



WORLD

International Association for Religious Freedom

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

**Come to our 31st World Congress
“Religious Freedom: Europe’s Story for Today’s World”
Budapest, 28 July - 2 August 2002**

Help to create a Voluntary Code of Conduct for Religious and Belief Communities

For a hundred years, IARF has campaigned for the right to believe. This right is now enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Alas, some religions abuse the positions that they hold by how they treat their own followers and/or those who do not share the faith. Therefore the production of an acceptable Voluntary Code of

Conduct is a vital work that identifies the responsibilities that should go with the rights that have been won to date. Initially framed by a group of experts from around the world, the first draft of a Code will come to the Congress for consultations among participants.

Get ideas and get connected

Exhibitions, talks, workshops, and videos will acquaint Congress attendees with IARF’s latest projects in India, Spain, the Philippines, and at the United Nations in Geneva. Participants can meet young people who worked on restoring a temple and mosque in Gujarat, those involved in Christian-Mus-

lim dialogue at the UN, and meet those working with interfaith projects around the world. The UN’s Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Abdelfattah Amor, will give a keynote address at this Congress. Additionally, a special International Panel will bring together other top experts in the field for a lively discussion about contemporary religious freedom issues.

Shape a worldwide E-learning project

A team of experts from Oxford University is collaborating with the International Interfaith Centre and the IARF

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The temple site of the IARF interfaith young adult project, Gujarat, India

(members of a network of international interfaith organisations), on the feasibility of prototype e-learning modules on Interfaith and Religious Freedom. The prototype modules can be tried out by Congress participants on a suite of computers that will be available at the Congress. The feedback and ideas that participants contribute can then be used to generate a fuller curriculum for this exciting educational concept. The goal is to give training to reduce discrimination where religious freedom is con-

cerned and encourage more understanding of each other's faiths.

Create new programmes in your regions

The structure of the Congress, via lectures and workshops, will enable participants to generate ideas for programmes furthering work combating the denial of Religious Freedom. Every help will be given to ensure that in each region a range of new work is engendered to be carried out after participants return

home from the Congress. IARF's current Strategic Plan will be discussed and participants will have an opportunity to explore what can be done in their own communities. A workshop series on values education will also help participants think of creative ways that children in their communities can learn about virtues, including tolerance.

Enjoy Beautiful Budapest!

On a hot day a short tram ride beside the Danube takes you to the parkland of Margit Island. Here there is plenty of historical interest and outlets selling drinks or food among the acres of grassland and trees. Frequent boat trips to and round the island are available at many points along the river bank. At a cooler time climb the hill behind the Gellert Hotel (just across the bridge from the Congress Venue), enjoy the wonderful views and stroll round this monument erected to celebrate the end of the Second World War.

Take the yellow metro that runs the length of Andrássy Street and alight at Opera station to see the famous Opera House. Andrássy Street is lined with sophisticated shops and cafes. A little further up, near the Octagon, is the Academy of Music offering world class concerts at very low prices. A few more stops on the metro will take you to the galleries of Modern and Fine Art that stand squarely opposite each other on either side of the great monument of Heroes Square. The Museum of Fine Arts houses a splendid collection of impressionist paintings and beautiful work by Rodin.

The Houses of Parliament, a magnificent building, is a focal point. Easily reached by No 2 tram from the Venue, it houses the Crown jewels. On the way back to the Venue visit the Basilica of St Stephen's with its high, painted domed ceiling. It is being renovated at the moment and will no doubt be even more glorious by the time of the Congress. Your next visit could be the largest synagogue in Europe, which is an imposing building with a highly decorated inte-

In Budapest, visit Europe's largest synagogue



rior. A museum and Holocaust memorial are housed close by.

Take the tram to Moscow Square, cross the square, go up the steps to the road at the top of the square and get the little bus to the Castle. (There is a picture of a castle by the number on the front of the bus!) The Royal Palace is an imposing building in the Castle area. It has a magnificent collection of works of art from many countries and ages. Cellists or violinists are usually filling the air around the Royal Palace with fine music. Mattias Church in the Castle area is stunning and is also a concert venue. Its interior is cool and is covered with amazing decoration. A small museum inside the church houses St Stephen's crown and gives a very well illustrated explanation of its manufacture over 400 years ago.

All the places in Budapest may also be visited as part of guided tours.

Explore Hungary, Turkey, the Czech Republic, Poland, Austria or Transylvania on a Post Congress Tour

Full details are available on the Congress website and in the 12 page booklet in the last edition of the IARF *World*. Copies of this are available from your Regional Coordinator, IARF Congress Office in Budapest, or from the Secretariat in Oxford. In this edition we have included a reduced version of the booklet, but it still contains information on key aspects of our Congress and all the relevant addresses and contact details. If you are not using it, please pass it on!

Tell others about the Congress, Young Adult Programme & Tours

Look at the Congress website or the booklet included in this newsletter. It gives the necessary full postal addresses, faxes and telephone numbers. Contact Anna Kerekes at welltrav@freemail.hu for tailor-made tours in Budapest and beyond.

Congress Website at www.conferences.hu/iarf2002

IARF Congress Office in Budapest, Tel: ++36 1 209 6442, Fax: ++36 1 386 9378, email: iarf2002@conferences.hu

OPPORTUNITIES TO TELL OR "SELL" AT THE CONGRESS

Such activities will take place on an upper floor since the registration area has to be kept clear. There will be a responsible person for each activity, and IARF retains the right at its discretion to withdraw any materials that are not deemed to be suitable for its Congress.

The Boutique

The procedure for the Boutique this year will be slightly different because Hungarian Law does not allow people to buy and sell goods without registering for payment of the relevant taxes. IARF members may put their books and goods on display and ask for relevant donations from those who would like to have them. The Boutique will be set up in a room that will be kept locked when it is not being staffed, but opening hours will be indicated. We hope that you will feel able to bring some items with you to raise funds for our work. Each member is responsible for her/his own items. Where donations are being given to you, we would expect a contribution to cover the costs of hiring the room and staffing it. If you intend to bring items to the boutique please register by 15th July with Klaus Glindemann who has under-

taken responsibility for the Boutique 2002. He may be contacted by fax (Germany) ++49 69 800 1009.

Exhibits about your Religion, Belief or Religious Freedom

Chapters or Member organisations may wish to bring with them items which show some aspects of their work for religion or religious freedom. This will enable other groups, new Chapters and participants to learn more of the background to IARF's membership and central concerns. Please register your requirements for space and the nature of the materials by 15th July with Richard Kellaway. Contact him by fax (USA)++7752431559 email: ishmael@empire.net

Distribution of Free Literature

A copy of any materials participants wish to distribute must be supplied, to: IARF Congress Steering Committee c/o John Clifford at Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, LONDON WC2R 3HY, UK. Each group will be limited to space for two publications for free distribution. No materials should be sent to Budapest prior to the Congress.

