



international association for

religious freedom

belief with integrity

14<sup>th</sup> National Conference of  
International Association for Religious Freedom – India Chapter

*Sri Adichunchanagiri Mahasamsthana Mutt, Mandya District, Karnataka | 30-31 October 2012*



## REPORT

Organized by

IARF India Chapter

in association with

Sri Adichunchanagiri Mahasamsthana Mutt, Mandya District, Karnataka

&

IARF South Asia Coordinating Council



14<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
OF IARF INDIA CHAPTER  
(30-31 OCTOBER 2012)








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#### CONFERENCE THEME:

#### COLLECTIVE RELIGIOUS RESPONSIBILITY ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT\*

The theme was selected based on the guidance given by SACC Chairman Dr. Thomas Mathew. He contributed much to the theme since he was fortunate enough to participate in UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20 at Rio de Janeiro, June 2012. It was indeed a timely theme, and resource persons presented various dimensions of the theme and appreciated organizers for selecting such timely topic.

#### DELEGATES

Total: **407**

Adults : **110** (Male: 95 & Female: 15)  
Young Adults : **296** (Male: 132 & Female: 164)



#### RESOURCE PERSONS

- Dr. Thomas Mathew, Chairman IARF SACC
- Mrs. M. A. Hemalatha, National President , IARF India Chapter
- Mr. Md. Shabeer Ahmed , National Secretary, IARF India Chapter
- Sri Muktidananda Swamiji, President, Rama Krishna Ashram, Mysore
- Sri Sri Nirmalananda Swamiji, Sri Adichunchanagiri Mutt,
- Rev. Fr. Ronnie Prabhu, PRO, SJ, Bangalore
- Maulana Usman Shariff Saheb, Sirkhazi, Mysore
- Mr. Shabeer Mustafa, Retd. Principal, Govt. I Grade College, Srirangapatna

<sup>1</sup>\* The **Theme logo/Visual Identity** of the Conference and the report layout is designed by IARF SACC Office

**Photos** furnished in the report are taken by IARF India Chapter & SACC Office, unless otherwise mentioned.



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- Mr. C.N. Manjappa, Chairman, Dept. of Studies in Research Law, Karnataka State Open University, Mysore
- Colonel Bhanu Prakash, Youth Hostel, Mysore
- Prof. Anbumani Arumugam, President, RFYN International

#### ABOUT THE VENUE:



#### SRI ADICHUNCHANAGIRI MAHASAMSTHANA MUTT © SACC

SRI ADICHUNCHANAGIRI MAHASAMSTHANA\* is situated on a rocky hill at an altitude of about 3,300 ft., above sea level, 110 kms west of Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka, India. It has a history of 2000 years of its existence. It is the holy land engulfed with the divine resonance and vibration. Ancient Vedic culture was founded here on spirituality, where nature is valued and worshipped.

Sri Kshetra is surrounded by a beautiful forest, which appears to radiate an aura of abiding serenity, spiritual solitude and peace. This area is known as 'Mayura Vana', where enchanting peacocks live freely.

Millions look to this ancient Monastery, for both spiritual and mundane guidance. Apart from teaching spirituality, Sri Kshetra is set out to uplift the rural community through education and healthcare programs – the two most pressing needs of the society.

<sup>2</sup>\*Read more about Mutt:

The Mutt is striving for the welfare and betterment of the common people, particularly those of rural areas. Several educational and technical institutions have been started in different places of the State including a Sanskrit college at Sri Kshetra. The service activities have increased many folds ever since Jagadguru Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Mahaswamiji became the head of the Mutt in 1974. At present there are twelve branches of the Mutt. Seven Mutts receive patronage and more than 350 Educational Institutions 40 Mutts are managed by the Mutt. The mutt has branches in Kashi, Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu, Selam and even in America. About 6,000 needy students are given free boarding and lodging and about 45,000 students are provided with general and technical education.

