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IARF CONGRESS 2010 by Doris Hunter

The 33rd World Congress of the IARF held in Kochi, India, September 4-7 with the theme, "Beyond Conflict to Reconciliation--The Challenge of the 21st Century," was a microcosm of its theme. It was indeed a little world, with a rich diversity of religious faith groups participating in the program. The interaction with Muslims, Jews, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, Hindus, Shintos, Bahais, Sikhs, and yes Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists was amazing. In our circle groups, we formed personal friendships that will remain and an understanding of one another that makes genuine interfaith

dialogue possible.

One of the highlights of the Congress was the opening address by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His message of compassion radiates in his presence, and later it was my privilege to give our US Chapter Award to Dr. Thomas Mathew, President of the IARF with the blessing of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The talks, workshops and cultural programs were challenging and inspiring.

The appearance of the Rangaprabhath Children's Theatre was a special moment. These children come from the villages in the state of Kerala and present dramas from the life and moral teachings of Gandhi. What an

inspiration it was to see these children enact Gandhi's ideals and to see these ideals of nonviolence and peace becoming part of their own lives as they become adults.

To be in India is a special experience, but to be part of the Congress in September was an unforgettable moment for all of us who attended. There were as many as six hundred participants with over one hundred young adults who added their energy and assistance to all of us. When this world of ours is filled with violence and religious misunderstanding and hatred, we can draw strength, commitment once more from this gathering of the 33rd Congress, remembering those who promote the vision of a world of understanding and not ignorance, a world where we meet as human beings and not as strangers from a foreign faith, a world of hope and not despair and cynicism. How fortunate we are, members and friends of IARF, to be part of this loving commitment to religious tolerance and interfaith understanding.



Presenting US Chapter Award to Thomas Mathew

SACRED PLACES A Pilgrimage to India

Join Rev. Abhi Janamanchi and members of Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater on a spiritual pilgrimage to India in Feb. 2011.

Feb 15-March 7, 2011



We will visit sacred places in southern and northern India (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, and Unitarian) including the Khasi Hills of northeast India and experience India from a native's perspective.

This trip promises to be a cultural and spiritual immersion into the heart of India.

If interested in going on this trip of a lifetime, please contact Barbara Brandt at mbrandt1@tampabay.rr.com or Abhi at abhij@uuclearwater.org

Send your news and thoughts to Betsy Darr, editor betdarr@gmail.com

From Hal French, New Chapter Chair

Greetings!
Some of you are veterans as members and friends of the U.S. Chapter, and some of you, as I am in this role, are relatively new. In either case, we hope that you find this a valuable connection. And perhaps that connection may mirror the story of Indra's net in Mahayana

Buddhism, where a vast net, like a spider web, hangs over the palace of the Vedic god, Indra. At each intersection of the web, there is a jewel, which reflects all the other jewels. Maybe you've seen it in a spider's intricate web in the early morning, when dew drops are sparkling on it. This is a symbol of our interconnection. We have common concerns in the IARF, and they involve us in trying to hear the voices of those who are denied some of the basic freedoms that we enjoy, including freedom of religion, very broadly considered. We hear a great deal about free speech, but this requires free silence, to enable us to hear their voices. Kay Lindahl, one of our advisors, has done widely admired pioneering in the art of listening. How may we enhance our listening skills? Albert Camus



**Nina Grey, Francie Markham, Betsy Darr,
Hal French in Columbia, SC**

once said, "Freedom is the concern of the oppressed, and her natural protectors have come from among the oppressed." We are not among them, but we must hear their voices and respond to their condition. We hear them in the desperate voices of persecuted Christians in Iraq, of Buddhists oppressed in Myanmar and Tibet, and with others.

Let me introduce a new Board member, Francie Markham, who has been personally involved in such an endeavor as Chair of a U.S. board sponsoring a large orphanage and school in Zimbabwe. This organization has mobilized incredible support, including sending three large cargo containers of

supplies there in the last few years. Francie has spent weeks onsite, listening and responding to the needs of the people. She has seen jewels reflected in the faces of the children. You know such jewels, and in all of our communications, in this manner and more directly, I hope to see and to hear the jeweled reflections of who you are and what each of you has to offer. It's a privilege to be working with you. We'll be listening for your voices in suggestions and support of the causes in which we are together engaged. My very best wishes,

Hal

The IALRW Congress, 2010

What is it like to attend an IARF and IALRW (International Association of Liberal Religious Women) meeting in a "foreign" country? In my opinion, it's an **adventure!** And most of all, it's an opportunity to make new "forever" friends from all around the world.