Cultural events at the Congress

On 31st July 2002 there will be a World Cultural evening held at the IARF Congress. In the past we have had a great variety of performers including musicians and dancers. This year, part of the programme will include Japanese traditional music. We are interested in hearing from IARF members who may know of a participant or group attending the 2002 Congress, who could give an appropriate performance of a high standard, as part of this World Cultural evening. The duration of the performance should be approximately 10 minutes (this can be discussed). Please contact your IARF Regional Coordinator or the IARF Secretariat with full details of the type of performance and the proposed length of time, a short summary of the past experience of the artistes, your own contact details, including email if possible and the contact details of the main performer, by April 30. (THERE WILL BE NO REMUNERATION FOR THE PERFORMERS) Please enclose if possible a cassette tape or CD and/or any other supporting material (we regret that we will not be able to return anything sent to us).

MAKING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM A REALITY

Do you believe that religious freedom is a basic human right? Can young people contribute to ensuring that right where it is threatened? Are you interested in taking part in a gathering of young adults from many different faiths and countries? Would you like to assist in promoting interfaith harmony and understanding?

Then why not join in the IARF young adult programme (YAP) in Budapest, Hungary from 2pm on 26th July until 28th July 2002? You are eligible to attend if you are aged 18 – 29 inclusive. The pro-

gramme will provide a time to bond and prepare for the main Congress which will take place from the afternoon of 28th July-2nd August 2002. As part of the YAP, we are holding different creative sessions to start to look at issues of religious freedom. We hope that you will also make a significant contribution during the Congress to the projects that we hope will come out of the workshops. These projects, if appropriate, will form the basis of some of our future work, as part of our Religious Freedom Young Adult Network (RFYN).

The cost of registration for young adults is 300 Euros. This includes the YAP and Congress programme, and most meals (except 3). Accommodation is 15 Euros per night. Information is on the Congress website www.conferences.hu/iarf2002. For more details of this event and other IARF young adult programmes contact your Regional Coordinator or Ramola Sundram (IARF Young Adult Programme Coordinator) Email: ramola@iarf.net For all contact details see the back page of our newsletter.

2002 Conference of the International Association of Liberal Religious Women

Theme: "Women's Role in the 21st Century: Action for Peace—Our Families/Communities/Countries/World".

Sub Themes: 1. Human Dignity; 2. Gratitude; 3. Non-Violence; 4. Health.

The spirit of world peace begins in our hearts. We need to have peaceful attitudes in our home, in order to spread it to our communities, our countries and to the world.

Programme highlights: Key note speeches by Betty Reardon, Professor, Columbia University, USA and Angela Kocze, Director of Human Rights education programme, Hungary; a panel discussion and a study group on Action for Peace which will include panelists, moderators and reporters from many countries; and circle groups.

Date: July 24th - July 27th, 2002

Place: Hotel Budapest, Budapest, Hungary, 1026 Budapest, Szilagyi Erzebet fasor 47

Contact details for queries and registration forms:

Akiko Sekine / Conference Administration Officer
1-27-4 Akabane, Kita-ku, Tokyo, Japan #115-0045

Tel: 81-3-3902-2838 Fax: 81-3-3902-2849

E-mail: sekine45@aol.com

Home Page: <http://plaza16.mbn.or.jp/~ialrw/index.htm>

IARF PROJECTS AND YOUNG ADULT INVOLVEMENT

Tell young adults about IARF's current work. See the project summary on page 19 and pages 9-11 for a recent young adult project that took place in India. For more details, visit our website <http://iarf-religiousfreedom.net>.

There are various exciting things happening as part of our Religious Freedom Young Adult Network (RFYN) so get in touch with us!

The contact names are in the advert above. We would love to hear from you. Hope to see you in Budapest!

NEW LOGO UNVEILED

Andrew Clark

We are pleased to unveil a new logo and identity for the International Association for Religious Freedom in this issue of the *IARF World*. After many painstaking months of discussions with a design firm, consultation with the Council members, input from the membership, discussions within the Secretariat and guidance from the President, at last we feel that we have arrived at a new logo that reflects our current goals and ideals.

What really matters, of course, is the quality of our programmes and it is this quality that should give its true credibility to any symbolism we use. Nevertheless, our organisation does need an effective, eye-catching image in order to convey our existence and purpose to the outside world. We are still too little known.

For a variety of legal and other reasons, we chose not to change the name of the organisation but visually to highlight our central purpose of “religious

freedom”. The new image represents spirit, energy, and unity. The five figures also represent the five inhabited continents. The new strapline, *belief with integrity*, reiterates both rights to religious freedom as well as the responsibility for religious and belief communities to be accountable for their practices. (This phrase ties in well with our current pivotal work on a Voluntary Code of Conduct for Religious and Belief Communities.)

It is essential only to use the logo and wording as a whole unit, rather than as a separate picture or emblem. The exact template and colour specifications will be sent to each authorised body in due course. Also, if some translation of the strapline is necessary, please consult with the Secretariat to approve any such additions. The word *integrity* in Japanese, for example, has overtones of military honour and hence may need some alteration. *Integrity* in English implies

concepts such as *respect, responsibility, honesty, morality* and *wisdom*. Finally, we accept that there may be a period of transition (to be discussed) when “IARF” as an acronym would be printed in conjunction with the new logo before being phased out.

Re-defining an organisation’s identity is usually a difficult process and requires a transition period. There is also no guarantee that everyone will welcome our “new look”. We did make special efforts, however, to ensure that the new logo could be accepted by different cultures and belief systems. Inevitably, the final product was the result of many months of discussions. Although no one won the competition, the Secretariat appreciated the various contributions that members and others have made to this process. In the months ahead, you will find the new logo consistently applied to our brochures, web site, letterhead, and the newsletter itself!



international association for

religious freedom

belief with integrity

United Nations

IARF Makes an Impact in Madrid

The IARF made valuable contributions to the *International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination*, which was held in Madrid, Spain in November 2001. The conference, which drew together some 700 government and non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives, was organised by the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, in co-operation with the Government of Spain. While the final document out of the conference excluded specific references originally made in a draft document to the development of appropriate and inclusive forms of religious education, the surviving text was still explicit in urging education for religious tolerance. As consensus among countries with such different approaches is difficult, the organisers were quite pleased that a final statement was adopted. (The final text is available at the following web site: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/main.htm>)

Dr and Mrs Gianfranco Rossi represented IARF as special guests of the Special Rapporteur. IARF staff members from Oxford and Geneva, plus two invited educators, completed a delegation of six. Dr Rossi's official intervention during the proceedings argued for the special rights of religious minorities in schools and, throughout the process, Dr Rossi had input into text of the final document that emerged from the conference.

IARF also presented its booklet of eleven essays on the models and practice of religious education in schools from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas. In this booklet, educators from around the world shared ideas on successful programmes, as well as on challenges to be overcome when teaching religion and beliefs in



Our delegation—Norman Richardson, Carmela and Gianfranco Rossi, Zarrin Caldwell, John Hull and John Taylor

school settings. This booklet was especially prepared for delegates to the conference by IARF's Research and Issues Coordinator, Ms Zarrin T Caldwell, and was well received by conference participants. The final document out of the conference recommended that "*concerned institutions and organisations should consider studying, taking advantage of and disseminating best practices on education in relation to freedom of religion or belief.*" As such, the booklet compiled and distributed by IARF made a significant contribution to these aims.

