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We in the West tend to think of the Middle East as being home to the most world religions (the Abrahamic faiths), yet this statement is in actuality true of the ancient sense of "middle east" — India. In addition to the large Hindu majority (itself made of countless different expressions of faith), the land we now call *India* is the historical home Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism, and many millions of Baha'is, Christians, Muslims, and Zoroastrians add to local and regional diversity. With religious tensions that often boil over into violence in India as well as in (or with) her neighbors Pakistan and Bangladesh, it seems fitting that the World Social Forum should hold its annual gathering in Mumbai (Bombay) this year.

In this issue we bring you several reports from the World Social Forum, as well as other news and reports from the Indian sub-continent, a guide to listening in dialogue, and a call for a "new international order" from the Pope.

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- InterfaithNews Editorial Team

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World Social Forum: Overcoming Violence

From the **Worldwide Faith News archives**

22 January 2004 ([WCC](#)) – "India is going through enormous insecurity because religion is being used for violence," Siddhartha, a member of an inter-religious group working for peace and justice in Bangalore, told participants at a seminar at the World Social Forum in Mumbai.

At the 20 January seminar on "Religious resources to overcome violence" organized by the World Council of Churches ([WCC](#)), Siddhartha gave some examples of religious-instigated violence in India. Recently in Mumbai, a bomb reportedly placed by Muslims exploded, killing scores of people; in 2003 over 2,000 Muslims were "literally massacred in Gujarat in the name of religion".

For Siddhartha, the ruling majority Bharatiya Janata Party ([BJP](#)) is propagating a fundamentalist brand of Hinduism and relegating Muslims and Christians to second-class status. "What will happen if the [BJP](#) wins the election [scheduled for April this year] or is in a coalition where it has more representation? How can a religion as inclusive as Hinduism become so exclusive?" he asked.

On a more positive note, Siddhartha highlighted India's potential for peace. He said that religious communities in the multi-religious nation of over one billion people are challenged to work towards a "hermeneutic of hope", that is, to reinterpret their different religious traditions to lift up the values of peace and justice in their core messages.

Reviewing the Middle East situation from a Muslim perspective, Mohamed Mosaad from the Egyptian chapter of the United Religions Initiative ([URI](#)) emphasized the need for religious leaders to give a spiritual dimension to concrete situations like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and provide spiritual resources that could help resolve it.

Referring to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the US, he said that there is an "apologetic Islamic discourse" which seeks to define "who is right and who is wrong" and to

respond to questions being raised in the West about violence and Islam.

He cautioned against misrepresentation of the Koran in order to respond to a secular situation. Mosaad suggested that Muslims should reflect on how a concept like 'Jihad' (holy war) used to work in the past, and how it could work now. In his provocative view, while Islam is not a religion of peace and love, it is a religion of fairness and justice.

The director of the Jerusalem-based Inter-faith Encounter Association (IEA), Yehuda Stolov, said that like Islam, Judaism is sometimes misused to suit a political situation. Inter-religious dialogue allows people to co-exist without hiding their differences, but putting political issues aside. Formed in 2001 by peace activists, the IEA is dedicated to promoting real co-existence and peace in the Holy Land and the Middle East through cross-cultural study and inter-religious dialogue.

On the topic of violence against women, LFW executive secretary for Women in Church and Society, Priscilla Singh from India, presented an LFW contribution to the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence. The document, entitled "Churches say no to violence against women", presents the results of a world-wide survey on the issue; it affirms that violence against women is a global reality even within the church.

Religion, noted Singh, usually treats women as victims, often offering only a "charitable response" on an individual basis. Instead, churches should tackle the issue as a whole; to do so effectively, they need to see the image of God beyond gender, promote masculine models that are nurturing and caring, and revision and rewrite theology with a feminist perspective.

Singh also called for efforts to go beyond dialogue towards concrete experiences that allow a new kind of relationship between men and women to develop.

Rejecting modern political 'messianisms', Rev. Jairo Suarez from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia called for strong witness from churches in the social and political sphere. The fact that fifty years of civil war in his country have brought the churches together is a paradox, he reflected.

Ordep Trindade, a Brazilian Candombli priest, stressed the message of peace as well as the ecumenical dimension of this religion, brought to Brazil by African slaves.

