

R.F.Y.N.
Young
Adult
Network



international association for

religious freedom
belief with integrity

**IARF Europe & Middle East Region
Youth Conference on Freedom of Religion & Beliefs
22-25 October 2009
Ludwigshafen (Mannheim), Germany**

Introduction

Young adults have been involved with the IARF in achieving its main vision and goals for many years and they have been working in specific IARF programmes and projects, at local & national, regional and international levels.

With the recent developments and changes within the organization and in its current leadership, participation of young adults in the decision-making process and in projects and programme implementation has been strongly encouraged. This has strengthened the existing network of RFYN (Religious Freedom Youth Network).

RFYN has been a major partner of the organization in implementing the Human Rights Education (HRE) project in Philippines, India & Bangladesh. To complement the HRE Project, RFYN has been organizing an annual international seminar on Human Rights and the Right to Freedom of Religion & Beliefs: the first was in the Netherlands (2007) in partnership with the IARF Dutch Chapter, the second in Jordan (2008) with the Youth Spirit Centre, an RFYN member organization.

The 2009 meeting is held in Chennai, India, from September 11-13 with the IARF South Asia Co-ordinating Council (SACC).

What is the IARF Europe & Middle East Regional Youth Conference?

A gathering of young people & youth workers from various IARF chapters and RFYN partner & network organizations within the EME (Europe and Middle East) region, taking place parallel to the main regional conference in Mannheim. They represent diverse faith, religious and cultural backgrounds, coming together to create a *common regional platform* in order to *inspire, inform, involve* and *empower* each other toward the achievement of IARF's objectives.

These young people & youth workers meet to share thoughts, ideas & hopes of helping the struggle to uphold human rights in general & freedom of religion in particular, drawing on their own experience and personal & social realities, enhancing their learning from the sharing of these experiences with one another.

Why an IARF Europe & Middle East Region Youth Conference?

To enhance the existing youth network within the European and Middle East chapter, and introduce an inter-generational dialogue between elders & young adults, creating a regional platform for issues that are important to young people.

What are the general & specific objectives of this regional conference?

Overall, to create a venue for young people to get involved in the regional dialogue and discussion among IARF members, chapters, networks and partners within the region on issues that are relevant in the achievement of the vision of IARF - thus creating a space to foster a spirit of understanding among young people of diverse ethnic, religious and spiritual backgrounds, which in turn shall be the foundation of future collaboration and partnership among youth adults across political, economic and religious and political boundaries. The specific objectives of the seminar are as follow:

- To bring together a wide range of young people with substantial experience in the promotion and protection of human rights in general, and freedom of religion in particular, plus knowledge and skills in peace and development-related work which are the foundation of IARF & RFYN work.
- To serve as a preparatory meeting of youth attending the 33rd IARF World Congress in India in September 2010. RFYN will use the conference as a venue to select 1 or 2 young adults from the region with the right profile or qualification to serve in the ***RFYN World Congress Working Party***. This working party will lay out the working methodology and plan the organization of the RFYN Pre-Assembly Meeting, which brings together all young adult participants in the Congress one week before the event, at the Congress venue in India, to outline and rehearse the youth inputs.
- To build upon young people's commitment to the IARF, and strengthen their capacity to get involve in decision-making and project and programme implementation of the organization's work at local & national, regional and international levels.
- To mainstream among youth in the region the fundamental human right of *freedom of religion & beliefs*.
- To bring young people & youth workers & partners from different countries in the region into meaningful contact with each other for the sharing of a common vision of a more tolerant world, and to develop leadership potential in outstanding youth and 'multipliers' among participants so that the same program, or follow-up events and projects, will be implemented in their own countries and communities.

Conference Methodology: This conference revolves around the idea of building common ground and trust for sharing ideas and developing ways of co-operation. It is about fostering *experiential learning* for youth so that they become better leaders by developing more self-confidence and self-awareness while gaining more appreciation of each other's differences, and learning to promote understanding and respect among races, religions and cultures.

The conference will be divided into *workshop sessions* and *group works* which will require participants to engage in activities and exercises to reinforce what they have learned about religious freedom & tolerance, overcoming racial & ethnic barriers and accepting others, and the role of young people in community development.

