

International Interfaith Organisations Network (IION) Meeting 2008



The 2008 meeting of representatives of International Interfaith Organisations (IION) was held in India from October 4th-7th at the Renewal Centre, Azad Road, Kochi, Kerala, in conjunction with the Assembly of the WORLD FELLOWSHIP OF INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCILS (WFIRC), which is a member of IION.

IION participants shared in the public and plenary sessions of WIFRC and also in prayer times. IION participants met by themselves for some of the meals and during sessions designated as workshops. Sharing in the WIFRC meeting gave IION participants the opportunity to learn about the great variety of interfaith work in many parts of India. It was also a chance to make those active in India more aware of the role of international bodies.

The IION meeting began with a time of introductions in which participants also talked about the work of their organisations.

Interfaith Work at the United Nations (UN)

IION participants were grateful for and encouraged by reports of interfaith activity at the UN, which had been sent by Sister Joan Kirby (attached) and Dr Gerardo Gonzales.

They expressed their support for the **Proposal for a Decade of Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace**, which is already supported by several IION member organisations. It was hoped that other IION member organisations would add their support and that all IION member organisations would encourage support from their members in countries around the world.

It may also be helpful to indicate to governments that there is widespread support for this initiative.

It is important to ensure that UN member nations and NGOs are aware of the significance of the 2009 Parliament of World Religions. It was also hoped that there would be sufficient progress for this initiative for it to be highlighted at the Parliament or even for the year to be launched there.

The Parliament of World Religions.

Plans for the Parliament of World Religions, which is to be held at Melbourne, Australia, from December 3rd-9th, 2009, were explained to the IION group, which was encouraged and impressed by the progress already made.

IION member organisations were urged to encourage awareness of and attendance at this important event. They could arrange a pre-Parliament

event and try to ensure that local interfaith groups feel involved, even if no one from them can actually attend. Considerable attention is being paid by CPWR to ensuring wide reporting of the event and multi-media access. It was hoped that IION member organisations might sponsor and pay for some young people and others who would not be able to pay for themselves. The Parliament aims to be as widely representative as possible.

It was hoped that CPWR would ensure that on-going interfaith activity and organizations in different parts of the world is highlighted at the Parliament and that there would be ways of showing that the various interfaith organisations are working in partnership.

There was discussion of how this might best be achieved.

It is hoped that all IION member organisations will arrange programmes and could involve people from other IION organisations in their programmes. .

It was suggested that a page in the programme could highlight IION and its member organisations – making clear that joining these on-going interfaith organisations are a way of continuing the achievements of the Parliament. It was hoped a way could be found to put people in touch with local interfaith activities on their return home.

It was suggested that in the exhibition area, the stands of the various IION organisations could be placed together.

Future IION meetings.

No future meeting was planned, although there will be opportunities to reconnect at Melbourne. It may be possible to arrange a get-together during one of the early evening Open Space Times.

The International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) will be holding its next Congress in 2010 and would welcome participants from other interfaith organisations.

It was suggested that, with the help the Interfaith Youth Core, participation of young people at future meetings should be encouraged.

The group discussed the rapidly changing landscape of interfaith relations. Some IION member organisations are already working closely together – for example in New York - and may not need an additional meeting. There are also several new interfaith bodies, such as the Blair Foundation and initiatives of several countries in the Middle East. It may be that new structures are required. It was hoped that IION member organisations would give some thought to this. It was also recognised that the International Interfaith Centre (IIC) at Oxford has very limited resources and no longer has an office or a paid director. The work is now being carried on by IIC Trustees and Patrons.

Ways by which new technology can close the communications gap between face-to-face meetings was discussed.

IION Leaflet

A new up to date leaflet giving details of IION member organisations was distributed. Thanks were expressed to Sandy Bharat and Celia Storey for their work on this. Member organisations are encouraged to produce copies to give to Board members.

www.interfaithorganisations.net

Following last years IION meeting, IIC has set up an additional website. This is intended to keep IION member organizations up to date with each other's activities and to make them known to a wider public. The website now carries quite a lot of news of current interfaith activities, but it will become far more useful if more IION member organizations use the facility to add news directly to the website. To do so each organization should register two people at <http://wordpress.com> and then please notify margpaton@gmail.com.