Sri Mutt serves free food to more than twenty thousand people every day.

“Let the Poor & Oppressed be our God.”- Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Mahaswamiji





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## INTRODUCTION

International Association for Religious Freedom-India Chapter convened its 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, entitled “**Collective Religious Responsibility on Sustainable Development**” from 30-31 October 2012 at Sri Adichunchanagiri Mahasamsthana Mutt, Mandya District, Mysore. With some **407 participants** (combining delegates & participants) representing different faith groups and social activists from **5 countries**<sup>3</sup>, the Conference venue became platform for ceaseless activity and discussions from the Opening to the Closing of Conference. Resource persons explained the topic, **Sustainable Development** from a number of perspectives especially on religious ground. Participants’ high degree of interest and involvement throughout the conference highlighted their desire to promote sustainable development.



DAIS © SACC

Day-1 | 30/10/2012

## Day-1 Programs

- Inaugural Ceremony
- Keynote Speech: Dr. Thomas Mathew
- Development Through Religious Harmony: Mukthidananda Swamiji
- Causes of International Religious Disharmony: Sr. Shabeer Mustafa
- Cultural Night
- Visit to Musical Fountain

## MORNING SESSION

### Opening of the Conference/Inaugural Ceremony

The Conference started at 10:30am on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2012. Prof. Anbumani Arumugam, International President of RFYN, invited dignitaries to the dais. Adv. Md. Shabeer Ahmed, National Secretary IARF India Chapter welcomed guests and delegates to the conference. Adv. Mrs. M.A. Hemalatha, president of IARF India Chapter chaired the meeting and flower bouquets were offered to all the dignitaries on the dais<sup>4</sup> after her presidential address.

<sup>3</sup> India, Afghanistan, Kenya, Tibet and Tanzania



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As a token of respect and love Conference Committee presented a Portrait of His Holiness Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Mahaswamigalu to Mutt Officials.

Sri Sri Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji, Sri Adichunchanagiri Mutt, Sri Mukthidananda Swamiji, President, Rama Krishna Ashram, Mysore, Dr. Thomas Mathew, Chairman IARF SACC, Maulana Usman Shariff Saheb, Sirkhazi, Mysore, Adv. Md. Shabeer Ahmed, Mr. M. Subramaniam, Mr. Raja, Adv. B.T. Chidambaram, Prof. Anbumani Arumugam, President RFYN and few other Swamijis of the Mutt were presented to grace the Opening Ceremony.



**ADV. MD. SHABEER AHMED** welcoming the dignitaries and delegates. © IARF India Chapter



**ADV. MRS. M.A. HEMALATHA** delivering the Presidential Address. © IARF India Chapter

### Inter-Faith Prayers

Prayers were offered by members of Buddhist, Hindu, Islam, and Christian faith group/traditions. Members of each religion humbly offered traditional prayers respectively and this eventually formed a harmonious atmosphere.

<sup>4</sup> Conference Committee also honored dignitaries and resource persons by presenting fruits bowls, shawls, Sandal wood garlands, book titled 'What religion is?' authored by Swami Vivekananda and Conference Bag.





MAULANA USMAN SHARIFF SAHEB, Sirkhazi, Mysore offers Islamic Prayer © SACC

### Lighting the Lamp

Sri Mukthidananda Swamiji, President, Rama Krishna Ashram, Mysore officially inaugurated the Conference by lighting the lamp.

Jagadguru Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Mahaswamiji of Sri Adichunchanagiri Mahasamsthana was invited to inaugurate the Conference; unfortunately he could not make it possible due to ill health. Sri Sri Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji, Secretary, Adhichunchanagiri Mutt, Maulana Usman Shariff Saheb, Sirkhazi of Mysore, Dr. Thomas Mathew, Chairman, IARF-SACC, M. A. Hemalatha, National President, IARF India Chapter, Mr. Md. Shabeer Ahmed, National Secretary, IARF India Chapter, M. Subramaniam, Patron IARF India Chapter, Vice Chairman, SACC Mr. B. T. Chidambaram, Treasurer IARF India Chapter and Mr. A Subramaniam Raja were presented to grace the occasion.



