

IARF YOUNG ADULT PROGRAMME
HELD AT RAJAHMUNDRY
ON 26TH AND 27TH JUNE 2004

Under the auspices of SACC and Rajahmundry Interfaith Project, a Two-day Young Adult Programme was organised at Rajahmundry on 26th and 27th June 2004. Twenty three young adults from different local colleges and eight young adults from Vizag participated. Among them were 15 male and 16 female participants. There were 22 Hindu, 4 Christian, 3 Jain and 2 Muslim young adults. Mr. Abhi Janamanchi, the International Council Member of IARF and the Coordinator of IARF SACC also took part.

The programme started with introduction of the participants through an ice-breaker game in which the participants formed groups and circles according to their age, first alphabet of their names, city or town they represented, etc. without speaking to each other. The game enlivened the proceedings as the participants used gestures and sign language to know each others background.

After the introduction, Mr. Janamanchi spoke about IARF, its history, objectives, programmes and policies. The the Coordinator informed the young adults about the IARF's RFYN and about the various YAP projects conducted recently in India.

Following this, the participants were given two questions to be discussed in small groups:

1. What you know about your own religion and about others religion
2. What you like most in your religion and others religion.

The groups had active interactions and returned to the whole group to make their presentations. A lively discussion with questions and answers from the participants ensued. Through the interactions, the young adults got to know more about their own and others religion. General misconceptions and wrong notions were removed.

Then the participants were asked what is that they always wanted to know one thing most about others religion. This question opened up the discussions further and they reached high levels of intellectual discourse. Some of the important things that the young adults sought to know from their friends were about the concept of Jihad in Islam, Ahimsa in Jainism, charity and conversions in Christianity and caste system and idol worship in Hinduism. In this engrossing exercise, the young adults quoted religious scriptures, moral codes and scientific reasoning to support their views.

In the next session the IARF's Statement of Purpose and religious freedom issues were discussed. The young adults then started the exercise of writing stories relating to religious freedom, discrimination and intolerance from the perspective of human rights.

Smaller groups of four in each were formed to share the stories and write them down. Then the young adults presented their stories to the whole group. The stories were heard with curiosity and interest followed by their analysis by the participants to understand the underlying issues of religious freedom, discrimination in the name of religion and caste and intolerance.

During the two-day programme, visit to a local Gurudwara and a Jain Temple was also organised. At the Gurudwara, the Sikh priest explained about his religion and also sang Kirtans. At the Jain temple, the Jain young adults showed the participants around and explained about their religion and system of worship, belief and practices. On their return the young adults shared their experiences of being at the places of worship of other religious communities. Some of them said that they knew about the existence of these places in their town, but had never visited them. They were happy that they could visit them and understand other faiths through this programme.

Before the close, the young adults discussed their future plans. They decided to convene a meeting of the young adults and adults soon to plan interfaith activities in Rajahmundry. They felt that the interest and co-operation of the local colleges would be very helpful in organising the activities.

At the valedictory function, the local Minister of Parliament was the Chief Guest. Besides him, Principals of four different colleges were also present. The young adults offered interfaith prayer and presented their reflections on the two-day programme. The programme ended with the National Anthem.

Zulfikhar Akram
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