Thanks

IION participants were most grateful for the warm welcome and hospitality, which they received from WFIRC and wish to record thanks to all the members of WFIRC and especially to Fr Albert Nambiapambil. Thanks were expressed to Charanjit Ajit Singh for chairing the meeting. Thanks were also expressed to URI and to the Kochi Brahma Kumaris Centre for each hosting a lunch for the IION group.

Attendance

Bettina Gray, Chair of the North American Interfaith Network

William Leshar, Chair of the Council for the Parliament of World Religions

Charanjit Ajit Singh, Chair of the International Interfaith Centre

Ajit Singh, World Congress of Faiths Committee member

Mr Thomas Matthew, President of the International Association for Religious Freedom

Mr Subriamanium, President IARF India Chapter,

Dr Asok Alex Philip Kerala IARF

Professor Jyothisraj, Kerala IARF

Fr Albert Nambiaparambil, WFIRC,

Professor Meher Master-Moos, WFIRC,

Justice P K Shamsuddin, WFIRC

Dr Abraham Karickam, URI Co-ordinator and Global Staff Member,

Sister Gopi Elton, BK, World Congress of Faiths

Atreyee Day, IIC staff member and secretary for the meeting,

Marcus Braybrooke, International Interfaith Centre and World Congress of Faiths.

Vivek Coutinho of the Focolare Movement attended as a guest.

(Not all of the above were present for all sessions)

Apologies were received from the Temple of Understanding, The Elijah Institute, the Three Faiths Forum, Minorities of Europe, Interfaith Youth Core, International Movement for a Just World, the Peace Council and Religions for Peace

Marcus Braybrooke

15.10.08

REPORT FOR IION ON INTERFAITH ACTIVITY AT THE UN
JOAN KIRBY – TEMPLE OF UNDERSTANDING

My report is written during the week of the opening of the General Assembly and I am pleased to report that Interfaith Dialogue has gained support again among significant members of the UN. Last November I described what I called a sea change at the UN regarding Interreligious Dialogue. This year interest in religious collaboration to achieve UN goals and cooperation for peace is the hope and expectation.

Following the meeting of IION in November, 2007 where John Taylor introduced the Proposal for a Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace, a group of Member States Ambassadors, representatives of more than 40 religious Institutions and of the major Interfaith Organizations met in January, 2008 at Bossey in Geneva to determine whether they could support the proposal. The expectations in the original text were altered and a revised edition gained support from the entire group. A provisional Steering Committee with Stein Villumstad as interim Chair was established to test the interest in this proposal among a significant number of Member States at the UN General Assembly.

The Religious NGOs at the United Nations Headquarters in New York have pursued the possibility of having this Proposal introduced during the 2008-09 meetings of the General Assembly. Stein Villumstad, Interim Chair of the Steering Committee, Chris Ferguson, UN Liaison for WCC, Monica Willard, URI Representative to the UN and Joan Kirby, Temple of Understanding representative to the UN are the New York members of the Provisional Steering committee established in Geneva. The task of the New Yorkers is to visit Member States to gain support and to find an appropriate Member State willing to introduce the Resolution.

During the spring and summer the support of many states was solicited. We have been able to open the dialogue and have found strong support for the core purpose of the Proposal – to assure collaboration of religious institutions throughout the world to help achieve the goals of the UN, notably Human Rights and the Millennium Development Goals. We began with the European Union since we had word of a Concept Paper that opposes the Decade. As we visited EU States we found that the main resistance is to a proliferation of Decades rather than opposition to Interreligious

Dialogue. Subsequent visits gained friends who promised to support but did not offer to sponsor the Resolution until we met with Senegal. After months of waiting it was during the opening days of the General Assembly that Stein Villumstad secured a meeting with President Wade who promised that Senegal will table the resolution. This is a major step that will be pursued during the months to come.

The opening of the General Assembly sets the agenda for the coming year. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and President of the GA, Miguel d'Escoto of Nicaragua both emphasized the importance of achieving the Millennium Development Goals as a primary objective. Perhaps this is the reason that Member States are interested in the proposal coming from the RNGOS at the UN.

29.9.08