The IALRW Congress precedes the IARF Congress, and each lasts about 3-1/2 days, making an entire week of fun and friendship. Our IALRW meeting, celebrating 100 years(!), was based on the theme, "Women in Action for World Peace: Past, Present and Future." Over 100 women met to get to know one another personally and learn how to help bring about World Peace in our daily lives. We did this through sharing our wide variety of spiritual practices; hearing the Risho Kosei-Kai choir sing works including "May There Be Peace" (lyrics by Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, music by Shirley L. Brown, soon on the IALRW.org website); enjoying performances by local dancers and musicians,



Read the latest news from the international office at

www.iarf.net

Chapter Board Members Gather

While Nina Gray and Betsy Darr were visiting the Columbia area in October, they met with Hal French and Francie Markham to establish face-to-face relationships with some members of a Chapter board that will need to conduct business at a distance. As well as potential new directions for the Chapter, they discussed portfolios for board members and named potential new members, who, happily, have all accepted their invitations. That evening we held a gathering of 50 persons on the theme, "How do we relate to our Muslim Neighbors?" co-sponsored by the IARF and the local interfaith organization, Partners in Dialogue.

plus the IARF Youth Choir, made up of young people from around the globe, which was formed for the occasion.

In our meetings, we heard female speakers from many countries and religions on the subject of "Message to the Future, and Message to the Earth." We heard a keynote speech from Barbara Beach, a guest from the ICUUW (International Convocation of UU Women). Circle Groups met to discuss religious cooperation, peace education, ecology, and human dignity. The update on our Literacy Project in Ladakh, India by Ms. Tsewang Dolma Yokhng, was inspiring.

As is our IALRW custom, we held a "water ceremony," whereby each woman brings a small amount of water from home to combine into one vessel - symbolizing that, though we come from different places and backgrounds, we are all one and the same human race, and when combined, we flow together in harmony, without visible differences. Featured throughout the meeting were the past 100 years of our history (or should I say, "her-story"?) in which the IALRW has been a presence on the planet for world peace and for better understanding among all people of all religions everywhere.

Judy Highfill



ALRW Friends



United States Chapter
International
Association
For Religious Freedom

Renew or join!
Visit our website
iarfus.org or send
your dues to
Harold French, Dept.
of Religious Studies,
University of South
Carolina, Columbia,
SC 29208

\$25 - Individual
\$40 - Household
\$10 - Student

To view and share
with friends, a fine
Dutch **video** of the
2010 Congress.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jsHc_kb8QQA

AND visit
International.blogs.uua.org

for **news** about
international
connections of the
UUA, including an
October post
about IARF-India.



We're on the Web!
See us at:
www.iarfus.org

Highlights of Chapter Meeting

The meeting of the U.S. Chapter of IARF, held in Cochi, India, on September 5, was chaired one last time by Doris Hunter. Doris introduced outgoing Chapter Board members: Richard Kellaway, Gale Maynard, Nyla McCulloch, and Peter Richardson. Doris's appreciation for the work done over the years the chapter was located in the Boston area was warmly echoed by all attendees. Appreciation was also expressed to Kathleen Moran, who so ably edited the Chapter's newsletter and shepherded it into an electronic format.

Since the last Chapter meeting in 2006, three integral members of the U.S. Chapter Board have died. We took a few moments to honor the memory and contributions of Polly Guild, Natalie Gulbrandsen and Frank Robertson.

A change in dues structure was discussed, but left for the new board to

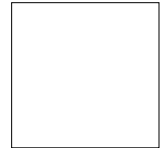
decide.

Richard Kellaway reported a membership of 121 chapter members. He presented the challenges to both expanding membership and organizing on a local level, including the presence of many local interfaith groups, and the possibilities for growth and visibility, such as partnering with and supporting other interfaith groups in the US and IARF chapters around the world.

Doris introduced the slate of new board members. The meeting elected Hal French (Convener), Sri Kota, Franklin Anderson, Orlanda Brugnola, Nina Grey, and Betsy Darr. Doris Hunter will continue as chapter liaison to IARF Council, Sue Nichols to the Office at the United Nations, and Judy Highfill to the IALRW. A letter from Hal French proposing some new directions for the chapter was handed around. The next Congress meeting will be held in 2014.

**U.S. CHAPTER
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

BETSY DARR
183 22ND AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94121



CUSTOMER NAME
STREET ADDRESS
ADDRESS 2
CITY, ST ZIP CODE