The seminar was moderated by Dr Guillermo Kerber from the WCC International Relations team. In his opening remarks, Kerber suggested that religion has played an ambiguous role in conflicts at the national and international levels; while it has often fuelled conflicts, at other times, it has made important contributions to overcoming violence.

* Ms Pauline Mumia, English editor of Lutheran World Information, the news service of the Lutheran World Federation, contributed to this article.

World Social Forum: What Comes First? Inter-Faith Dialogue or Resolving Differences?

MUMBAI, India/GENEVA, 21 January 2004 (LWI) – A member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) delegation participating in the Fourth World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai welcomed an LWF initiative on inter-faith collaboration to resolve peace in Africa. But he wondered whether individual religious groups were ready to receive and work with such a model.

Rev. Jairo Suarez, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia, while commending the work begun in the context of the Inter-faith Action for Peace in Africa said he considered the inter-religious approach as rather complex for participating Christian networks. Should it not have started by first focusing on peace efforts by individual religious groups such as Christian churches before combining such efforts with those of other faith communities? he asked. "Many of the churches do not agree on their approach to conflict. Are they then ready and equipped for an inter-religious group approach?"

Suarez was responding to a presentation by the coordinator of the inter-faith initiative Sheikh Saliou Mbacki, who was the main speaker at the LWF-organized WSF seminar on inter-faith action for peace in Africa.

Roman Catholic priest Bernard Janicot from Algeria welcomed the inter-faith approach but was concerned about its role in his country where society is not only faced with an intra-state conflict but also conflict within Islam, the predominant religion. He concurred with Suarez that religious groups had serious internal problems that hindered their effective participation in such a well-meaning inter-faith process.

A number of WSF participants in the LWF seminar expressed concern that women should be part of the process at both the leadership and grassroots level. In his presentation, Mbacki had pointed out that women and women's peace networks were actively engaged in peace efforts in conflict situations, and their presence was notable in the first summit and sub-regional conferences. But an inter-faith delegation to Liberia in October 2003 included only one woman representative. Women and youth, he stressed, played an important role in peace making in Africa. The plan of action mandates their involvement and full participation in inter-faith peace efforts on the continent.

Ugandan Anglican Bishop Baker M. Ocholla II commented on the situation of women in conflict using the example of northern Uganda where he is actively involved in the peace efforts of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). "Conflict has brutalized women so much that they have become weapons of war," he said. Not only are an increasing number of

women becoming widows because their husbands have been killed at war, many of them have been raped by armed militant groups, often in front of their families. For Ocholla II, participating in the [WSF](#) as an [ARLPI](#) representative, the issue of violence against women during war is an urgent task for religious leaders in the inter-faith initiative for peace in Africa. Ocholla II represented [ARLPI](#) at the summit in Johannesburg.

Rev. Monika Matthias of the Martha Protestant congregation, Evangelical Church in Berlin-Brandenburg and the Silesian Oberlausitz, Germany, commented on the need to involve ordinary church-goers in dialogue and conversations on an inter-faith basis. The average person, she noted, asks very basic questions about the faith of the other, and this was a very critical level in an inter-religious process such as the one Mbacki had presented. In her pastoral duties, Matthias also works with groups that focus on inter-religious issues and women's empowerment.

Mr. Jules Wahare from Togo, representing the International Movement of Catholic Students at the [WSF](#), noted that from a local perspective, an inter-faith process can be viewed with suspicion by people whose religious opinions are limited to "my religion's world view." "I can't imagine a Christian entering a mosque in my own village," he observed.

Islamic scholar Prof. Farid Esack, director of the Center for Progressive Islam in Cape Town, South Africa, wondered whether the approach to involve religious leaders in the inter-faith process was not too elitist. Such a process should involve the grassroots at the very initial stages, he argued.

Concluding, Rev. Dr. Piri Rasolondraibe, the seminar's moderator and head of the [LWF](#) delegation to the [WSF](#), emphasized the need to work with religious communities at all levels if the trend of conflict in Africa was to be changed.

[WCC: US focus of Decade vs Violence](#)

[WCC](#) launches year to focus on overcoming violence in the US during service honouring Dr Martin Luther King, Jr

7 January 2004 ([WCC](#)) – Representatives from Christian faith communities around the globe launched a year-long effort to confront and overcome violence in the United States during a stirring worship service commemorating the life and ministry of the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr at the Interchurch Center in New York City on 12 January. The focus on the US in 2004 is part of the World Council of Churches' ([WCC](#)) Decade to Overcome Violence ([DOV](#)).