SWAMI MUKTIDANANDA, President, Rama Krishna Ashram, Mysore lighting the lamp along with other dignitaries © India Chapter.

### INAUGURAL ADDRESS: Sri Muktidananda Swamiji \*

In his speech Sri Muktidananda Swamiji highlighted the role of religion in bringing out sustainable development. All religions are leading to same truth. Because of this uniformity I am here to inaugurate the conference. How the religious leaders can come together for social development. Religious harmony is the most important elements when it comes to development. Since, very antiquity all religion in India maintained harmony and peace. Today the problem with the religion is the mushrooming of fundamentalists and anti-socials within the religion.

\* Swami Mukthidananda is the head of Ramakrishna Ashram, Mysore





**Maulana Usman Shariff Saheb<sup>6</sup>**

He appreciated the broad-mindedness of Mutt to allow people of different faith to come together to share their concerns and ideas.

In his speech he told that, 'we all believe in God and call Him in different names. Practicing of faith is different from one religion to other. Religious freedom is very important right for a human being, and wherever it violates, there arises division, unrest and disharmony.

**Sri Sri Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji<sup>7</sup>**

He appreciated the efforts of IARF India Chapter in promoting inter-faith relations, in the multi-religious context.



**DELEGATES © India Chapter**

#### **KEYNOTE SPEECH-COLLECTIVE RELIGIOUS RESPONSIBILITY ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:**

##### **Dr. Thomas Mathew\***

Dr. Thomas Mathew presented a detailed picture of Sustainable Development and its religious dimension. Regardless of specific religion or faith, religious attitudes can accelerate the sustainable development.

<sup>6</sup> Maulana Usman Shariff Saheb is the head of Muslims in Mysore.

<sup>7</sup> Swami Sri Sri Nirmalananda is a disciple of Jagadguru Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami

<sup>8</sup>\*Chairman of International Association for Religious Freedom, South Asia Coordinating Council. His speech is available on request: [silentnet@sify.com](mailto:silentnet@sify.com)/[info@iarfsacc.org](mailto:info@iarfsacc.org)





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‘Pressure on the major religions is increasing today and they have to come together and proactively engage in public discourse on issues pertaining to individual wellbeing and social progress’, Dr. Mathew stressed. He also assured the support and cooperation of IARF in working with all likeminded individuals, NGOs and religious bodies to ensure sustainable development in the coming days.



DR. THOMAS MATHEW delivering Keynote Speech. ©India Chapter

## AFTERNOON SESSION

### DEVELOPMENT THROUGH RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Sri Mukthidananda Swamiji<sup>9</sup>, Ramakrishna Ashram, Mysore



SRI MUKTHIDANANDA SWAMIJI addressing the delegates © SACC

SWAMIJI told that the role of religion is to ensure human progress. There exists a conflict between religion and science. Root of all is one. There is only one sun for all. Therefore no one can claim any uniqueness in religious. God is for all and formless. ‘People who breathe intolerance and violence are anti-socials, he added.

Quoting Swami Vivekananda, he said “Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man”.

Swamiji also related the story and philosophies of Sri Ramakrishna. “The greatest contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world is his message of the harmony of religions. To Sri Ramakrishna all religions are the revelation of God in His diverse aspects to satisfy the manifold demands of human minds. Like different photographs of a building taken from different angles, different religions give us the pictures of one truth from different standpoints. They are not contradictory but complementary. Sri Ramakrishna faithfully practiced the spiritual disciplines of different religions and came to the realization that all of them lead to the same goal. Thus he declared, "As many faiths, so many paths." The paths vary, but the goal remains the same. Harmony of religions is not uniformity; it is unity in diversity. It is not a fusion of religions, but a fellowship of religions based on their common goal -- communion with God. This harmony is to be realized by deepening our individual God-consciousness. In the present-day world,

<sup>9</sup> Mukthidananda Swamiji is the head of Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore.