Approximately forty people attended a special lunchtime meeting to launch the booklet on the first day of the three day event. Dr John Hull from the University of Birmingham, who served as an IARF delegate, spoke eloquently at this meeting about the need for young people to become more tolerant of others by '*learning from religion.*' He also addressed the relevance of religious teachings to problems in contemporary society. Regarded as one of the leading experts in the field,

Dr Hull's participation on IARF's delegation was an important contribution in that there were very few educators present at the conference overall. Norman Richardson, from Stanmillis University College in Northern Ireland, was the second educator on IARF's delegation and had valuable input regarding his inter-religious work in the troubled region of Northern Ireland.

Dr John Taylor, IARF's representative to the UN in Geneva, also took part and noted a range of perspectives in the interventions of governments at the forum. Some of these are summarised below.

- The Spanish government, co-host of the conference, was among those that testified to the importance of correcting past stereotypes in the teaching of both history and religious studies.
- The EU position, presented by Belgium, urged tolerance, refused an amalgam between religion and extremism, and called for integration over assimilation.
- Germany spoke of the need for state

and religious communities to share responsibility for religious education.

- Ireland welcomed the specificity of the 1981 UN Declaration, but regretted the gap between principle and practice in many places.
- France reaffirmed the separation of state and religion and the consequent inadmissibility of religious education, seeing philosophy and history as imparting values of pluralism and respect for the individual.
- A non-EU European country, Norway, reviewed its own requirements for all students to learn a respectful understanding of world religions and ethics.
- Yugoslavia aspired to new approaches that would avoid denial or misuse of religion and give equal rights, including the right to religious instruction, to all communities.
- The USA, where religion cannot be taught in public schools, urged education for rights to religious freedom.

The US noted that parents have an important role in education and, while the central government has limited responsibilities, it should encourage innovation.

- China affirmed freedom of religion and belief and urged dialogue among diverse communities, including mutual respect between religious and non-religious people. While affirming the right to religious education as part of the teaching of culture and history, it warned against the influence of “evil sects”.
- Malaysia, speaking also on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, approved dialogue, but warned against any UN directives that would impose specific methods.
- Both Egypt and Tunisia mentioned the importance of teacher training to create a culture of peace and tolerance, building on religious values.
- Namibia described its own use of a multi-faith religious and ethical educa-

tion syllabus, which taught openness and responsibility.

The interventions of NGOs at the Madrid conference were also numerous and equally varied. They ranged from careful pedagogical proposals for religious education as a means to build respect for diversity to impassioned pleas to ban religious education in all its forms. Ignorance was seen as a corrosive factor in creating prejudice and, thus, respect for differences was widely affirmed. Various NGOs advocated moral and spiritual development and there was widespread interest in education in global ethics.

IARF is extremely grateful to Rissho Kosei-kai, which, as an organisation, contributed £5,000 to this religious education project. The IARF booklet, *Religious Education in Schools: Ideas and Experiences from around the World* will be available to participants at the IARF Congress in Budapest in July.

Re-launch of Geneva-based Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief Dr John Taylor

Some twenty Geneva-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) held elections on 5 December 2001 to appoint officers for the newly re-established *Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief* of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations (CONGO). Traditions represented at this meeting included Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and others. As detailed in the last *IARF World*, the IARF played an important role on this committee in the past and is now very involved in its revival. It is hoped that the committee will strengthen co-operation among NGOs involved with the UN's human rights machinery.

At the December elections, Rev Ruediger Noll of the Conference of European Churches was selected as chairperson. Rev Noll also serves as chairperson of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Advisory Council on Religious Freedom. Ms Alessandra Aula of Franciscans International will hold the position of vice-chair and Dr John B Taylor,



A view of the United Nations showing the Wilson Memorial Globe

IARF's representative in Geneva, will hold the position of secretary.

On the new committee's immediate agenda will be discussions of the ways in which religiously based and secular NGOs can co-operate in promoting the work of the United Nations Special

Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. This work is especially relevant in view of the UN's co-sponsorship of the recent *International Consultative Conference on School Education in relation*

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20th Anniversary Remembered in India

Dr Mohinder Singh

To mark the 20th anniversary of the *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, a function was organised by the South Asia Coordinating Council of the International Association for Religious Freedom. It took place at Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi on November 23, 2001.

Dr Karan Singh, (former Minister of the Indian Government and Ambassador to the United States), highlighted India's unique tradition of tolerance towards other faiths. He mentioned that it was a tribute to India's spirit of tolerance and accommodation that nine out of twelve major religious traditions in the world were thriving in India in spite

of aberrations here and there. The event was attended by a large number of people from different parts of India including prominent religious leaders from different faith traditions and other important personalities. All the Indian members of the IARF International Council were present.

Mr Tarlochan Singh, (Vice Chairman of National Commission for Minorities), felt that in keeping with the UN Declaration there was a need to ensure religious freedom in all parts of the world. He specially mentioned some of the Middle Eastern countries that do not allow the rights of passage to some of the members of other faiths.

Rev Valson Thumpu mentioned that it was time to diagnose the epidemic of

negativity, which was fast taking over the traditional spirit of tolerance in India.

Swami Agnivesh, political activist, emphasised the need to cultivate secular human values to create good human beings and referred to various malpractices being performed under the garb of religion.

Dr A K Merchant, (General Secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís), reminded the audience of the golden rule to do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Other speakers addressed issues that were more broad in their subject matter. (Mohinder Singh is based in Delhi and is a member of the IARF International Council.)

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with *Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination*, which was held in Madrid, Spain in November 2001 (see story on page 6). The report of that conference will be brought to the 58th Session of the UN Human Rights Commission in March-April 2002, and, at that time, the new NGO Committee may hold a hearing based on the recommendations of the Madrid Conference.

Other matters of concern for the relaunched committee will include: communication with the New York-based Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief (where the role of secretary is also held by IARF's Sue Nichols); widening the membership of the Geneva-based committee to more human rights organisations (including those without a particular religious identity); follow-up to the UN Conference against Racism held in Durban, South Africa; and, addressing challenges for the safeguarding of civil liberties in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. The officers are preparing a series of invitations for experts to meet the committee and to promote discussion on issues related to freedom of religion or belief.



Swami Agnivesh, speaking in Delhi

Other IARF News

IARF Receives Rockefeller Grant for Voluntary Code of Conduct

The IARF is very pleased to announce that it has been awarded a grant of just over \$70,000 by the Rockefeller Foundation for work on Creating a Voluntary Code of Conduct for all Religious (or Belief) Communities. As outlined in the May 2001 issue of *IARF World*, work on a Voluntary Code of Conduct is central to the organisation's strategic plan for 2001-07. Consequently, this is a very positive development for our organisation.

