



“The Role of Young Adults in Human Rights and Duties”

A brief report on the **International Young Adult Program**

@ Dhyana Ashram, Chennai, India
September 11th to 13th, 2009



“The Role of Young Adults in Human Rights and Duties”



94 selected young adults from India and nine other nations (female 64, 30 male) represented five major religions – Hinduism (45), Buddhism (8), Islam (13), Jainism (2) and Christianity (26).

Indian Participants from 11 states:

Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Kashmir, Manipur, Punjab and Pondicherry.

International participants from the following countries:

Nepal, Tanzania, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Somalia, Tibet, Uganda, Philippines.



The conference was officially inaugurated by the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission of Tamil Nadu State and former Chief Justice of Jharkand State, ***Justice A.S. Venkatachala Murthy.***

In his inaugural address Hon. Justice highlighted the dire need to educate the public regarding human rights, and about the importance of protecting religious freedom as a fundamental human right.

He also appreciated the IARF taking initiatives in involving global youth in such a great need.



The **ice-breaking session** carried away tensions and inhibitions, and each of the three days began with an all-faith prayer.



Day One: The first session, led by Mr. Radhakrishna Menon, an expert international trainer assisted by Mr. Venkat of Chennai, briefed on 'Values and Ethics' and prepared the group for a full swing orientation session. The HRE Facilitators from India overviewed past young adult programs, each sharing a different topic and their organizing experience.

The next session - "Human Rights, Duties and Religious Freedom" - led by Dr Ashok Alex Philip, National Trainer and Mr. Jyothiraj T K, HRE Administrator of SACC - briefed on the activities of IARF, the responsibilities of youth as human right activists in a pluralistic world, and the need for co-existence.



The Group discussion session conducted by Bro. Albert Xaviour and Mr. Venkat divided participants into ten groups given ten different topics for discussion: Religion; Caste; Tolerance; Politics; Education; Employment; Human rights; Youth; Communication; Health. The report-back turned into the most intense interactive session of the entire program.



The first day ended with an entertainment programme which included folk songs and folk dance by the various nationalities.

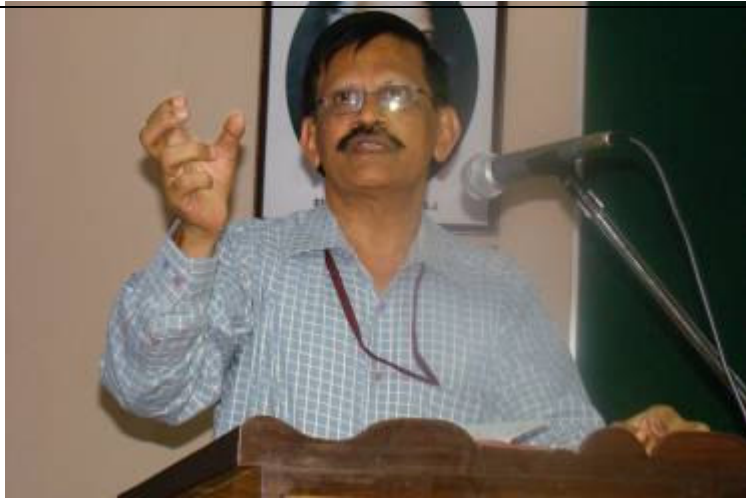
Day Two prepared the group to face the challenges to bringing about world peace.

International Council member Dr Homi Dhalla addressed the gathering with “Challenges before the Young Adults for World Peace”, focusing on the need for collective leadership for world peace by religious and political leaders.

His Powerpoint presentation about the religious conflicts around the world, civil wars and world politics mentioned that peace is not a dream, but can be achieved through constructive action. He described various civil initiatives from around the world. The questions and answer session continued for about 35 minutes.

The next session was viewing our three HRE training films as an introduction for the next session about the UDHR and Religion. Participants shared views and opinion about the content of the films, with clarifications provided by the HRE Facilitators.





The Additional Director General of Police, Tamil Nadu, *Dr K.R. Shamsunder (IPS)* shared his views on religion: **“No religion changes, it is the leaders who change them”**.

He emphasized that right parenting is the need of the hour: **“Parents should instill love, truth, simplicity and harmony in their children”**.



A tour around Chennai’s places of worship included St. Thomas’ Basilica, ‘Santhom’ (Swami Vivekananda House), and Kabaleshwar Temple (as well as the Marina beach!); unfortunately due to the Ramadan evening prayer, the group could not visit the Mosque.



For many, especially those from Africa and the Maldives, it was their first visit to other religions’ holy places.



An **evening cultural get-together** featured a mime group on human rights violation and killings of innocent people in *Sri Lanka*, raising the question of what role the human rights activist has when innocent civilians are tortured by their own governments. The play addressed the importance of action by civil society instead of us being mere mute spectators.



When encouraged to perform their traditional cultures, everyone responded wholeheartedly.

Tibetan participants sang a song about their ambition to live peacefully in their homeland – one day. Afterwards a two-minute silent prayer was observed.