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threatened by nuclear war and torn by religious intolerance, Sri Ramakrishna's message of harmony gives us hope and shows the way".

Swamiji insisted the delegates to fill their heart and minds with the message of peace and harmony. He appreciated the efforts of IARF in promoting peace and harmony in the Indian Context.

## CAUSES OF INTER NATIONAL RELIGIOUS DISHARMONY

### Mr. Shabeer Mustafa\*

EVERY religion is for the goodness of human being. God may give all the strength practice religion in this way. Man is the noblest among all beings. Therefore man has to maintain the standard. Islam does not teach violence. Now what's happening is pseudo religious people are hijacking true religion. He related some of the social riots happened in India in recent past.



MR. SHABEER MUSTAFA speaks © SACC

## EVENING SESSION

### Cultural Night<sup>11</sup>

A cultural night was organized at the Mutt Auditorium, where young adults from different colleges in Mysore and Bangalore performed dances, skits, songs and other art forms. The participants had a good time of celebration. The event thus resulted in sharing of reminiscent times, new friendship built and rich experiences shared. Inter-faith skits, folk dances etc were performed.

<sup>10</sup>\*Mr. Shabeer Mustafa is a retired Principal, Govt. I Grade College, Srirangapatna

<sup>11</sup> Video of Cultural Night is available later at <http://www.iarfsacc.org/media/videos/>





DELEGATES watching Cultural Night © SACC

### Visit to Musical Fountain

After dinner, the delegates were taken to Musical Fountain at the premise of Mutt. Attractive beam shows have been designed to sync with the popular local and international music to elate the audience. The Laser show introduces the vision of Jagadguru Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami to the audience at a glance and kindles their interest to know more about Mutt in particular. The Laser Show is followed with Musical Dancing Fountain. Delegates were thrilled of attending the laser show and Musical Dancing Fountain.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Day-2 | 31/10/2012

### MORNING SESSION

#### Second Day Programs

- Revitalizing of IARF Activities: Dr. Thomas Mathew
- Tolerance with and without: Col. Bhanu Prakash
- Responsibility of citizen in promoting peace: M. C.N. Manjappa
- Valedictory Ceremony
- Executive Committee Meeting & General Body Meeting, IARF India Chapter

#### REVITALIZING OF IARF ACTIVITIES:

##### Dr. Thomas Mathew<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Thomas Mathew, Chairman of IARF SACC explained the role of IARF playing for inter-faith harmony and development over a century. It provided a unique opportunity for IARF to get introduced to more than 400 delegates from India and overseas. As a result many committed to join IARF and work for the holistic development of the nation.

<sup>12</sup> Presentation is available on request: [silentnet@sify.com/info@iarfsacc.org](mailto:silentnet@sify.com/info@iarfsacc.org).



DELEGATES watching presentation © SACC



REV. FR. JERALD SEQUIRA interacting in the panel session © SACC

#### **TOLERANCE WITH AND WITHOUT: Col. Bhanu Prakash<sup>13</sup>**

Harmonious life of individuals is necessary in the society. Now-a-days suicides, divorces, terrorism, racism etc become the common news. Personality of an individual is bases on his/her Attitude, Attribute, Social Endowment and Skills. Among all, Tolerance is the important trait.

He quoted many of his experiences, to explain the importance of tolerance.

<sup>13</sup> Col. Bhanu Prakash is a retired army officer. Currently he is serving as the warden of Youth Hostel, Mysore.