"We are gathered as peacemakers from various regions of the world to launch this year-long

focus in the United States by lifting up the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr, whose work and ministry has inspired peacemakers around the globe," said Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, archpriest, Orthodox Church in America, and moderator, US Conference of the WCC, in opening remarks at the service.

In a multimedia presentation, members of the congregation watched graphic images of violence, destruction, and war on a large screen as DOV coordinator Rev. Hansulrich Gerber presented the **goals of the Decade to Overcome Violence**, which is to be one of "Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace".

No justice, no peace

"It is a contradiction of life to put peace ahead of justice," said the Rev. Dr Otis Moss, the pastor of the Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, in introductory remarks in his sermon. "There will be no international peace until there is international justice," he said, quoting Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion.

Moss, a friend and associate of the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr, urged members of the congregation never to forget the lessons of history as they pursue both peace and justice. "To forget is exile," he said, "to remember is redemption." Moss warned the congregation to never forget "the moans and groans of countless millions of human beings" who were imprisoned on slave ships and "who were fed to sharks if they died on passage, or served up to slave masters if they survived."

Yet Moss also cited some redemptive historical developments during the past half-century, including the passage of the GI Bill in 1944, that opened educational and career opportunities to millions of disadvantaged veterans. In addition, he said that the establishment of the United Nations and the World Council of Churches were important international milestones on the way to universal peace and justice.

Moss also pointed to national and international liberation movements - beginning with the independence of India in 1947 - as redemptive signs. "When India gained independence, the British Empire had a nervous breakdown and the rest of western colonialism had a heart attack," Moss said.

All of these significant historic developments, Moss said, were the context in which King found his prophetic vocation.

Following Dr King's footsteps

"What can we do to follow in Dr King's footsteps?" Moss asked. "We must be about the business of building a new generation of prophets of justice," he said. "We must be disciples of

love, apostles of liberation, teachers of nonviolence, and ambassadors of reconciliation."

Such endeavours, Moss said, "will not come automatically, nor without institutional and individual risks." And, he added, efforts to make peace would require leaders who "have the courage to lead, to mould consensus, and to act despite the risk of being persecuted." Quoting Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Moss described King's life and ministry as "a vision, a voice, and a way". He urged his listeners to "share his vision, hearken to his voice, and follow in his way".

"War is obsolete"

Citing the anti-war sentiments of several former generals in the US military, Moss asked: "If generals of the army had that kind of insight, then what is the excuse at the White House, or your house, or my house if the occupants of those homes do not oppose war?"

"We must join with those former generals and declare that 'War is obsolete,'" Moss added. And in a reference to the war in Iraq, Moss chided the Bush administration for its search for weapons of mass destruction there, when there are such weapons in the US.

"Where are the weapons of mass destruction?" Moss asked. "Look around: AIDS is a weapon of mass destruction," he said, "so is hunger, the denial of health care to the poor, illiterate and uneducated minds, tobacco and tobacco-related illnesses, uncared-for children". All these and many other weapons destroy the fabric of the nation, Moss contended.

Efforts to pursue peace must originate "in our commitment to break the bonds of injustice, and to bring justice and peace into our homes, and into our collective house - the White House," Moss concluded. "When we break the bonds of injustice and oppression, then we become God's peacemakers."

More information on the DOV

After launching the Decade to Overcome Violence in 2001, the WCC focused its efforts on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2002, and on Sudan and Africa in 2003.