This means the following:

- *Team-building and working with people from diverse backgrounds* is very important, as it helps in building trust and openness for deep and sensitive discussions;
- Activities such as *visits to sacred places of historic, educational, religious or natural interest* will inspire the participants for deeper discussions;
- *Plenary, lectures and open discussions*: There will be two kinds of plenary, firstly experts giving keynotes and intros for certain topics, to be followed by open discussions; the second kind will be plenary organized by the participants themselves, which can be based around a theme that they were asked to prepare before or during the seminar, or after working groups;

- *Cultural presentations and activities*: Time for learning not only about the country, but also about its different religions;
- *Physical activities* such as team works that will reinforce teambuilding, and quieter, relaxing activities such as singing, chanting, meditating, and keeping a training journal;
- *Group works* to develop methods and common understanding;
- *Inter-generational dialogue and learning*, where elders and young people share knowledge and information;
- *The experiential and participatory learning approach*, where learning is built on the experience of the participants and their realities, so that they have a sense of ownership of the whole learning process;
- *Sustainability of the seminar*, by developing concrete action and activities around how to follow up on the output of the meeting;
- *Mainstreaming gender*: The participation and involvement of young women is assured and will be given priority.
- *Giving feedback and reporting to our constituents* (donors, partner organizations, participants and others), who will be updated on the proceedings of the training through participants' reports and reflections.

Organizers & Partners: The regional youth conference is being organized by the **Religious Freedom Youth Network (RFYN)** in collaboration with IARF's Europe & Middle East (EME) region.

Partners: Besides the two main organizers mentioned above, this seminar is being implemented with the support of youth organizations in Germany, Netherlands & Switzerland:

- ❖ Bund Deutsch-Unitarischer Jugend e.V, Germany
- ❖ Netherlands Network of Liberal Youth
- ❖ « Serioso ma non troppo » (SMNT) directed by Serge Ilg, Switzerland
- ❖ The British Isles Unitarian Young Adult Network (BUYAN), United Kingdom
- ❖ Irish Unitarian Youth

Venue and Dates: **Ludwigshafen (Mannheim), Germany; 22nd to 25th October 2009.**

Criteria for Participation: 20 young adults from diverse cultural/ ethnic/ religious backgrounds will be invited to participate in this conference.

Participants should be proficient in English, and have relevant experience working with youth or on people-to-people initiatives for youth. They should be aware of national or international youth issues in relation to human rights and the right to freedom of religion & belief, and have an active interest in promoting understanding and respect for other cultures, religion or beliefs.

Application

Interested parties should send the duly completed Registration Form no later than **15th October 2009**. Applications (and any general inquiries) to:

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Background of the RFYN

Since IARF's Strategic Plan of 2001-2007, a variety of initiatives involving young adults have taken place within IARF. Among them was the creation of a global network of young adults (RFYN) in 2002 which promote in society the principles of freedom of religion and belief, a human right enshrined in Article 18 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which guides the work and activities of the IARF. Since then, the Young Adult Programme has been integrated in the agenda and programming of the IARF, with a long-term goal of developing the necessary knowledge and experience among young people.

The intention is that young people can both be active on religious freedom issues and derive support from each other to do so. Since then IARF has always placed great importance on youth, and in this endeavour has define and develop specific programmes for young people. The principal objective of IARF's strategy for action with and for youth is to champion the empowerment of young people as equal and valuable partners in the organization, by enhancing their full participation in its decision making process and implementation of programs.

Through RFYN, IARF promotes youth participation in society at the local, regional, and international levels. In this regard, youth activities of the organization focus on encouraging young people to express themselves, as well as giving them the best possible chance to participate fully in promoting religious dialogue, acceptance and tolerance.

In line with IARF's continued efforts to strengthen youth participation, Young Adults have been inspired and continued to seek and reaffirm the value of having the input of young people in the IARF vision, missions and goals through various projects and activities such as Work Camp (gift of labor) in Gujarat, India, Tri-People Youth Dialogue and Traveling Classroom Program in Philippines, UUA and Japan Exchange Program held in Japan, and the Human Rights Education project, in co-operation with IARF members and chapters.

As mentioned above, RFYN has organized an annual international training seminar on human rights and freedom of religion & belief in 2007 (Netherlands), 2008 (Jordan) and 2009 (India, also a regional conference for youth in South Asia).

After the IARF World Congress in Taiwan in 2006, a Young Adult Representative was elected International Council Member which resulted in the creation of the RFYN Steering Committee, a 12-member body of young adults from various world regions which serves as the young adults' main decision-making body. At the 2009 IARF Council Meeting held in Japan, RFYN proposed to increased the representation of youth in Council from one to at least two (one female and one male).