Why is this work so important? While governments are expected to adhere to standards of international law related to freedom of religion and belief, situations do exist where the religious or belief communities themselves are not accountable or are not ensuring that their own practices uphold the fundamental dignity and human rights of their members and others. These practices include, for example, lack of financial accountability, problems with health practices, and failures to protect minors. Indeed, recent incidences of such abuses by religious groups have led, and may continue to lead, to a backlash by governments in which freedom of religion and belief will be curtailed beyond reason. Hence,

legislation has been introduced in some countries that is misconceived or repressive.

Regional institutions such as the *Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (OSCE) have been examining these topics. IARF, thanks in part to the Rockefeller grant, can now become much more engaged with this subject in the years ahead. Initially, IARF will be working with selected experts in the field to develop voluntary guidelines to encourage responsible religious practices. The members of a small drafting committee will come together in mid-March 2002 for an initial meeting in England. They represent a variety of backgrounds, including Shinto, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, and indigenous traditions. Dr Eileen Barker, Director of the *Information Network Focus on Religious Movements* (INFORM) at the London School of Economics, will take a leading role in the project.

Following its work in March, the drafting committee will bring an initial text to the IARF Congress in Budapest in July 2002 for further discussion by member groups. Following the Congress, there will be a wider process of

validation among interfaith groups, scholars, and like-minded non-governmental organisations. Close liaison with the *World Conference on Religion and Peace* (WCRP) will ensure that mainstream religious groups have opportunities for comment. Overall, IARF expects this project to take the form of an open debate over a period of several years. While IARF members will be expected to assent to the Code, religious, belief or human rights groups outside of the IARF family will not be asked, or expected, to sign and ratify the document. Nonetheless, their comments and critiques will be welcomed.

Ultimately, developing a Voluntary Code of Conduct for all Religious (or Belief) Communities is meant to establish that there should be a standard of conduct against which religious and belief communities should be ready to explain their practices. The process of formulating such a document may itself affect the behaviour of religious groups in a positive direction. In the longer term, it is hoped that this initiative will serve to improve the tolerance between the followers of different religions and beliefs, as well as between such groups and state authorities.

Young adult news

At the time of going to press, the IARF is extremely saddened to see the violence perpetrated by "criminal" elements in some of the Muslim and Hindu communities. This has caused a breakdown in relationships between many Muslims and Hindus. The villagers involved with the project below, have stated that the collaborative work they have carried out together is now of even greater significance.

Interfaith project—From 22nd December 2001 to 7th January 2002, thirteen young adults from Gujarat, nine from other Indian states and ten from Canada, Hungary, Japan, South Africa, UK, and the USA took part in an international interfaith project in Gujarat, India. They helped to restore a mosque in a Muslim village, and to build a temple in a Hindu village. The original temple had been totally destroyed and the mosque partially damaged in the massive earthquake that hit the area on 26th January 2001.

The background—The project was arranged by the IARF South Asian Coordinating Council, and supported by the IARF Secretariat. We wanted to show solidarity with the people who had been affected by the earthquake in Gujarat. Our additional concern in choosing Gujarat, was awareness of incidents of religious intolerance, which needed to be addressed indirectly through a cooperative, publicly visible endeavour.

It seemed that a project to restore

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Young adult news

local places of worship in one location could be a great opportunity for interreligious understanding. Young adults would play a significant part. Investigation teams were sent to the region and months of discussions followed. The IARF was encouraged by the enthusiasm of local organisations such as the Anoopam Mission and in particular, the people from the two villages. Finally, the IARF Project Coordinator set about the task of making the detailed arrangements.

The aim of bringing the young adults together in this situation was to promote interfaith cooperation, an awareness of different cultural traditions and to provide an opportunity to reflect on issues of religious freedom. We hoped that this project would attract young adults both from India and other parts of the world who would be interested in continuing to work for the cause of religious freedom, some of whom would also have leadership potential.

The programme—The Indian nationals were in Ahmedabad to welcome with garlands the international young people who had arrived from Delhi. They all had the opportunity to visit Sabarmati Ashram, where Mahatma Gandhi had lived. Later they talked about his views such as advocating Ahimsa (non-violence), simplicity, and that there should be truth in thought, speech and action.

After a long coach journey, the local people greeted the young adults with dancing and they all joined in. Among the faith and belief traditions represented were Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, First Nations spirituality, Hindu, Muslim, Unitarian and there were also young adults of no fixed belief.

It was not so straightforward to try to maintain a balance between the work on the sites and time for discussions, relaxation, visits and so on! A regular feature was the sunrise ceremony at 7am, when the hardier participants gathered together for meditation and selected readings from different religious scriptures! During separate worship sessions, each participant had the opportunity to present aspects of her/his faith or belief system and there was time for discussion and explanations. The Cultural and Entertainment committee arranged events to revitalise the group.

It is not possible to convey all the different experiences of the young people and the entire programme in detail, but a glimpse of some of the more positive aspects of the project can be ascertained from a sample of their comments below.

Aruna, India—*There is unity in spite of our diversity. I have enjoyed the people from the four corners of the world coming together to achieve certain goals.*

Amit, India—*I enjoyed working with the group of young adults with the help of the local village people. These people are*

from different religions and it is good to see that.

Nangroi, India—*I learned the importance of team work and cooperation.*

River, Canada—*We moved sand, painted and destroyed a wall. The falling of that wall was symbolic of the religious barriers that were collapsing. All of us on our knees worshipping in the mosque is a memory I will cherish. Then there was the tiring work at the temple. The sun burned hot beating down on all of us and weakening our backs but our resolve was strong. We poured concrete, moved dirt and built the foundations. At the same time as we were building foundations of interfaith tolerance.*

I was proud of us when we were working, giving ourselves in the true meaning of shramadan. (editor—"shramadan" means "the gift of labour") Recollecting the last evening together, River noted, I have only felt that type of unity and happiness once and that was never in the midst of so many differences.*

Nora, Hungary—*When we were working in the Muslim village, we experienced the Friday prayer. We were not part of it, since we stayed downstairs, but it was a very special feeling for me, because in that very moment I really had the feeling that we had done something useful. We stopped working, and were listening to what the Imam was saying (some of us did not understand a word, of course). However, we were part of their life and they became part of my life at that very hour.*

I have very much enjoyed learning about each other's faith and cultural traditions. I have experienced the power of human beings, the power in the diversity and similarity.

Nana, Japan—*I enjoyed working with the village people. I enjoyed the interfaith group work. We could talk about some of the problems of religious intolerance.*

Xolisa, South Africa—*I really enjoyed the interaction between the locals and us (internationals); all of us at the project were so close that it was hard leaving each other on our last day. The work we did was probably the greatest thing I have ever done to contribute to one community, and hope I could do the same for my community as well.*

Rebekah, UK—*It seems to me that*



Work in progress at the mosque

shared physical labour of the most simple, enduring kind is part of the humble spirit that helps break down barriers of culture and religion and that, particularly in a situation where communication cannot be perfect in the linguistic sense, such physical acts of communal spirit can speak volumes.

We were told by the Muslim villagers that we were the first of numerous groups who came looking round the village after the earthquake, who had stopped to help as well as to question.

