

REPORT ON
DR. THOMAS MATHEW'S PARTICIPATION AT
INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON 'HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN SOUTH ASIA'
HELD AT DHAKA UNIVERSITY ON 24TH SEPTEMBER 2012

Prepared by Dr. Thomas Mathew, Chairman IARF SACC

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to inform you all that we had a successful visit to Ramakrishna Mission (hereinafter RKM), Kolkata, Bangladesh, Chennai, Madurai etc. IARF International Council Member Rev. Takahiro Miwa and Mrs. Yukari Miwa joined me in Delhi after their participation in the International Day of Peace observed by IARF Pakistan Chapter.

23.09.2012 - At Rama Krishna Mission, Kolkata

From Delhi we went to RKM Ashram Kolkata, one of the oldest member groups of IARF in India and the previous head quarters of IARF SACC. Prof. Anbumani Arumugam, RFYN International President joined us there. At RKM we had a great welcome by the head of RKM Swami Suprananadaji Maharaj. There we had a good time of sharing about IARF's present and future programs and projects. Prof. Asit Kumar Basu, IARF HRE facilitator from RKM, explained about various developmental projects going on in RKM and guided us to different educational institutions and programs running by the RKM in their 340 acre campus.

24.09.2012- At University of Dhaka

On 24th we flew to Dhaka to attend the International Seminar organized by IARF Bangladesh Chapter and the Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (CIID). Due to the anti-Islam film 'Innocence of Islam', there were violent protests and processions in entire Bangladesh (across the Muslim world in general) on 23rd just before our arrival. The unrest created panic in Dhaka city and the traffic became almost uncontrolled. It took three hours for us to reach the Seminar venue from our hotel which is only just 10kms away.

International Seminar on 'Human Rights and Religious Freedom in South Asia'

The International Seminar on 'Human Rights and Religious Freedom in South Asia' held at the Centre for Advanced Research in Humanities of the University of Dhaka on 25th September 2012 at 4 p.m. The meeting hall was fully packed with educators, social workers, scholars, religious leaders and post graduate students. Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam, President of Bangladesh Chapter presided over the meeting and a bunch of dignitaries mentioned below presented various papers.

- Dr. Tapan C. De Rozario, Department of World Religions and Culture, Dhaka University.
- Prof. Dr. Patrick Gaffney, University of Notre Dame, USA.
- Prof. Waldemar Lies, Professor of Communication and Reconciliation, Germany.
- Rev Takahiro Miwa, International Council Member IARF, Head Priest, Tsuyoshi Shrine, Nagoya, Japan.
- Dr. Thomas Mathew, Chairman SACC and Former President of IARF.
- Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam, Department of World Religion and Culture, Dhaka University and head of the IARF-Bangladesh Chapter.
- Ms. Anbumani Arumugam, International Young Adult President, IARF RFYN.

The keynote speaker Dr. Tapan C. De Rozario, in his thirty minute speech, highlighted the issues related to religious freedom and human rights. Dr. Rozario circulated his paper among the participants, so it eventually made them to refer the raise questions on the topic. The seminar generally addressed human rights issues, religious issues like fanaticism, intolerance and Religious Freedom. Speakers addressed the issues based on personal experiences and the reports from different national and international agencies, including United Nations and US Commission on International Religious Freedom. Every speaker did not forget to accept the reality that religious fanaticism and intolerance are growing across South Asia. Religious Freedom is being violated not only by the fundamentalist but also by the Government bodies in the region. The seminar upheld the reality that only peace between the religions and the interference of the religious

leaders only can cure religious unrests and make peace in South Asia. Rev. Miwa emphasized the importance of solidarity between the religions for the world peace in this era of globalization. I was able to explain about IARF and its principles and missions across the world and our work with UN bodies, especially with the Human Rights Commission. Around 6:30 pm the meeting was finished and all the participants were invited for light refreshments. I must say that the meeting was successful one and another good step to the long journey of IARF in Bangladesh. The program was telecasted by many national televisions and reported by many news papers.

IARF Bangladesh Chapter Board Meeting

Around 8:00pm Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam organized the Chapter Board Meeting of IARF Bangladesh along with Dinner. He shared the difficulties which IARF Bangladesh Chapter has been facing over years, especially in the field of Religious Freedom Advocacy. He and his colleagues shared that working for IARF is not an easy subject in Bangladesh. Many times they have been watched suspiciously by the religious fundamentalists. As a developing country, its resources are very limited, so he requested a certain fixed amount to run the chapter. We understood the difficulties both for activities and administration, and pledged our solidarity with them and also shared the financial difficulty facing by IARF at present. At the same time we have assured our best cooperation in the future years.

26th September 2012

Sharing at the Department of World Religions and Culture of Dhaka University

On 26th, Department of World Religions and Culture of Dhaka University invited us to share about IARF and Shinto Religion to the PG students at the Department Seminar Hall. The meeting was started by 10:00am. Rev. Takahiro Miwa addressed the gathering and shared about Shinto Religion and its traditions. The students interacted with him and asked questions about the rituals and practices of the Shinto religion. It gave them an impression that the essence of all religion is one and it proclaimed peace. Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam presided over the meeting and again I was able to share with the students about the mission of IARF and Human Rights Education program.