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COL. BHANU PRAKASH speaks. © India Chapter

## AFTERNOON SESSION

### RESPONSIBILITY OF CITIZEN IN PROMOTING PEACE<sup>14</sup>:

**Mr. C.N. Manjappa\***

Mr. C.N. Manjappa started his speech with a hymn from Ramayana "O almighty - Let everyone be happy, let everyone be healthy, let everyone perceive only the good and let nobody be in misery" a hymn in Ramayana prays the god to bestow lasting peace and harmony on this universe, which ardently every religion and human being is looking for.



*There is no way to peace. Peace is the way. Thus I vouch that I shall - "Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached".*

MR. C.N. MANJAPPA speaks © SACC

## VALEDICTORY CEREMONY

Valedictory Ceremony was held at 4:00pm

<sup>14</sup> See the full text of speech at <http://www.iarfsacc.org/downloads/files/responsibility-of-citizen-in-promoting-peace-c-n-62.pdf>

<sup>15</sup>\*Chairman, Department of Studies and Research in Law, Karnataka State Open University, Manasagangotri, Mysore.





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**DIGNITARIES** on the Dais during Valedictory Ceremony © India Chapter

## MESSAGES

### Rev. Fr. Ronnie Prabhu<sup>16</sup>

Rev. Fr. Ronnie Prabhu, an ardent promoter of inter-faith harmony and understanding was present at the valedictory service. We love religion than God. We have to accept good things of other religions. God must be the highest value in our life, vertical to god and horizontal to fellow being. One must maintain both vertical and horizontal relations. He quoted a moral story of frogs. There was a barren well with frogs of different colors like blue, red, yellow etc. All began to croaking and realized that source was same for all.



**REV. FR. RONNIE PRABHU** speaks © SACC

### Sri Sri Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji

<sup>16</sup> Fr. Ronnie is working with the Bangalore archdiocese, as the PRO. He has also served as director of the Jesuit Retreat House, Dhyanaashrama in Bangalore.

Fr. Ronnie has long had an interest in different religions and has attended courses in Hinduism, Islam, Jainism and Buddhism, and has developed a deep regard for these religions. He is an ardent promoter of inter-faith harmony and understanding, and is intimately associated with the inter-religious harmony group at Ashirvad in Bangalore, and also Dharma Samanvaya, Mangalore. He has also worked in the field of education. He has served as rector of St. Aloysius College, Mangalore, St Joseph's College, Bangalore, and Mount St. Joseph Training College for Jesuits, Bangalore, and as president of the Karnataka Jesuit Educational Society.





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Sri Sri Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji, disciple of Jagadguru Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Swamiji was also present at the valedictory service. In his speech, Swamiji insisted the delegates to read the scriptures of all religion. Converting one to other should not be done. He also shared his personal inter-religious experiences. “Many a times Jesus came to me and talked, and comforted me”, he added. He has seen visions of Jesus several times. Science and religion would move together, though there exists some disputes, he also added. At the end of his speech Swamiji expressed Mutt’s solidarity of IARF in promoting inter-faith and religious harmony.

Later Swamiji presented shawls to all the Dignitaries on the dais.



**SRI SRI NIRMALANANDANATHA SWAMIJI** Speaks © SACC

#### **PEACE PLEDGE**

IARF India Chapter believe that peace and peacemaking as an indispensable part of our common goal. ‘All participants must speak out as one voice to promote peace’, that was the resounding message put out by participants at the 14<sup>th</sup> National Conference of IARF India Chapter as it drew to a close Sri Adichunchanagiri Mutt.

As a sign of expressing solidarity to peace making, IARF India Chapter President Adv. Mrs. M.A. Hemalatha led the recitation of Peace Pledge. Delegates pledged their unity in driving a worldwide peace through their communities and institutions irrespective of differences.



**DELEGATES** reciting the Peace Pledge © SACC





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**ADV. B.T. CHIDAMABARAM**, Treasurer, IARF India Chapter reading message

#### VOTE OF THANKS

Adv. Md. Shabeer Ahmed, IARF International Council Member and National Secretary, India Chapter proposed vote of thanks. He thanked Dignitaries, Mutt authorities, all delegates, SACC officials and each and every one who associated with the conference in one way or other. He also wished all a wonderful journey home.