Information on the Decade to Overcome Violence is available at:

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/DOV>

Photos of the service are available at: **http://www.wcc-coe.org/WCC/press_corner/us-focus.html**

A DOV-US focus poster on "The power and promise of peace" is available on the DOV website: **<http://www2.wcc-coe.org/DOV.nsf>**

Decade to Overcome Violence Goals

1. Addressing holistically the wide varieties of violence, both direct and structural, in homes, communities, and in international arenas and learning from the local and regional analyses of violence and ways to overcome violence.
2. Challenging the churches to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence; to relinquish any theological justification of violence; and to affirm anew the spirituality of reconciliation and active nonviolence.
3. Creating a new understanding of security in terms of cooperation and community, instead of in terms of domination and competition.
4. Learning from the spirituality and resources for peace-building of other faiths to work with communities of other faiths in the pursuit of peace and to challenge the churches to reflect on the misuse of religious and ethnic identities in pluralistic societies.
5. Challenging the growing militarization of our world, especially the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Pope: New International Order Urged for Sake of Peace

In a world where religiously-motivated violence is still far too prevalent, religious leaders have increasingly come to understand that they must be instruments for change in the world, instruments for the promotion of true peace. In His Holiness John Paul II's homily on the World Day of Peace (Jan 1) He emphasized the *duty* to promote peace in the world. His were not the first words on the subject from an international religious leader; indeed peace has long been a theme of His. Nevertheless it is a call that must needs be constantly repeated to peoples who have spent millenia hearing their leaders—usually with some religion "on their side"—calling for violence against "the other." Read on for excerpts from His homily and for links to peace statements from other traditions.

Pope Says Temptation to Mistrust Must Be Overcome

From: **Zenit.org**

VATICAN CITY, JAN. 1, 2004 (Zenit.org).- John Paul II started the new year by insisting that peace is "possible" and thus a "duty," and he called for a new international order.

That was the focus of the Pope's homily today at the Mass to celebrate the solemnity of the Mother of God. The Church also marked World Day of Peace.

The Holy Father concentrated on the need to teach peace, an issue he highlighted in the first year of his pontificate. "Given that peace is possible — I wish to repeat — it is a duty," he explained in St. Peter's Basilica.

"In the face of situations of injustice and violence that oppress various areas of the planet, in the

face of the permanence of armed conflicts frequently forgotten by public opinion, it is ever more necessary to build together paths of peace," the Pope said. "Therefore, it is indispensable to teach peace."

He said it is particularly necessary to teach peace in the land where Jesus was born, which, "unfortunately, continues to live in dramatic conditions."

"It is necessary, however, to persevere without yielding to the temptation to mistrust," the Holy Father added. "An effort is necessary on the part of all to have the fundamental rights of people respected through constant education in lawfulness."

"With this objective, everything possible must be done to overcome the logic of strict justice in order to open also to that of forgiveness. In fact, there is no peace without forgiveness," the Pope said.

Commenting on the international scene, the Holy Father explained that there is an ever-greater need for "a new international order, which will make use of the experience and results obtained in these years by the United Nations."

He called for such "an order that will be capable of giving solutions that are appropriate to the problems of today, based on the dignity of the human person, the integral development of society, solidarity between rich and poor countries, and the capacity to share the resources and extraordinary results of scientific and technological progress."

Ambassadors of countries accredited to the Holy See attended the Mass, which was presided over by the Holy Father and celebrated by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano.

A Selection of Peace Statements from Various Religious Traditions...

- Bahá'í: *The Promise of World Peace*
- Buddhism: *Speech of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the European Parliament*
- An interfaith statement: *The Assisi Decalogue*
- World Council of Religious Leaders: *Commitment to Global Peace*

please write to us if you have other suggestions.

The URI and the Interfaith Movement in India

India Trip and Report by Sally Mahé

January 6, 2003

Dear URI friends,

Greetings of peace and love to all. I am filled with gratitude and excitement for the future of the URI as I return from a full three weeks travel connecting with URI leaders and friends in India. I am indebted to Dr. Mohinder Singh, Father Albert Nambiaparambil, Justice P.K. Shamsuddin, Dame Meher Master Moos and Dr. Abraham Karickam for their excellent care and wonderful hospitality.

The purpose of my trip was to participate in two major interfaith conferences: the Delhi Peace Summit, December 7-11, organized by the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions and led by Mohinder Singh; and the Interfaith Meet on Harmony and Non-Violence, December 13-17 organized by the World Fellowship Inter-religious Councils CC in Cochi and led by Father Albert and Justice P.K. Shamsuddin. In addition to attending these gatherings, I visited Mumbai and the Masdayaznie CC with Meher Master Moos and spent several days with Abraham Karickam and his family and met with URI CC leaders and friends in various towns in south India.

