

# **IARF e-Newsletter**

## ***January 2010***

*News in a nutshell...*

To

IARF Council; Member organisations & Chapters;  
Interested organisations.



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  - Online registration available from January

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*"Religious Freedom: A call to action"* ; October 22<sup>nd</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> 2009
- September 11<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> 2009  
[International Young Adult Program](#) – Dhyana Ashram, Chennai, India  
*"The Role of Youth in Human Rights Duties"*
- HRE Philippines Update: Interfaith Village duck-raising event

## Message from the President

**I wish you all a very happy and peaceful New Year.**

IARF has commenced its work of organizing the 33<sup>rd</sup> Congress. The Indian Host Committee and Japan Liaison Committee are actively working in this area. I thank all the Congress Working Party members, the Council members and members of the secretariat who are helping us to organize the 33<sup>rd</sup> congress in a grand style. Our speakers' reputations as world leaders is enough headline for any international conference, not to mention what the presence of **His Holiness the Dalai Lama** will do to help us get international attention. I sincerely wish this 33<sup>rd</sup> Congress may become one opportunity to revitalize the IARF, the world's oldest interfaith organization.

I had the privilege to attend the **IARF EME (Europe & Middle East) conference** held in Mannheim, Germany. The enthusiasm I found there was enormous, including among the committed young adults who attended the simultaneous RFYN program.

Important news to share is that 94 young adults from ten countries attended the **International Young Adult Conference** program in Chennai from September 11 to 13. Solid discussions and deliberations regarding peacemaking, war, terrorism and human rights took place, with young adults from African nations and the Maldives much attracted to the activities of IARF, and offering their help in all our activities..

And in what may be considered as recognition of IARF's work in India, the 1,500 year-old JSS Hindu Mutt in Mysore extended its support in organizing at their conference venue the **India Chapter 13<sup>th</sup> National Conference** on 21–22 December 2009, with the theme "Interfaith Dialogue – The Way to Reconciliation". 200 people from all over India attended, with primary emphasis given to pre-Congress planning for the Indian IARF leaders.





**At right, Thomas Mathew with Swami Agnivesh**

At the **Parliament of the World's Religions** in Melbourne, I had the privilege to present — along with Drs. Homi Dhalla & John Taylor (at left) and Guji Takahiro Miwa — a workshop titled “*Religious Freedom and Inter-religious Dialogue: IARF and its work in India*”.



Forty participants from around the world attended, and the workshop featured an 11-minute video highlighting the recent Young Adult Conference and a Human Rights Education program held in a Dalit/Adivasi (indigenous) village. Some very lively interactions afterwards focused on how IARF is playing an advocacy role for communal harmony and upholding of religious freedom against the multi-religious background of India.

And in what was a fruitful occasion for us to join and interact with the world interfaith community, details of our forthcoming Congress were shared and discussed.



The forthcoming **US Chapter Conference** will be an opportunity to explore the possibilities of regaining our momentum. It is a great recognition for IARF that the Charter of Compassion has included us as a partner in its noble activities.

Finally, I would like to solicit your help in seeking new members for the next **International Council (2010 to 2014)**, to be inaugurated during the General Meeting at Congress) to lead IARF actively and vibrantly in these difficult times for the freedom of religion around the world.

Peace, Shanthi, Shalom, Asalaam Alaikum, Heiwa.

Thomas Mathew, President  
**(at left, with Sarvodaya leader Dr. Ariyaratna of Sri Lanka)**

## Congress news update

The Host Committee for our 33<sup>rd</sup> Congress in Kochi (4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> September 2010) has successfully negotiated the attendance of His Holiness the **Dalai Lama** at our Opening Ceremony, when he will give the inaugural address.



**HH the Dalai Lama with IARF Vice-president Rev. Takeshi Nishida (at right) & Rev. Yoshinobu Miyake**

Registration is now open on our website, where you can also pay using a credit card or PayPal.