Overall, I have never been on a project that left me feeling so positive and so connected to my fellow team mates. Though there were some difficulties of translation and some differences of opinion, this was a very successful project and IARF should definitely feel that part of its 7 year aim to create a network of young people committed to interfaith work, and to international relations is already being fulfilled. I feel full of hope for what we as young people can achieve in our future world.

Paula, USA—The physical work was very powerful for me, being able to give of my time and spirit are things that I value....Learning about different religions was also very moving. I believe that religions, faiths, or just ways of being are really interesting to know about because you learn what motivates people, what keeps them strong, and what their answers to the big questions are. The

things I will remember for the rest of my life were the small things during the trip. I loved the bus rides, talking and singing with everyone. I loved the spontaneous dancing that would sometimes happen. I loved that at every meal we would pray together. I loved the conversations I had with the other participants, that weren't planned. I loved all the laughing that we did as a group and how close I felt I came to everyone. The part that changed my life were the people I met. They are what made the trip so absolutely amazing to me. The work we did was very powerful, but the friends I made, I will have for life.

Outcomes—We are most grateful for the generosity of Rissho Kosei-kai and the Unitarian Universalist Association in enabling this project to take place. It is hoped that the cooperation and support that has taken place amongst the two villages, Muslim and Hindu, will be viewed in a positive light by other areas of Gujarat. In fact, there have already been interesting experiences. Many villagers and people from the nearest town, came to the final ceremony of the project. It is also envisaged that the publicity following the completion of the mosque and temple, will promote deeper understanding between faith communities. Nationally and internationally, the young adults are already considering how they can be involved further. They

hope to contribute to our global network of young people committed to addressing religious freedom issues and to promoting interfaith harmony and understanding in their area.

The next project—The next IARF young adult project has been requested for the Philippines. It will comprise an educational tour for Indigenous young adults from the island of Mindanao to encounter their contemporaries of different faith traditions on neighbouring islands. It is hoped that over the eight day period, they will gain a deeper understanding of each other's belief systems and spiritual traditions.

And onwards!—To Budapest, Hungary! We are expecting over 120 young people from around the world, with diverse faith traditions and beliefs to take part in our Young Adult Programme and Congress. (See page 4 for more details). This is just one of the events which may motivate some of the participants to play an active role in our Religious Freedom Young Adult Network (RFYN)—part of our IARF Strategic plan (2001–2007).

Ramola Sundram, IARF Young Adult Programme Coordinator would be delighted to discuss any issues regarding our programme or any new ideas, so contact her via the IARF Secretariat, email: ramola@iarf.net or get in touch with your Regional Co-ordinator.



Buddhists and Unitarians sharing their faith traditions

IARF General Secretary in the Philippines

The purpose of the visit that took place in November 2001 was for Andrew Clark to attend consultations in the three regions, Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

In Manila and Dumaguette, interfaith meetings were arranged with a number of very active IARF supporters and other leaders of faith and human rights organisations. There was considerable interest in a co-operative venture in working on religious education in schools, as a strategy for promoting understanding and lessening discriminatory attitudes

A consultation in Mindanao took place with Indigenous and Muslim leaders. Andrew Clark met with senior representatives of the ten principal indigenous peoples' tribes: the *Manobo*, the *Aromanon Manobo*, the *Ilianen*, the *Tiduray*, the *B'laan*, the *Tagabawa*, the *Kirenfeken*, the *Matidsalog*, the *Igorot* and the *Tinananen*. The Muslim leaders were from the *Maguindanaon*, *Jansug*, *Maranao* and *Iranon*.

The Conference had been called by Dr Sebellon Wale, Deputy Assistant responsible to the Provincial Governor for Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and International Council member of the IARF. 22 people were present. A welcoming IP invocation with incense was given by Mr Taupan from Barongis, Libungan in his (unwritten) tribal language. The process that followed was a three stage one:

- An extensive round of introductions in which each of the IP leaders gave a brief explanation of the main tenets of his or her beliefs;
- An explanation given about the purpose and Strategic Plan of the IARF;
- Discussions in three groups (2 IP & 1

Muslim) about the kind of initiatives which they would like to develop in the field of religious freedom.

The IPs sometimes had a dual religious identity because their faith traditions were not officially recognised, so some of them had been "Christianised" and used Christian first names. They had not rejected their traditional beliefs, but in the absence of any written records, and under the pressures of modern society, they were rapidly becoming forgotten. It was especially noticeable that they did not necessarily understand each other's languages, the only common language was Cebuano.

They mostly referred to one Creator God who required obedience, and a variety of goddesses for such aspects of creation as animals, honey bees, the sea, fish and trees. Offending these natural deities could bring sickness. There was one mention of "fairies". God or a goddess also oversaw various activities such as war, hunting and agriculture, and it was a religious leader's responsibility to conduct a harvest thanksgiving ceremony. God required good behaviour such as faithfulness in marriage, and avoidance of criticising other people, and our obedience would be judged. Ultimately there was life after death.

Outcome of the Consultation: The presentation by each of the three discussion groups was a rich collection of ideas. The Muslim groups expressed the need to stay together and work in a joint process with

the IPs. Any work of IARF should consider the need to strengthen the underlying belief values and identity of the indigenous peoples. Proposals included:

- a research project properly to record the beliefs of Mindanao's indigenous peoples in a way which would



This map of the Philippines can be found at: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia01/philippines_sm01.jpg (The Visayas are islands situated between Luzon and Mindanao)

Beliefs of the Indigenous Peoples: In general it was noticeable how relatively less clear and assertive the IPs were about their beliefs as distinct from the Muslim leaders whose exposition of Islam was comprehensive and clear in terms of: *the 5 pillars, 11 commandments and 6 principles*.

IARF President in Thailand and Taiwan

Eimert van Herwijnen visited Thailand in January at the invitation of Venerable Dr Mettanando Bhikkhu, (Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General for Buddhist Affairs). Ven Mettanando explained to IARF the difficulty Bhikkhus face in obtaining passports and permission to travel abroad.

(Continued from p. 12)

IARF General Secretary in the Philippines

- strengthen their identity and self-confidence,
- production of religious education materials for schools which include all faith traditions,
 - the proposal to have an educational tour for young adults to meet with their contemporaries of different faith traditions on neighbouring islands.

A first step was thus taken to lay the foundations for a process that would produce practical ideas for local initiatives. IARF will be able to support some of them in the context of its overall work for religious freedom, and link them to the work of the other two branches in the Visayas and Luzon. Already the IP and Muslim groups have met again in Mindanao as planned on December 6th 2001, and project proposals along these lines are taking shape.

After discussions with IARF representatives, it was also recognised that the administrative needs of IARF were changing. It was essential to encourage work actively with a co-ordinator at each regional level. Branch coordinators have now been established in Manila (for Luzon), Dumaguette (for Visayas) and Kidapawan (for Mindanao). The national coordination will continue to be managed from Manila as before.