RFYN Bangladesh Chapter Meeting

At the same day evening 4:00pm RFYN Bangladesh Chapter organized its first formal meeting at the Department of World Religions and Culture. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Md. Abu Taher, President of RFYN Bangladesh. The entire meeting was organized by RFYN members of Bangladesh. Mr. Abu Taher, an Assistant Professor at the Dhaka University presented a power point presentation on '**Human Rights Violation in Today's World**'. The presentation in fact was touching and thought provoking. Prof. Anbumani Arumugam was the guest of honor of the meeting. She shared about the importance of youths to encounter with religious issues and to bridge the path between the divided religious societies. Mrs. Yukari Miwa greeted the youths of IARF Bangladesh Chapter. Two papers were presented on Human Rights and Religious Freedom by Ms. Jannatul Maa¹ and Ms. Tahsina Ferdouse² research students of department of World Religions. The papers addressed the human rights violations across South Asia and the root cause of intolerance. They expressed their view that fanaticism growing at the cause of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and the unholy nexus of politics and religion. The students expressed their own view in the presentations and shared their concerns about the violence and the intolerance. They pledged to work with IARF as much as possible in the coming days. Mr. Abu Taher mentioned that though Bangladesh is a Muslim country, they observe all important days of all religions as national holidays and officially observe to bridge the religions. At the end of meeting they have selected the RFYN National

¹ Presentation by Ms. Jannatul Maa <http://www.iarfsacc.org/downloads/files/human-rights-and-religious-freedom-in-bangladesh-43.pdf>

² Presentation by Ms. Amin Tahsina Ferdous <http://www.iarfsacc.org/downloads/files/presentation-by-ms-amin-tahsina-ferdous-48.pdf>

Committee of Bangladesh and I read it and formally declared, the RFYN Bangladesh Chapter³. It has included all the major religions in Bangladesh and I hope it is a good beginning of our youth programs in Bangladesh.

RFYN programs in Madurai and Chennai

Mrs. Yukari Miwa attended RFYN programs in Madurai and Chennai. The reports of events will be sent by concerned organizers. Due to the lack of time I could not attend the programs at Madurai and Chennai.

Concluding Remarks

We are thankful to the Bangladesh IARF chapter leaders Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam, Mr. Shaid Hossain and Mr. Abu Taher for organizing such effective gathering on behalf of IARF. I appreciate Rev. Takahiro Miwa, IARF Council Member for his presence in IARF Pakistan, Bangladesh and India programs along with his wife and for bearing the travel cost. I am also thankful to Prof. Anbumani Arumugam, RFYN International President for attending the programs in Bangladesh and India by her own travel arrangements.

Please follow the links below to see photos and presentations.

Sincerely,



Dr. Thomas Mathew
(Chairman IARF SACC)

Links

Photos

Kolkata

- Meeting at Ramakrishna Mission
<http://www.iarfsacc.org/media/photos/index.php?cat=70>

Bangladesh

- International Seminar on 'Human Rights and Religious Freedom in South Asia'
<http://www.iarfsacc.org/media/photos/index.php?cat=67>
- RFYN Bangladesh Chapter Meeting
<http://www.iarfsacc.org/media/photos/index.php?cat=68>
- Sharing of World Religions at Department of World Religions, Dhaka University:
<http://www.iarfsacc.org/media/photos/index.php?cat=69>

Chennai

- Mrs. Miva's visit to Chennai
<https://picasaweb.google.com/106048874172816275704/MrsMiwaVisitToChennai?authkey=Gv1sRgCLLE-NX9nclrswE>

Reports

- Report by Prof. Ms. Anbumani Arumugam
<http://www.iarfsacc.org/downloads/files/international-seminar-at-dhaka-university-report-44.pdf>
- Mrs. MIWA's visit to Young Adults at Chennai
<http://www.iarfsacc.org/downloads/files/mrs-miwa-s-visit-to-young-adults-at-chennai-46.pdf>

³ RFYN Bangladesh Organizing Committee-2012

<http://www.iarfsacc.org/downloads/files/iarf-rfyn-bangladesh-organizing-committee-2012-47.pdf>

Presentations

- Presentation by Prof. Ms. Anbumani Arumugam
<http://www.iarfsacc.org/downloads/files/role-of-youth-in-religious-freedom-in-south-asia-45.pdf>
- Presentation by Ms. Jannatul Maa
<http://www.iarfsacc.org/downloads/files/human-rights-and-religious-freedom-in-bangladesh-43.pdf>

Other

- RFYN Bangladesh Organizing Committee-2012
<http://www.iarfsacc.org/downloads/files/iarf-rfyn-bangladesh-organizing-committee-2012-47.pdf>