



Report to IARF membership on the 2011 meeting of Council

On Tuesday 29th and Wednesday 30th March 2011, IARF's new Council (2010 to 2014) held its first full meeting at the Kyoto shrine of new Japan Liaison Committee member Mutsumi-kai, very near the Kyoto International Conference Centre where the Kyoto Protocol was signed.

The meeting took place in the shadow of the disaster in north-east Japan. Rissho Kosei-Kai representative on Council the Rev. Keiichi Akagawa was unable to attend due to the extensive relief operations in which they are involved. Contributions were brought from member groups in the US and UK, with Europeans groups having donated online.

Discussion on the Congress in Kochi acknowledged the overall success and largely favourable impression on the part of the membership, as returned in a survey of participants. But the discussion had to confront the reality of a deficit. The 2006 congress in Taiwan had shown a small profit thanks to the great generosity of our host, Fo Guang Shan monastery, but cost overruns at Kochi had been due to unexpected additional spend on accommodation and catering. Future events will have to be both organiser-free and preferably member group-supported, as at Taiwan, in order to avoid a repeat deficit.

Chapter exchange programmes had been proposed at Congress, and Rev. Sakai reported that the Japan Chapter was already planning exchanges with the US Chapter. The Secretariat office will continue to be based in Osaka, cost-free, while the administrator operates on a more virtual basis from London, where he will meet regularly with the Treasurer/ Company Secretary. This is a model increasingly used by small charities in the current economic climate, and as 'Cloud computing' (where the user's computer may contain almost no software or data) makes administration no longer dependent on desktop PCs or even applications. The Guji Takahiro Miwa returned to Council having agreed to chair the Visioning Committee. Committees were also formed for: Finance & Investment; Visioning; Development (Activities & Fundraising); External Representation; ByLaws.

Investment options are being considered for the JLC-generated capital replenishment fund presented at Congress as a contribution to rebuilding the IARF's reserves. Alongside the reserves held in the UK, this will enable support of the charitable activities for which Council

approved two funding requests, from the South Asia Co-ordinating Council (SACC) and Israel member group **Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA)**, which appealed for funding of its Jerusalem-Hebron Religious Leaders Forum. Director Dr. Yehuda Stolov spoke on its grassroots nature, akin to the similar groups that IEA already runs, which aims to go right to the core of the region's inter-religious problems. In reporting on the ongoing **Human Rights Education (HRE)** work in India since the Congress, Brother Albert Xaviour, the new RFYN representative on Council and an energetic facilitator of HRE programs in many locales in India, emphasized that each session costs a very economical IRs 10,000 (US\$225) for refreshments, certificates, room hire and lecturing expenses. Requests for IARF to hold programs have been received from various colleges that have heard of our work. To date, most of the training has been in South India, but now it is hoped to arrange it in Gujarat and North India. 65 sessions are planned for 2011–2012, each having 40 to 50 participants. It is also planned to create a publicity DVD of the five-year history of the programs since 2005. Although there was a problem of young adults moving on after HRE training, some had continued with RFYN and attended Congress.

The Pakistan Chapter has proposed leading a series of interfaith dialogue encounters between faith leaders in the year ahead, given the severe situation for religious minorities in the country. New member of Council Rev. Dr. Wytse Dijkstra has successfully approached a Dutch church funding group, Kerk in Actie, which will allow IARF to begin work in one of the world's most extreme settings for religious freedom. This external help will make savings for our Indian HRE, and allow work to begin in Pakistan without the political complications of liaison with India.

United Nations: Council heard motivations for a stronger emphasis on our UN position as an NGO in General Consultative Status with ECOSOC (the Economic and Social Council). We attained this status in 1995, allowing us — as a consultative body regarded as having expertise in matters of religious freedom — a number of privileges in terms of access to UN organs and instruments for the pursuit of human rights.

Positive developments at the UN for an organisation like ours which has been involved for five years now in Human Rights Education & Training (HRET), are that the Human Rights Council has adopted a draft Declaration on HRET, for adoption by the General Assembly; and that the mandate of the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Dr Heiner Bielefeldt, will prioritise promotion of HRET.

Dr. John Taylor, our UN in Geneva representative, reported that the last year included meetings between Dr Bielefeldt and NGOs in Geneva in September 2010 and March 2011. The NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief, of which IARF is vice-moderator,

arranged the meetings. And when Dr. Taylor attended the Eighth Doha Conference of Inter-Faith Dialogue (19th–21st October) in Qatar as a member of the Steering Committee, his keynote address gave particular attention to IARF India's HRET programmes.

New website: To present IARF to the world adequately in our new UN focus, the new Council resolved to replace our 20th century website with a complete rebuild based on the current generation of maintenance-friendly Content Management Systems. This will allow us better social networking, and feature a blog as well as a mobile version. Members' contributions in the form of articles on any aspect of our mission, and in any language, will be very welcome. And to keep you in touch with news related to religious freedom, we are now on Twitter — search for @IA_ReligFreedom, and please follow us!

The new Council with president the Most. Rev. Mitsuo Miyake sends best greetings to all, with many thanks to all those who have contributed through IARF to disaster relief in Japan. The Secretariat looks forward to hearing of plans for activities in the year ahead, and hopes you will enjoy and contribute on our new website.



In the garden of IARF member group
ShiTennoji Temple (in Osaka), with
the Abbot, Ven. Shocho Okuda.



Council and staff at the Shrine of meeting host member group **Mutsumi-Kai** in Kyoto