Ven Mettanando arranged a meeting for Eimert with Samaneri Dhammananda, who is leading the Training Centre for Buddhist Women, 50 km west of Bangkok. Ven Dhammananda, a former Professor of Buddhism, received the lower ordination of Samaneri in February 2001 in Sri Lanka. The law in Thailand does not allow Bhikkhus to ordain women to become Bhikkhunis, they can only become *maeji* (white robed nuns). Ven Dhammananda is very active in the struggle for the right of women to be ordained.

Interest in an IARF Chapter is now being shown in Thailand and Ven Dhammananda is actively working on this. The matter will come before the IARF International Council.

In Taiwan, Eimert spent time at the headquarters of IARF member group *Fo Guang Shan* (FGS), represented on the International Council by Bhiksuni Chueh Men. FGS was founded by the

Venerable Master Hsing Yun in 1967 and promotes Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan and in many countries overseas. The monastery in Kaohsiung has developed into the largest Buddhist monastery in Taiwan. The Monastic Order now has more than 1300 monks and nuns, the majority being women; FGS has 65 temples in Taiwan. Ven Master Hsing Yun founded the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) in 1992. This lay movement now has over one million members in 175 chapters around the world.

A visit was paid to the newly built Fo Guang University in the city of I-lan which is the fourth out of 150 universities in Taiwan to offer religious studies and humanities. The Dean of the Faculty of Religious Studies, Dr Chen Yu-Hsi took an interest in both our proposed Voluntary Code of Conduct, (see page 9) and in IARF's approach to the field of religious education.

A view of Fo Guang Shan, Kaohsiung



More news and events from around the world

Europe

Ilona S Orbok, IARF Europe and Middle East Coordinator, has visited several European countries, meeting IARF members and making new contacts.

Poland—Ilona had nine different meetings in November with representatives of other religious traditions and gained a deeper understanding of their current situation. She received warm hospitality by IARF member group, the Polish Unitarians and their lay leader Rev Czeslaw Glogowski. Poland is primarily a Roman Catholic country and minority groups all complained to Ilona about the privileged situation of the majority Catholic Church and its strong influence in politics. A lot of prejudice exists in Polish society towards the new religious groups and there are a growing number of anti-sect movements. The minority groups wanted to know how they could be better accepted. Ilona learned about the legal situation in Poland with regard to the registration of religious groups. There are 3 categories:

1. The Roman Catholic Church has a special situation due to the Concordance signed by the Polish government and the Vatican.
2. The government has signed a special agreement with 14 churches or religious groups: Protestant churches, the Jewish community, etc. Their registration gives them a better position, as it is based on the agreement.
3. The third category: 82 religious groups such as Unitarians and Buddhists.

A meeting with Michael Schudrich,

Chief Rabbi of Poland proved to be extremely interesting. Rabbi Schudrich comes from a Polish Jewish family, but was born and brought up in the USA. He gave a detailed commentary of the tragic history of Polish Jews. During the Second World War, 90% of the four million Polish Jews were killed in concentration camps or in the ghetto. The survivors mostly emigrated to Israel, or to the USA. For a long time Polish Jews had only one Rabbi in Warsaw, now there are 3 in the whole country.

Germany—Many years ago, the IARF established a separate NGO in Germany to be able to apply to the German government for financial assistance for the former IARF Social Service Network. Now this financial assistance is no longer available for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) linked with international bodies. IARF members felt that it was important to maintain an NGO in Germany focussing on interreligious programmes, with particular emphasis on the involvement of young adults. The new NGO is called *Projekt globale Verständigung*, (Project for global understanding). Many thanks to those who attended the crucial meeting in Frankfurt on 23-24 November, including Ernst Mohnike, President of the Board and other members, including Dorle and Diether Gehrmann (former IARF General Secretary). They hope to work closely with Ramola Sundram (IARF Young Adult Programme Coordinator).

Hungary—An independent parliamentary proposal in Hungary has been introduced to establish an Inter-Ministerial Committee “for the coordination

of social self-defence against spiritual influences endangering fundamental freedoms.” While the legislation is meant to safeguard citizens against the “sect phenomenon,” Ilona Orbok, has worked with Peter Buda of *Human Rights without Frontiers*, to raise concerns about the potential treatment of religious minorities under such legislation. This is on-going work.

UK—The British Chapter of the IARF and Sheffield Interfaith co-sponsored a conference held on 2 February 2002. Ishtiaq Ahmed of the Bradford Council of Mosques spoke on *Lessons from Bradford*. Declaring himself to be proud to be both British and Muslim, he explained some of the successes and failures of interfaith work in his area. Various workshops enabled the participants, who came from a wide variety of faith traditions, to discover more about other religions. Zarrin Caldwell, Issues and Research Coordinator at the IARF, led a workshop entitled, *The IARF: Religious Freedom and Governments*.

South Asia

Sri Lanka

A very successful conference organised by the IARF Sri Lanka Chapter took place in February at the Ramakrishna Mission. There were over 300 participants, from a wide range of faith traditions and ages.

The Chief Guest was the Honorable Minister in charge of Western Development of Sri Lanka, Mr M H Mohammed. Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists spoke on how their reli-



Hard at work discussing the new NGO in Germany

gions can reflect harmony and understanding. Their message was quite inspiring and educative and provided an opportunity for incorrect perceptions to be dispelled.

The Sri Lankan Chapter discussed the importance of young adult programmes to encourage a younger membership base and the need for the active support of all religious groups, with emphasis placed on the participation of women.

North America

USA

California—Members and friends of the IARF gathered at the Rissho Kosei-kai Centre in Pacifica, near San Francisco on October 21. Featured speakers were Rev Richard Boeke and Professor George Williams. A mini conference in May is being planned.

New York—A conference on November 17th at the Rissho Kosei-kai Centre in Manhattan featured Jeffrey Huffines, United Nations Representative for the National Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís in the United States and President of the Committee of Religious Non-Governmental Organizations at the United Nations. He addressed the theme: *Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Moral Imperative for a Peaceful Society*. Jeffrey stressed the importance of the IARF because of its commitment to fostering a universal and inclusive community. He reminded the group that there is serious religious oppression in many parts of the world, and shared the example of the desperate plight of the Bahá'ís within Iran.

The realities of religious intolerance were illustrated in a powerful presentation about the communal oppression of religious minorities in the rural villages of Bangladesh. The presenters were members of the Vivekananda Study and Philanthropic Center of the USA; its parent group, the Ramakrishna Mission is a member group of the IARF. They asked for support in pressuring the government of Bangladesh to ensure the rights of all its citizens are upheld.

Circle groups provided an opportu-



Panelists at the Boston conference

nity for all the participants to share their personal spiritual journeys. Many expressed interest in further IARF involvement.

Boston—Five area Muslim leaders and a Jewish peace advocate from Jerusalem made presentations on November 18. The event entitled *Understanding Islam in these Tumultuous Times*, was sponsored by Wayland-Weston Interfaith Action Group, Wayland church and the IARF. The five speakers included professionals, students, and Imam Salih Yucel, President of the Boston Dialogue Foundation. Many misconceptions about Islam were addressed, particularly the distorted portrayals of the concept of holy war and the place of women in Muslim societies. A spirited discussion followed.