Day Three dawned bright and beautiful, starting with bhajans performed by the following:

Hindu - Ishwarya & Harine; *Christian* - Sr. Amutha; *Muslim* - Imtiyaz & Zahoor; *Common bhajan* - Mrs. Hemalatha & Promila; *Bengali* - Mr. Ashit Basu; *Zoroastrian Prayer* - Dr. Homi Dhalla.



The HRE program and Young Adults: Handled by the Indian IARF young adults Bro. Albert Xaviour, Ms. Anbumani Arumugam, Ms. Laxmi and Adv. Preethan Rao, this session shared their experiences in the IARF international programs and their contributions to the HRE training programs in India.

Participants evaluated the activities of the previous day and went on to share experiences.

The **Kashmir** participants are studying in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, where some of the local people treated them very badly due to their appearance/ origin. Once they were imprisoned for a night because they were misunderstood by the locals to be foreign illegals. They were forced to call their parents, and college authorities had to identify that they were in fact Indians. They felt it was too much for any person to carry an identity card while traveling in one's own country.

The participant from **Manipur** State in North-East India shared his experience that some policemen regularly kill ordinary innocent people in order to create a panic situation to be able to impose law and order. False counter-attacks planned and implemented by the authorities also violate the basic human right of every citizen to live in peace. At the same time, when somebody wants to start any business or small industry, first they have to hand over money to the terrorist groups and get their permission, before then proceeding to getting government approval. So, ordinary citizens are living sandwiched between the government and terrorist groups.





African participants shared that generally in Africa there is a tendency for people to support politicians when there is benefit for them, for which they are ready to kill people and destroy the development of their own nation.

In many African countries there is no proper education about the importance of respecting the freedom of others, whether it is religious freedom or any other human rights issue.

Corruption is very common, so the entire administration is biased. Many religious leaders are trying to keep away from politics, so the importance of religion in creating an atmosphere conducive to peace and interfaith dialogue is still a dream. Lack of education is the main cause of the unrest in many African nations.



The **Maldives participants** shared that since there is only one faith in their land, this was the first occasion ever for them to hear and share about their religion. The HRE videos gave them an impression of how important is peaceful co-existence. After their arrival in India they were welcomed by local people in Mysore, especially Christians, who helped in fulfilling their accommodation and other needs. It changed their prejudice about other religions and nationalities.

Indian participants related their difficulties with educating ordinary people due to poverty and inadequate education. Unemployment and deprivation obstruct the enjoyment of basic human rights by the people, and have been attracting many youth to extremist organizations.

< RFYN's Co-ordinator **Morse Flores** conducted a special session educating the participants on communication skills and the need to improve them. His presentation was wholeheartedly welcomed by the participants.

Plans by the Young Adults

The participants asked for a chance to give their feedback on the conference, along with suggestions for future programs.

- Three-day programs are not enough, they should be doubled;
- “Reach out to Africa and we will walk with you, to Uganda, Kenya & Tanzania, and be sure we will support IARF”;
- “Now we have information about what Human Rights are, we welcome IARF to conduct HRE programs in our own places”;
- “We learnt the importance of celebrating the different religious festivals together, to plant the seeds of trust and hope”.
- “This kind of conference should not be given only to the educated, it should be more for the uneducated because they face more problems in their day-to-day life”;
- “We were scared to talk about human rights in our college or in our society, this is the first time we got a chance to speak about the problems of society and hear from others about their experiences”;
- many participants shared that they are interested in becoming HRE Facilitators if IARF gives them the opportunity;
- celebrate Human Rights Day in our institutions.

Best slogan of the conference:

Change yourself to change society, because you are society

by Jahnvi Gupta of Indore, who received an award from IARF president Dr. Thomas Mathew.

Planning for IARF's 33rd International Congress

Adv. Shabeer Ahmed led the discussion, and two committees were formed to support the Indian Host Committee: one for the RFYN (young adult) pre-Conference meeting, 2nd-4th September 2010; the other, for the IALRW conference.

The valedictory function was inaugurated by Dr. R.M. Ramathal, Chairperson of the Woman's Rights Commission of the Tamil Nadu State. She emphasized the importance of gender equality for a civilized society, and shared her participation in the IARF Human Rights Day program on December 10th 2008 at the Anna Adarsh College, Chennai, and how it motivated the youth. She expressed the hope that NGOs can play a vital role for religious freedom because they are not bound to work for any specific religious community. Close work with the UN is important to avoid war and mass destruction.

Dignitaries on the dais distributed certificates and mementos to the participants. A photo session brought the curtain down on the three-day Youth Conference, with participants assuring the organizers that they are looking forward to assisting IARF in their respective institutions and countries. All of them were enthusiastic about continuing the relationship, and bade one another farewell with "Next meeting at the World Congress in Kochi!"



The conference was organized under the able guidance of Dr Thomas Mathew, IARF President

Members of the organizing committee were:

- The President of the India Chapter
Mr. V. Rengapashyam
- National Secretary Mr. Shabeer
Ahamed
- National Treasurer Ms. Hemalatha
- SACC Young Adult Coordinator
Bro Albert Xavier
- HRE facilitators

Report prepared by Bro. Albert Xavier and T.K. Jyothisraj (SACC HRE Administrator)