December 4-10 Delhi Peace Summit

I left San Francisco December 4. The USA Today paper on the plane had a special article about Angola and recent efforts to develop democracy there. It said, "the essence of democracy is about people being actively engaged in making decisions about their lives and how their countries should be run." I realized that URI's vision and principles are providing an action-field for true democratic practices and values to floURIsh around the world. Even though the news is of a broken world, one filled with stories of war, want, corruption and terror, there is also news that people everywhere from various backgrounds are bursting with competence to meet these challenges. People want to draw upon the teachings of their diverse faith traditions and engage in cooperative actions. As a growing global community, the URI generates vision and hope, provides connections and skills, and engenders trust and inspiration that feed people's ability to engage in decisions that affect their lives. URI is contributing to humanity's competence for cooperation worldwide.

I was very eager to meet and speak with CC leaders in India and learn from them how they are putting URI principles into practice and how they engage in decisions and leadership that affect their communities. I was eager to learn what types of local or regional coordination benefits CCs and how CCs see their work being sustained over time.

In addition to leading workshops and speaking as part of panel discussions at the conferences, my aim was to hear firsthand about experiences and needs of CCs in India and to inspire more people involved in interfaith work to consider joining the URI as a Cooperation Circle.

First stop in Delhi was my residence for four days, the India International Center, an impressive international meeting place, walking distance to the Peace Summit conference. Rohinton

Rivetna, an old friend of the URI and member of the Board of Directors for the Parliament, and I met with Mohinder Singh, Director of the Center for Punjab Studies and URI Global Council Trustee. Mohinder asked us to go over the conference program for last minute edits. We hoped to offer Mohinder our best support. We realized that Mohinder was carrying a huge responsibility and doing an extraordinary job managing the various issues and details for the Delhi Peace Summit, Pre-Parliament Conference which was an important public and political event for India.

Later, we attended a Sikh religious ceremony and received recognition by the Sikh community. Dr. T. D. Singh arrived and we enjoyed a happy reunion. He spoke, however, about a recent tragedy in Manipur. An eight year old girl, daughter of Christian missionaries, was recently kidnapped and murdered in Manipur. The motive and perpetrators were still unknown but the community was threatening violence. T.D. suggested that the URI CC in Manipur could offer effective intervention at this tense time.

Next day, I was off to the Salwan School CC to meet with the principal, Mrs. Vandana Puri and to see the tree planting project! A happy bubbling atmosphere pervaded this expansive urban K - 12 school of about 6000 students. About one third of the students are from families from a "weaker economic sector." This group is housed on the same campus but follows a different school program. Mrs. Puri, a wonderful woman and master multi-tasker wasted no time telling me that she thinks that the URI CCs in the Delhi area need clear and firm coordination support. She thinks that regular gatherings of different CCs would strengthen each CC's unique projects and would help inspire their work and renew their URI identity and benefit each of them. Salwan School is committed to providing an interfaith environment and educational program. I noted that Salwan would be a good place to pilot the new URI Peacebuilding Guide and Mrs. Puri agreed.

The highlight of this visit was seeing where the students at Salwan School had inaugurated the interfaith Prasad Tree Planting Project in July 2003. Now, five months later Mrs. Puri inspected the area (a strip of land that serves as a highway median) with passionate commitment to its on-going needs for regular watering and nurture. From a depressing and rubbish filled median, this land was transformed to a new garden planted with various saplings and flowering bushes and small rock sculptures built by the children. Mrs. Puri is determined to do what is needed to keep this garden alive. The Project needs a steady flow of funds to pay for a water truck to deliver water there once a week. The students and teachers and gardeners provide the care as part of their curriculum studies. With indomitable resolve, Mrs. Puri announced to me, "we need a steady supply of water and if trees die we will just keep planting more trees!" Immediately, I began thinking of possible CCs and URI friends who might want to support this project and share resources with Salwan School to help keep this patch of hope and determination alive and floURIshing. (I couldn't help but see this little transformed garden patch as a metaphor for the whole URI - we are many saplings around the world now doing our best to grow in order to

offer a good life, beauty and the possibility of change to this wounded world... and, just like these little plants, we need regular nurture and care.)