Yehuda Stolov, Director of the Israel Encounter Association and a long time leader in interfaith dialogue in Israel, shared his experience of transcending religious and ethnic barriers by bringing together leaders as well as ordinary citizens. He expressed the hope that these continuing efforts would ultimately lead to peace and reconciliation.

Many people were keen to organise a Boston area IARF branch.

Tampa Bay—Several meetings have

been held with representatives from more than a half dozen religious communities. A highlight was a meeting with an Imam who discussed the convictions and practices of his religion. The Imam comes from an American Black Muslim background. A spring event is currently under consideration.

Rev Richard Kellaway has been appointed as the interim IARF North American Coordinator (part-time). He has been associated with the IARF for over thirty years! His duties will include: identifying, developing, and nurturing potential new branches, members and member organisations; supporting the US and Canadian chapters; gathering and disseminating data on religious freedom issues and working with other North American interfaith and human rights organisations. Richard will work closely with Rev Orlanda Brugnola, the IARF representative to the United Nations (New York), and the members of the IARF North American Coordinating Council. He is eager to present issues of religious freedom to interfaith groups and would welcome invitations to speak and organise.

For further details, contact Richard Kellaway—see page 20

A Decade of Religious Changes in Post-Communist Russia: Major Trends and Challenges

Dr Alexei Krindatch

The last decade of the 20th century was a period of rather turbulent religious transitions in Russia which has been marked by several controversial developments. Two events can be seen as the symbols of the beginning and end of this transitional epoch. The first event took place in 1988. A religious festival, the millennium of the establishment of Christianity in Russia, was officially declared a national festival and, consequently, was sponsored by the state. Under the conditions of the Communist regime, this was an almost shocking idea. The second event occurred in December 1999. After President Yeltsin's resignation, Vladimir Putin went to Patriarch Alexij 2nd (head of the Russian Orthodox Church), to ask for a blessing to serve as the temporary appointed head of the state until the next presidential elections took place. This action was seen as perfectly acceptable to the majority of Russia's population. As such, these events demonstrated both the increasingly close ties between the state and religious institutions in Russia as well as the importance of religious organisations in post-Soviet Russian society.

Sociological surveys in Russia indicated that the share of people declaring themselves "believers" increased from 25% in 1985 to about 50% by 2000 [1]. Today, about 33-40% (or about 50-60 million) of Russia's population are Orthodox Christians, 10-13% (or 15-20 million) are Muslims, 0.7% (or about 1 million each) are Jews, Buddhists and Protestant, and about 0.2% (about 300,000) are Roman Catholics. The remaining 50% consider themselves non-believers [2]. Nonetheless, the majority of experts agree that only 10-15% of those declaring some form of religious belief (or 5-8% of the total population) can be considered practising believers, (those regularly attending church services and following dietary and other religious requirements and rituals). [3].

Regardless of the number of practising believers, religion is not regarded as a personal belief system as such, but rather as an important part of the traditional cultural environment and/or a symbol of an ethnic style of life. In other words, a sense of belonging to a certain religion or, more specifically, to a particular religious organisation has become an inseparable part of a person's identity in today's Russia. More importantly, judging by the level of people's trust, religious organisations are well ahead of political parties, the mass media, national government, and parliament. Only President Putin and the Russian armed forces compete with religious organisations in their degree of public popularity.

The last decade of the 20th century saw a period of very dynamic institutional growth of various religious organisations. In 1991-2001, the number of legally registered local religious communities (such places of regular worship like synagogues, prayer-houses, etc.) grew threefold from 6,600 to 20,200. This quantitative growth was accompanied by an increasing diversity in Russia's "religious scene". In the first half of the 1990s, there was a vast increase in the number of various Protestant churches and of other new religious movements. These organisations had not been present in the Soviet epoch and were mainly initiated by foreign religious missionaries. Several factors contributed to this process. Firstly, there was a growing public interest in religion itself, a subject that was not welcomed under the Soviet regime. Secondly, there was an interest in everything "foreign", or connected with the "West" and, thus, also forbidden (or at least inaccessible) under conditions behind the "iron curtain". Finally, at the beginning of the 1990s, domestic religious organisations in Russia were just recovering as institutions from a period of oppression and did not pay attention to missionary work. Con-

sequently, foreign religious missions considered "atheistic" Russia as an undiscovered mission-field and concentrated their finances, activities, and programmes on working with Russia's "unchurched" population. The post-Communist religious revival in Russia was accompanied by growing discord on the religious front.

This discord was highlighted over the last decade when two very different national laws were adopted which described the status of religious organisations and the legal framework of Church-State relations. In 1990, a law was adopted which considered the religious life of society as a "free market" to be regulated only by natural competition between various churches for people's hearts. Alternatively, in 1997, new legislation was passed which, in comparison to the 1990 law, was stricter in terms of state control over the activities of religious organisations, especially those of foreign origin or newly established ones.

The initial 1990 law represented a historical response to a long period of Communist anti-religious policy. Its main purpose was to liberalise religious organisations from total subordination to the state and to set up a legal framework of religious freedom in Russia. Consequently, it was basically limited to the description of various rights/privileges granted to religious institutions. The new 1997 law, in contrast, was adopted in order to consider the new realities of social life in contemporary Russia and to absorb the experiences collected during the period after the break-up of the former Soviet Union in 1991.

A distinctive feature of the 1997 law was a separation of all religious associations into two big categories: "religious groups" and "religious organisations." The former term, "religious group", was defined as a voluntary association of persons sharing one belief, that exists

without state registration and that does not have the status of a legal entity. The term “religious organisation”, however, meant official recognition by the state as a religious legal entity after a special procedure of registration in the Ministry of Justice. From the perspective of the freedom of an individual’s religious practice, the differences between these two categories were not important. There are, however, certain forms of activities allowed, or rights granted, only to “religious organisations” and not to “religious groups”. For instance, religious groups cannot found their own educational institutions (either theological or for general education) or teach religion on the territory of public schools. It is not allowed for a “religious group” to establish any mass media (to publish newsletters/magazines, or to have their own broadcasts), or to have enterprises producing religious literature and articles for religious ceremonies. Religious groups cannot invite foreign citizens to serve professionally on a permanent basis as clergy in Russia, or claim defer-

ment of military service for their clergy, etc. The 1997 law also required that, in order for religious groups to obtain the more privileged status of “religious organisation”, they had to prove that they have operated in Russia for at least 15 years.

In many ways, the adoption of the 1997 religious law in Russia has been indicative of a shift from the American “separationist” model of Church-State relations (which was in effect in the early 1990’s) to a “co-operative” one, which is common in many European states. In comparison with the 1990’s legislation, the 1997 law is less concerned with an idea of Church and State separation as such and assumes, overall, the co-operation of the state with religious organisations in different spheres of the life of society (charity, education, prison ministry, etc.).

While the adoption of the 1997 law caused an intense domestic and international public discussion over its “discriminatory character”, it is a lesser known fact that local legislatures in 30

of Russia’s 89 administrative regions passed their own regional, religious legislations. Many of these regional laws contradict not only the 1997 legislation, but also Russia’s Constitution. These legal changes also resulted in numerous hotly debated court-cases at both national and regional levels. The most internationally known examples are, probably, the continuing debate over the activities of the Church of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Moscow region and the problems with registering the Salvation Army as a religious organisation.

