

## **Brief Report on 3-day IARF Young Adult Programme held at Shillong**

IARF Young Adult Programme Shillong on 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> June 2004.

*Venue:* The Youth Hostels Building, Shillong

The programme was inaugurated on 16<sup>th</sup> evening by Mr. Carleywell Lyngdoh, the Secretary of the Unitarian Union of Northeast India, and Mr. T.K. Darnei, Leader of the Presbyterian Church in Jowai. Representatives of Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong and Kolkata (Mr. Asit Kumar Basu) and the Buddhist Monastery, Shillong were also present. Dr. Creamlimon Nongbri, former Council member of IARF, Baladiangti Nongbri (YAP Gujarat), Mangsai Pariat (IARF Congress, Vancouver), YAP leaders from Meghalaya Nangroi Suting, Darihun Khriam and Helpme Morhmen were also present on the occasion.

The programme was organised by SACC in collaboration with the local IARF member group, Unitarian Union of Northeast and Meghalaya Branch of IARF India Chapter.

For the young adult programme that started on 17<sup>th</sup>, 30 young adults (20 male and 10 female) were present. Among these were 14 Unitarians, 2 from Ramakrishna Sect, 3 from Presbyterian Church, 5 Catholics, 2 Muslims and 4 Buddhists.

The theme of the programme was "***Interfaith Harmony***". It started with an interfaith prayer followed by introduction of the participants where one participant would introduce another participant. Before the introduction, the participants went into teams of two each and interacted to know each other. Introduction of young adults was followed by a brief introduction of IARF and RFYN by the Coordinator. Then the young adults formed consisting of co-religionists to discuss about their faith traditions and to answer the following questions:

1. What you know about your religion?
2. What you know about others' religion?
3. What you like most about your own religion and others religion?
4. What your religion says about others religions and tolerance?

The presentations on the questions by representatives of different faiths evoked a lot of curiosity and lively interactions as the young adults sought to share and know more about each others religions. The interactions also brought to the fore the common stress laid by all religions on tolerance, understanding, justice and freedom. They also helped in removing many misconceptions, wrong notions, misunderstanding and stereotypes in ones own as well as others religions. The Universal Declaration of

Human Rights (Article 18), the scope for religious freedom and belief within India Constitution, etc. were discussed briefly.

In the following session IARF's Statement of Purpose was discussed with examples and questions and answers. Then the whole group shared information about religious freedom issues in Meghalaya and other parts of India. The young adults also shared instances of religious discrimination, intolerance and hatred. The misunderstanding and differences that prevail between the various Christian denominations in the Northeast were also brought out.

The session on sharing of instances of denial of religious freedom, intolerance and discrimination in relation to human rights led into an exercise to put such instances into short stories. The whole group discussed how to present the instances in story form. Then it divided itself into small groups of 3 to 4 young adults in each to share the stories at a personal level and then write. After writing the stories in small groups, the young adults returned to form the whole group and presented the stories. The presentation of stories generated tremendous interest among the listeners. After each presentation, the stories were discussed and the underlying larger issues were identified.

After having identified the issues, the young adults discussed interfaith activities to promote understanding, harmony and religious freedom. The young adults once again went into small groups to discuss the activities. This time the groups formed were on the basis of the geographical proximity of the areas represented by the young adults. They did exercises on programme designing and made presentations. The young adults from Meghalaya designed activities to promote understanding and respect among the different Christian denominations. The young adults from Kolkata proposed meaningful activities to promote harmony and understanding between Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The Buddhists young adults drew the attention of the group to the religious freedom concerns of their country, Tibet.

During the three-day programme, the young adult also spoke about their worship and religious practices. An interfaith pilgrimage was organised. The young adults visited a Catholic Church, a Presbyterian Church and trekked through three kilometers of clouds-clad Khasi Hills to a sacred place of the indigenous faiths called "Lum" (Navel of the Earth, where according to the indigenous belief, the Earth and heavens met). The local young adults were very excited to visit the sacred spot where their forefathers used to, and now some indigenous faiths continue to, make offerings to their Gods. The long trek brought the young adults closer and also provided ample time and opportunity to discuss their views on religion, belief and practices.

The young adults decided to keep connected to each other through a network and to work closely with the IARF's adults membership in the region to organise interfaith activities in the future. Some of the young adults also presented cultural programmes after the valedictory on the last day.

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