The Delhi Peace Summit began with a day of pre-conference workshops. The first session, "The Role of Women" was hosted by Dr. Saida Hameed, director of the Women's Initiative for Peace in Southeast Asia. and was led by Dr. Linda Bennet-Elder, professor of comparative religions at Valdosta State College in Valdosta, Georgia USA and leader of the [URI Pilgrimage Project CC](#). Linda began the session by inviting responses to her question, "what do I need to know about the role of women here in India?" Many responses and perspectives to this question were shared before Linda directed us into small group discussions. We formed groups according to our self-selected "identity": activist, artist, educator, and spiritual practitioner or administrator. We discussed why interfaith work is significant to each of us? What is our passion? How do we embody our work for equity, justice and peace? Linda did a great job spotlighting the role of women and with a graciousness that is characteristic of [URI](#) spirit, Linda generated a warm atmosphere of speaking and listening with one another.

The [URI](#) session followed in the afternoon but presentation time about [URI](#) was shortened to make room for additional presentations about other interfaith organizations. I loved the sea of familiar faces in the audience: Josef Boehle, an early leader of [URI](#) efforts in Europe; Audrey Kitagawa, leading member of [URI](#) at the [UN CC](#); Jerry Chang, leader of Humanity United Globally [CC](#); Shakuntala Moorjani-Vaswani, Peacemaker's [CC](#) Philippines; Dr. Muntaz Khan, leader of the Bangalore [CC](#) and representative of the [IARF](#) in India; Marsha Pilgeram, [URI](#) Utah [CC](#); Abraham Karickam, Cosmic Community Center [CC](#) Kerala; Biswadeb Chakraborty, Ektaan [CC](#) India; Mr. Radhamohon Das, Manipur [CC](#) India; Father Albert Nambiaparambil and Justice P. K. Shamsuddin, World Fellowship of Inter-religious Councils [CC](#), India; Dame Meher Master Moos, Mazdaysnie [CC](#), Bombay; Amy Keill, [URI](#) volunteer; and, Allison Van Dyke, Temple of Understanding, New York City. (Jinwol Lee arrived later.)

Yoland Trevino, [URI](#) Global Council trustee, hosted the session and began by leading a simple and profound ceremony expressing indigenous perspectives and symbols. Dr. Muntaz Khan spoke about [IARF](#); Meher Master Moos and Father Albert spoke about the World Fellowship Inter-religious Councils, Allison Van Dyke spoke about the Temple of Understanding and I spoke about the [URI](#). Since so many leaders of [CCs](#) were in the audience, I invited the leaders present to give highlights of their recent activities which we all enjoyed hearing. I ended by asking participants to focus on a vision of the future: Imagine it is 2008 and there are 1000 [CCs](#) in the world. How is this group of [CCs](#), this critical mass making a difference? What gift and change are they bringing to a wounded world? At the end, the supply table with [URI](#) materials was deluged and every piece was taken!

Quickly, we were hustled off in buses to the Ashok Hotel for the formal inaugural opening ceremonies and speeches by several dignitaries. Children from the Salwan School sang, Weave

Us Together (a favorite song from the [URI](#) interfaith songbook). The large audience was enchanted and inspired by the President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam who spoke about, "The Joy of Being A Human Being." His sparkle and spiritual simplicity offered a refreshing contrast to the more political speech-making taking place. The evening ended with a cultural program and a late dinner.

The next day included a 12 person interfaith panel presentation and an extensive interactive small group discussion process lead by Dirk Ficca, Executive Director of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. It was great to see Dirk lead the successful implementation of the Intra-faith and Inter-faith group discussion protocol that the Bridge [CC](#) in the Bay Area had so diligently piloted and refined in recent months. The large body of participants worked first in Intra-faith groups and then in Inter-faith groups as they tackled the question: How does your faith tradition support and enliven your response to religiously motivated violence? What in your tradition inspires you? What in your tradition is a block or a problem? Excellent conversations took place followed by a report-back session.

The evening was dedicated to devotional songs from Sufi and Sikh traditions. In reflecting on this day, I realized how inspiring it was for me to experience authentic spiritual expression in song and in words and how depleting it was to experience speeches that were motivated by a desire to express political/religious influence rather than sincere spiritual leadership.

