

IARF Member Group Workshop **23rd and 24th August 2008** **Organization for the Development of People, Mysore, Karnataka State, India.**

Member groups from various parts of India participated in the Fourth IARF Member Group and India Chapter Leaders Workshop and Interfaith Seminar, presided over by [Mr. Thomas Mathew, IARF President](#).

The two-day workshop started at 10 am on 23rd August 2008 with prayers from Hindu, Christian and Muslim traditions.

[Catholic Bishop of Mysore Dr. Thomas Anthony Vazhapilly](#) inaugurated the meeting. Eminent leaders in the city of Mysore addressed the gathering:

- [Mr. Ayub Khan \(Mayor of Mysore City\)](#),
- [Mr. P.M. Chikkaboraiiah \(former State Assembly Member\)](#),
- [Mr. Vasu \(President, V.V. Educational Trust\)](#),
- [Mr. Taj Mohammed Khan \(Secretary Rifa – Hul –Muslimeen Educational Trust\)](#),
- [Rev. Fr. Leslei Moras \(Principal, St.Philomenas College\)](#).

They stressed the need to work together and think together to avoid religious clashes in the Indian society.

Besides IARF members around 70 people representing various organizations and religious communities also participated in the colorful inaugural function which closed by 11.30 am.

Soon after, the regular session of the 4th IARF Member Group commenced. Mr. Shabeer Ahmed, the organizer of the meeting welcomed the gathering (*picture at left*).

A silent prayer was observed to commemorate the sad demise of Dr. J. J. Bennet, President of All India Christian Association, a member group of IARF.



The next day, 24th August the workshop began with a prayer offered by Mr. Asit Kumar Basu of Ramakrishna Mission.

11 Member Groups & India Chapter leaders presented their annual reports of the previous year. They also discussed their involvement in interfaith activities and the problems faced in the respective areas. Members came up with lots of suggestions to solve intra- and inter-religious issues with the support of SACC in their respective states.

Participants shared their concerns over the intolerance between the religious communities and the political interferences, which often change small sparks into fire. They also suggested religious education in schools should be encouraged to know about other religions besides their own to avoid prejudices about different religions.

Members shared their concern over the growing fanaticism among youth. They suggested that more such interactions between the religious communities be encouraged. There was a strong recommendation raised by members to restart the Social Service Network to intervene actively in social problems, including poverty and religious intolerance. Dr. Homi Dhalla assured that it might be raised in the next IC meeting of IARF.



Members also suggested that their meetings could be held twice a year but they were informed that it was impossible due to scarcity of funds. They discussed about the forthcoming International Congress to be held in 2010, and suggested that the member groups and chapter leaders should raise funds locally for the Congress.

They also opined that the selected venue of the 33rd International Congress was congenial and there must be maximum participation and involvement from spiritual and religious leaders. The meeting authorized the SACC to constitute sub-committees for the smooth functioning of the Congress.

They also authorized SACC to publish a souvenir and to raise funds for the Congress through advertisement. The meeting entrusted SACC to appoint one or two staff members at the appropriate time for the proper and smooth arrangements of the Congress. Some of them suggested organizing pre-congress meetings in different parts of South Asia to attract the public and News media. Suggestions came in to appoint a volunteer

media manager to highlight the IARF news to Medias during the Congress. Suggestions also came to organize cycle rallies from various states to the venue but some members cautioned that this might be difficult.

The meeting also suggested that no event management or external agency must be included for holding the International Congress. It stated that the International Congress must be held on the collective volunteer leadership of IARF members.

The meeting also lauded the HRE project, which was successful at the grassroots level, and said the response from the educational institutions and religious leaders was encouraging. The meeting also stated that the HRE project must continue and the proposal submitted to the IARF International Council should be given prime importance and the next phase of the project must be implemented soon.

It was also echoed that some member groups are asleep or dormant. The member groups agreed and supported the move of IARF international council in this regard. The decision was also taken to add more member groups, which can function actively in the field of interfaith and focus on IARF purpose and mission.

The members were informed that the IARF secretariat was shifted to Konko Church, a member group of IARF at Osaka, Japan on January 1, 2008. The members shared their wish to have a permanent Headquarters for IARF. The members assured their wholehearted support to organize Peace Programmes and IARF Programmes in their respective areas whenever possible.

The members appreciated the Organizer Mr. Shabeer Ahmed, member group leader Mrs. Hemalatha and the members of the Forum for Harmony, Mysore for their wonderful assistances and services. Also they thanked the SACC for such a well organized conference. SACC officially thanked the members for their active participation and suggestions. As a token of appreciation of their participation, mementos were presented.

The conference concluded with an entertainment programme arranged by the organizer, and the entire programme finished by 6 pm on 24th.



Interfaith General Meeting **24th August 2008, 10.30am** **Organization for the Development of People, Mysore.**

Spiritual leaders from Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Christian, Islam, Zoroastrian, Sikh communities and the Rama Krishna Mission blessed the occasion with their presence and speeches. Prayers were offered by all religious traditions mentioned above.

The meeting was presided over by the **President of IARF Mr. Thomas Mathew** and **Dr. Homi Dhalla** spoke on the topic, **“Role of Religion for World Peace”**. Head of the **Sri Ramakrishna Matt - Swami Nityasthananda, of Mysore**, inaugurated the meeting by lighting the lamp.



The gathering was addressed by spiritual leaders and scholars in their traditional attire:

- **Rev. Dr. Archie Gonsalves (Christian)**
- **Prof. Dr. Syed Akheel Ahmed, Vice Chancellor, Yenepoya University (Islam)**
- **Dr. Homi Dhalla (Zoroastrian)**
- **Mr. Renjith Singh, Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurudwara (Sikh)**
- **Rev. Fr. J. B. Xaviour (Catholic)**
- **Mr. Tanveer Sait (Islam, former State Minister & Member of Karnataka State Assembly)**
- **Guruji Dikshita (Jainism)**

- **Ven. Khagsar Tulku (Buddhism)**, The Tibetan Settlement at Bylakuppe, Karnataka as a special invitee, represented the refugee camp of 22,000, among them 10,000 Buddhist monks).

All speakers shared their ideas and message for Peace and Harmony. They assured their co-operation to organize such interfaith meetings in their respective areas. The local Karnataka State Assembly member and former Labor Minister Mr. Tanveer Sait expressed his interest to organize a public interfaith meeting with the participation of 50,000 people with the support of IARF–SACC in December 2008. Seventy-five local religious leaders along with IARF members participated in the interfaith meeting. The Catholic Service Organization [ODP] freely provided the air-conditioned auditorium. By noon, the meeting was over with fellowship lunch.

On 25th August, some members of member group under the leadership of Mr. Shabeer Ahmed and Mrs. Hemalatha along with Mr. Thomas Mathew and Dr Homi Dhalla visited the settlement area of the Tibetan migrants at Bylakuppe. The exiled Tibetan Government Representative and Mutt leaders welcomed the IARF team members.



In the further discussion, their problems were addressed. Mr. Shabeer Ahmed and Mrs. Hemalatha guaranteed that with the help of local agencies they could arrange the higher studies of the youth in the settlement. The members also visited the Tibetan Golden Temple and met the religious leaders. The 1,000year-old Hindu Matt - [Sri Suttur Veerasimhasana Mysore Head Jagatguru Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Mahaswamigalu](#) - who is running **361** education institutions in India and Mauritius, invited IARF leaders to his Matt and congratulated them for their service to mankind. He offered help in the form of his institutions for interfaith meetings free of charge.