fell. The Canadians also erected a monument in homage to the French battalion composed of Moroccans, on the other side of the road, not far from the imposing Canadian monument.



This experience reminded everyone how difficult peace has been to achieve; how precarious it can be; how important it is to remember that humanity is all one big family; and beyond national, political, social, cultural or religious divisions, it is the human family as a whole that suffers.



A human being is first and foremost a child of God, the Heavenly Parent, and when the cannons were heard at Vimy, it was fathers, husbands, brothers and sons who fell, whatever their nationality; and it was

first and foremost their Heavenly Parent who suffered.

In the afternoon the group visited Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, a major memorial site of World War I. A former place of pilgrimage that became a battlefield, a necropolis, and then an international memorial, the site bears witness to the different layers of this land's history.




At the center of the Ring of Remembrance, three speeches were given. Ms. Chantal Nga Onana from northern France reminded everyone of the meaning of visiting this site, emphasizing the importance of overcoming divisions between peoples and building a shared memory. Ms. Bénédicte Suzuki from northern France presented the Peace Road project and its aim to create tangible connections between peoples, despite the challenges of the present time. Mr. Johann Colléter from Belgium offered a symbolic interpretation of the site through three images: sweat for the earth, blood for heaven, and tears for humanity.




These speeches converged on the same idea: transforming the memory of conflicts into responsibility for the present and a commitment to peace.