It was a great gift to interfaith efforts in India that the Deli Peace Summit drew the presence and attention of the H.H. Dalai Lama, the President of India and a host of religious and political dignitaries. Such political visibility presents a gift and challenge, however. Interfaith gatherings are a vital and hopeful source to renew spiritual integrity and must be vigilant not to fall prey to political pressures. The challenge is in how to offer due recognition to recognized religious and political leaders and still create an open forum that allows for diverse voices so that the resources of the people assembled are shared.

Continue...

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Listening in Dialogue

by Kay Lindahl

What is conversation? At the most basic level it is a generic term for people talking together. That seems pretty simple, and yet a good conversation—being able to connect with each other—is something we don't often experience. We yearn to be in community and we haven't been taught the skills to discern how to listen and speak to each other.

A practice that trains us to have meaningful conversations, to listen and speak with our hearts, is the art of dialogue. The word dialogue is used a lot these days-but often it turns out to mean a serial monologue! You say what's on your mind, then I say what's on my mind, and we are not really listening to each other. It could just as easily be done by two tape recorders talking to each other. There is no interaction.

The following guidelines have evolved from nearly twelve years of practicing the dialogue process with the Alliance for Spiritual Community, a grass-roots interfaith organization and The Listening Center, which offers classes, workshops and retreats on the sacred art of listening. The roots of this practice come from the work of Dr. David Bohm, a physicist who became interested in the way humans learn and think, particularly collectively. Over the years he developed a deep understanding of this conversation which he called dialogue. One of the major points of his teaching is the distinction between dialogue and discussion.

Dialogue is from the Greek dia-(through) and logos-(meaning or word). So a dialogue is a flow of meaning through words in which new understandings emerge that might not have been present before. It is done in a spirit of inquiry—wanting to know. We look for shared meaning, beyond our individual understanding.

Discussion is from the Latin dis-(apart) and quatere-(to shake). It's the same root word as percussion and concussion—to break things up. A discussion is an analysis, looking for an answer. It is done in a spirit of looking for results. Each person states his or her analysis of the situation with the hope of influencing the other's position on the issue.

One is not better than the other—both are valid means of communicating. It's simply useful to know what kind of conversation you are engaging in. If one person is in the mode of a dialogue, wanting to explore an issue, and the other person is looking for a solution for this issue, they are really in two different types of conversations. It's small wonder that each person feels unheard. The first person wants to know why the second is in such a rush to action; and the second person is wondering why the first person can't make a decision. They are each listening for something different. They are not connecting. Listening to what kind of conversation we are in is not only useful, it is also a key to effective communication. The interplay between dialogue and discussion forms the dance of daily conversation. We simply need to know what dance we are in and learn the appropriate steps.

These guidelines are designed to facilitate this type of dialogue and to create a safe space for the conversation.

Guidelines

Respect and honor differences: listen for understanding, not to agree with or believe what is

being said.

You don't have to agree with or believe what the other person is saying to listen to understand them. A wise person once said: "You can honor what someone says without owning it."

Relate your personal experiences: speak for yourself, not for others in the group or in your tradition. Avoid generalizations.

The only person you can really speak for is yourself. Notice how often the terms "We all know," "Everyone says," "Of course," "You know" come into your conversation. Own what you say by using the word "I".

Suspend assumptions, judgments, evaluations, titles and status: notice when you feel surprised or upset about what is being said. Look to one of these areas to see if you are letting them get in the way of understanding the other.

Dialogue is a collegial experience with no seniority or hierarchy. Each person is an expert in their own lives, which is what they bring to the dialogue. When you find yourself judging or evaluating what is being said, simply notice it and then get back to listening to understand what is being said.

Focus on inquiry and reflection: ask open-ended questions with the intention of gaining insight and perspective. Take time to reflect on what has been said, notice how we are connected.

Dialogue is a slower conversation as we honor what's been said and reflect on what wants to be said next. Allow for times of silence.

Release the need for an outcome: the purpose of dialogue is to be open to new understanding, not to come up with an answer or a solution.

We live in a results oriented culture. Dialogue is an opportunity to explore a topic. Discussion is a conversation in which you are setting goals and objectives and looking for results. Two different conversations.

Kay Lindahl lives in Laguna Niguel, California, USA. More information on her books The Sacred Art of Listening and Sacred Art of Listening: A Guide to Enrich Your Relationships and Kindle Your Spiritual Life, published by Skylight Paths Publishing, can be found at www.sacredlistening.com.