**ADV. MD. SHABEER AHMED** proposing vote of thanks © India Chapter

At the end of valedictory meeting, Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Mahaswamijigalu spoke to Dr. Thomas Mathew, SACC Chairman, Mrs. M. A. Hemalatha National President IARF, India Chapter and Mr. Md. Shabeer Ahmed National Secretary over the phone and congratulated them for the success of the conference. Further His Holiness offered full support of Mutt for the upcoming activities of IARF India Chapter and IARF in general.



**YOUNG ADULTS** at Conference © India Chapter





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**YOUNG ADULTS** at Conference © India Chapter



### CONFERENCE OUTCOME

The major outcomes of the conference are:

- It is for the first time Sri Adichunchanagiri Mahasamsthana Mutt allowing someone to hold an interfaith program in their premises.
- After attending the Conference a College Professor from Odisha decided to begin a branch of IARF at Odisha. ( He was directed to the conference through IARF Rama Kirshna Mutt Branch, Narendrapur West Bengal)
- Members of others NGOs are ready to working closely with IARF on Development issues.
- Around 300 young adults were inspired to work for the protection of Human Rights and Religious Freedom.

### SIDE EVENTS

#### Yoga & Meditation

Each day one hour (06:30am-07:30am) was separated for Yoga and meditation. The sessions were aimed at physical, mental and spiritual health of delegates. Renowned Yoga Gurus Mr. S. Sudhesh Chand from Mysore and Mr. P. S. ShivaKumar from Bangalore led the sessions.



**DELEGATES** attending Yoga Session © India Chapter





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#### IARF India Chapter Executive & General Body Meeting



**GENERAL BODY** meeting of IARF India Chapter in progress © SACC

#### OTHER INFORMATIONS

##### TRANSPORTATION TO CONFERENCE VENUE



**VEHICLES** for transportation © SACC

Two buses of Adi Chunchanagiri Mutt, one bus of Mother Teresa Nursing College Mysore, one bus from JSS Mutt Mysore and other four private vehicles were arranged from IARF Mysore branch for the transportation of delegates and participants. This ensured comfortable transportation of delegates between conference hall and lodging rooms. However travel expenses of delegates were met by themselves.

##### FOOD & ACCOMMODATION

Mutt provided food and accommodation for delegates and participants for three days, combining breakfast, tea, lunch, tea & snacks and supper. Delegates enjoyed the food and the serving staff was also nice.





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A VIEW from Dining © India Chapter

#### **VOLUNTEERS & SUPPORT STAFF**

60 people from Sri Adichunchanagiri Matt volunteered the conference, plus five Volunteers each from the delegates JSS Law Mysore, Mahajana Law College Mysore, Vidhyavardhaka Law College Mysore, KLE Law College Bangalore, BGS B Ed & D Ed College Adi Chunchanagiri, Mother Teresa Nursing College , Mysore. Services rendered by support staff are highly appreciable.

#### **THANK YOU ALL**

We are profoundly grateful to our hosts, Sri Adichunchanagiri Mahasamsthana Mutt who has generously provided us a rich and spacious setting for the Conference.

We also thank...

Dr. Thomas Mathew, Chairman IARF SACC

Mr. Abin K. Vincent, Coordinator IARF SACC

Adv.M. R Preethan

Mr. Mansoor Ahmed

Ms. Naghma Ara

IARF India Chapter Office Staff and Support Staff

Members of Conference Committee and delegates from all over the country and overseas

#### **WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

Further information, including the Conference Program, Text of Speeches, Photos, Videos and press releases, may be obtained from the website of IARF SACC:

<http://www.iarfsacc.org/>

Quick link to Photos: <http://www.iarfsacc.org/media/photos/index.php?cat=79>



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