The future of religious freedom and, more importantly, of interfaith dialogue in Russia are further challenged by the fact that the changes in the legal sphere reflect, to a great extent, the shift in public opinion. The brief period of excitement, with the possibility to join various “foreign churches”, at the beginning of the 1990’s has ended. Although today

(Continued on p.18, col.1)

The Novodevichij Monastery in Moscow



(Continued from p.17, col.3)

96% of Russia's population support the general principle of freedom of personal choice of belief, only 40% of respondents agree with the full legal equality of all religions and churches. About one quarter of the population also supports direct restrictions on the activity of non-traditional religious organisations in Russia [4].

While contemporary Russian society remains largely secular by nature, it is seriously impacted by religious organisations and their leaders and by events on the country's religious scene. The current conditions of interfaith relations, and different issues of religious freedom, demonstrate clearly that the religious sphere of the country's life is very far from what is understood as an "open civil society". The situation is aggravated by the fact that, although numerous domestic and international human rights organisations are working

in Russia, very few of them are dealing with religious freedom issues in particular. Hence, the obvious importance of IARF having a strong presence in the Russian Federation.

(Alexei Krindatch is based in Moscow and is an IARF International Council member)

Sources:

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Federacii ("Religious Organizations of the Russian Federation"), Moscow: Respublika, 1996; and *Religija, svoboda sovesti, gosudarstvenno-tserkovnyje otnoshenija v Rossii* ("Religion, freedom of conscience and church-state relations in Russia"), Moscow: 1997.

3) *Novyj kurs Rossii: predposylki i orientiry* ("New course of Russia: premises and orientations"). Moscow: Institute for Socio-Political Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. Academia, Moscow, 1996.

4) Mtchedlov, Mikhail. *Religioznost molodezhi* (Religiosity of youth), in the newspaper "Nezavisimaja Gazeta", 23.01.98, p.2

A Woman's Place: Religious Women as Public Actors

By the World Conference on Religion and Peace, 2001
ISBN 0-935934-10-3

This book provides a very good overview of the role of women in various faith traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith, as well as in Chinese and African traditional religions. Compiled as a series of essays from women who are well versed in each of these traditions, the book addresses some of the challenges faced by religious women and the unique contributions that women have to offer.

Particularly interesting is how the various essays address the influence of patriarchal structures in defining "a woman's place". In other words, while the scriptures from these faiths may not always be repressive of women, the interpretation of these scriptures and their implementation has resulted in many injustices against women. The book reviews the effects of a dominant male hierarchy in many traditions and a sometimes selective reading of history.

Despite these perspectives on the past, the book also looks to the future. For example, the book's editor, Azza Karam, calls for the importance of partnerships both with men and across faiths, to "right the wrongs" of the past and to move forward. The book also calls attention to the things that ordinary women have done to benefit their communities and to enhance the role of religion in women's lives. As such, it provides a useful reference to the role of religious women as public actors.

Remember the

Global Reviews

in the last 2 issues of the
IARF World?

These are now being posted
on a quarterly basis at:
<http://www.iarf-religiousfreedom.net/global.html>

*Updates from March 2001
to February 2002
are now on the site and
each update includes a
review of the denial of
religious freedom in
6 selected countries.*

Keep up to date, bookmark
the site, and tell your friends!
Contact the IARF Secretariat,
your Chapter or Regional Co-
ordinator if you want our
global review and cannot get
access to the web.

SUMMARY LIST OF RECENT & CURRENT IARF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM PROJECTS

- **Religious Education in Schools: Ideas & Experiences from around the World.** IARF sent a delegation of six, including educational experts, to the *International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination*, which was held in Madrid, Spain in November 2001. One of IARF's contributions to this event was a booklet of 11 essays on the models and practice of religious education in schools from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas, edited by our IARF Research & Issues Co-ordinator. (see page 6)
- **A Young adult international interfaith project in the earthquake zone of Gujarat, India.** (see pages 9-11)
- **The 20th Anniversary of the 1981 United Nations Declaration against Discrimination and all forms of Religious Intolerance** was commemorated by IARF in various parts of the world. (see page 8)
- **A Voluntary Code of Conduct for Religious and Belief Communities.** (see page 9)
- **A Proposal for Muslim-Christian dialogue** has been developed by our Geneva Representative at the United Nations. Muslim and Christian leaders will try to identify the mutually agreed bases for their religions to co-operate and to recommend how to promote further dialogue. This is the first of a series of five such encounters covering some of the major religious traditions.
- **Re-launch of the Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief, at the United Nations, Geneva,** assisted by our Geneva representative. (see page 7)
- **An initiative on e-learning** for the promotion of interfaith knowledge and training has been proposed by IARF in collaboration with several other international interfaith organisations. (see front page)
- **“Freedom of Religion and Belief: Europe’s Story”.** This book was commissioned with a view to being of interest to those coming to Europe for our IARF World Congress but also to inform Europeans about their own heritage. It provides the full context for the evolution of the concept of religious freedom.
- **The IARF World Congress and Young Adult Programme.** (see pages 1- 4 and the booklet)
- **Working to end discriminatory & restrictive legislation in Europe.** (see page 14)
- **A small grant to CLAAS,** agreed in principle, to assist with the publication of its report “Faith under Fire”. CLAAS is a British-based group mainly defending the rights of Christians in Pakistan, some of whom are in a dire situation.
- **S. Philippines: Young Adult Educational tour** for approximately 25 Muslims and Indigenous Peoples, originating in Mindanao and including the Visayas region over a period of 8 days.
- **Indigenous Peoples’ Beliefs and Religious Education in Schools.** This is the current direction and planning of the IARF branches in the Philippines, originating from a consultation with IPs and Muslim groups in Mindanao. (see pages 12 and 13)
- **RFYN—Religious Freedom Young Adult Network.** Following the IARF Strategic Plan (2001-07) a variety of initiatives involving young adults are taking place. The overall approach is under the leadership and planning of the IARF Young Adult Programme Co-ordinator together with the IARF regional staff. Its shape is that of an integrated programme with a longer-term goal of developing the necessary knowledge and experience in 200 young people around the world. The intention is that they can both be active on religious freedom issues and derive support from each other to do so.

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18)

IARF’s Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) is to work for freedom of religion and belief because it is a precious human right that potentially enables the best within our religious lives, or our search for truth or enlightenment, to flourish. It requires:

- *Freedom from oppressive interference or discrimination by the state, government or society’s institutions on the grounds of religion or belief;*
- *Mutual understanding, respect and the promotion of harmony, or at least “tolerance”, between communities or individuals of different religions or beliefs;*
- *An essential accountability by religious communities to ensure that their own practices uphold the fundamental dignity and human rights of their members and others.*

Thus, IARF works with and for:

- *Groups from different religious traditions or beliefs (normally those which share its values);*
- *Communities suffering from religious persecution or discrimination.*

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