Badshahi Mosque Opened for First Christian-Muslim Dialogue

By Yuel Bhatti and Fr James Channan OP

Lahore, Pakistan — The third Friday of the month of January 2004 marked a dawn of a new era of Christian-Muslim dialogue in the history of Pakistan as the gates of 400 year old grand Badshahi Mosque, Lahore, Pakistan were opened to a Christian delegation to participate in a conference.

This conference was organized in the main hall at the center of the mosque to pay tribute to late Maulana Dr. Abdul Qadir Azad. Fr James Channan OP, Director, Pastoral Institute Multan, and Consultant to the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims delivered a speech on the occasion. He thanked Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, Grand Imam of this Mosque for inviting him and other Christian representative to participate in the conference. He highly appreciated gesture of interfaith harmony and Christian-Muslim dialogue by the Grand Imam and his council for inviting Christians for the very first time to participate and deliver a speech in a conference, prior to their Juma (Friday) Prayers and Khutba, (sermon).

Fr Channan, while addressing the Ulama and other Muslim participants, said that "today you have revived the Sunna (tradition) your Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH), who had invited a Christian delegation to offer prayer according to their own Christian creed in the Masjid-e-Nabvi in Madina."

He also paid a rich tribute to late Maulana Azad saying that Maulana Azad was not only promoter of dialogue among Muslims, but he was an ardent promoter of dialogue among believers of different religions as well. Maulana Azad had played an extraordinary role in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan and in several other countries.

He went to Shanti Nagar and Bahawalpur to express solidarity with Christians community at the tragedies which had taken place over there. He also celebrated Christmas with Christians.

Fr Channan urged the Muslim Ulama to follow the noble path of religious tolerance which was practiced by Maulana Azad. Fr Channan said "I am very happy to present a speech in the mosque during this conference. I feel very honored as I happen to be the first Christian to deliver a speech in this grand mosque." He also read a verse from the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew which was the most favorite of Maulana Azad: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt. 5.9) Maulana Azad very often quoted this verse in his speeches and addresses.

This Mosque is so large that 100,000 Muslims can offer prayers at the same time. Other Christian who participated in this conference included: Dr. Marcus Fida, Yuel Bhatti and Javed Akhtar.

There were over 3000 Muslims along with Ulama of all sects of Islam present in the main

central place of the mosque to express their appreciation towards Dr. Abdul Qadir Azad, who served in this mosque for 28 years as Grand Imam and Khateeb. Prof. Abdul Majeed Chaudhary of Ulama Academy said, "Maulana Azad was a great scholar of Islam and international figure. His son Maulana Khabir is walking on the foot steps of his father and we will fully support him in this noble mission."

Maulana Abdullah Sani of Khatm-e-Nabowat said "Maulana always worked for the rights and dignity of Muslims." Syyed Khatim, a social worker said "Maulana was a such a great personality that he played an important to promote harmony among people of all sectors of life." Mr. Akhtar Gilani said "in Pakistan all citizens are equal and we respect all of them." Allama Hussain congratulated Maulana Khabir for being appointed an Grand Imam and Khateeb of the Badshahi Mosque and said "we are with you in this mission of unity, tolerance and dialogue."

Other Muslim religious leaders who addressed included: Allama Waqarul Husnain Naqvi, Allam Zubair Ahmed Zaheer, Javed Akbar Butt, Maulana Naeem Badsha, Maulana Farooq Ahmed, Allama Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, Allama Riaz ul Rahma Yazdani, Maulana Aqeelul Rahman Pir Zada, Secretary of Auqaf (Trust). Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, Chairman, Majlas-e-Ulama Pakistan and Grand Imam of the Badshahi Mosque was the chief organizer and host of this conference. He thanked all participants, and especially the Christians and vowed to keep up the mission of father Maulana Azad in interfaith harmony and cultures of peace and healing.

For Christians this openness from the side of Muslims is a fruit of many years of dialogue encounters which are taking place in Pakistan. It was hard even to imagine such an openness a couple of decades ago. Sincere gratitude also to Pope John Paul who addressed Muslims as brothers at several occasions and has promoted dialogue among the believers of Islam and Christianity. The Pope also visited a mosque in Damascus and has sent a couple of message at their Eid'ul Fitr. May such an atmosphere of dialogue and interfaith peace always remain with us!

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