<http://www.iarf.net/2008site/Congress/2010/index2010.htm>

## Conference of IARF European & Middle Eastern Region and the European Liberal Protestants Network

Mannheim & Ludwigshafen (near Heidelberg), Germany  
*"Religious Freedom: A call to action"*, October 22<sup>nd</sup>–25<sup>th</sup> 2009



This conference was held in response to the high level of enthusiasm generated by the IARF EME Belfast conference of July 2008. Wolfgang Jantz and Gudrun Hahn volunteered to organise it and were soon joined by EME President Wytske Dijkstra. IARF member group ***Freireligiöse Gemeinde, Mannheim*** provided their community centre for the meetings

and were wonderfully welcoming hosts. The ***Bund Freireligiöser Gemeinden Deutschlands*** had just celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the conference room contained an exhibition of its history. A short distance away in neighbouring Ludwigshafen, the Freireligiöse Gemeinde also provided the location for a parallel Religious Freedom Young Adult Network (RFYN) conference, organised by IARF Council member Morse Flores.



***Above:*** Newly appointed Bishop of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church, Ferenc Bálint-Benczédi & daughter Réka

***At right:*** Conference organisers Gudrun Hahn, Wolfgang Jantz and Wytske Dijkstra, Chair of IARF EME

The conference was attended by forty-four people from eight countries, a mixture of long-term IARF members and newcomers. The new Transylvanian Unitarian Bishop, ***Bálint-Benczédi Ferenc***, led a significant delegation, including seven for the RFYN conference. IARF President Thomas Mathew and Council members Shlomo Alon and Esther Kopmels also participated. The conference overheads were met by IARF funds administered by trustees from the German Chapter.



Three workshops addressed the IARF's role and future potentials:

- 1) Wies Houweling's workshop considered the IARF's relative position to other interfaith bodies.
- 2) Chris Hudson facilitated a very active public relations workshop.
- 3) Wytske Dijkstra's workshop considered the organisation and governance of the EME Region.

An important outcome of the workshops was the creation of an **EME Steering Committee** comprising Wytske Dijkstra (Chair), Lucie Meijer (Treasurer), Shlomo Alon, Glenn Bauer and Jeff Teagle.



Other features of the conference were a promotion of the **IARF World Congress 2010** by Thomas Mathew, an explanation of IARF's role within the United Nations by our representative John Taylor, and a guided tour Heidelberg. We completed the programme on Sunday morning by joining the RFYN and the Freireligöse Gemeinde congregation of Ludwigshafen, where its minister, Renate Bauer, graciously facilitated participation by conference members.

**(At left: President Thomas Mathew with David Gyerö)**

The conference achieved everything it set out to do. By bringing its members together at this time, it has generated a renewed feeling of purpose and community and laid the foundations for participation in Congress and further EME activities in 2011 and beyond.

***Report by Jeff Teagle***

## SACC Events

### New Chapter branch formed in Indore

August 2009

Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India.



HRE participants and new IARF branch leaders (seated) of **IARF Indore Branch**

All the new branch's leaders are Young Adults from different parts of India, working in Indore (central India). Two are Doctoral students from India's troubled state of Kashmir. These young adults organized an HRE program in Indore on 21- 22 August, at Gujarati Innovative College, with 42 participants attending from five surrounding colleges.

## International Young Adult Program – “The Role of Youth in Human Rights Duties” Dhyana Ashram, Chennai, India - September 11th -13th 2009

**A personal reflection on the meeting, from a Kashmiri young adult (name withheld)**



I am from Kashmir, sharing my personal experiences about the IARF International Young Adult Conference held at Chennai, India. First of all I am very thankful to the IARF for conducting the young adults program, as it was a great opportunity for young adults to learn new things and become aware about new issues faced by the humanity.

As I am Muslim, I always start my day by praying and reciting the verses of Qur'an, and in the same way the program of IARF begins with the prayers from different religions. It was a great opportunity for me to listen to the prayers of other religions. I am very thankful to Dr. Homi Dhalla for performing a Zoroastrian Prayer, as it was the first time for me to hear this prayer.





The speeches given by dignitaries like Dr. Homi Dhalla, Dr. Thomas Mathew, Dr K. R. Shamsunder IPS (Director General of Police, Tamil Nadu), and others were very knowledgeable. It boosts my mind and increases my knowledge. I appreciate the view shared by Dr Shamsunder that "No religion changes its followers to fanaticism, it is the



leaders who are changing them". It was first time in my life that I come to meet different people from different religions and also from different countries. I learnt many new things even of my own religion as well as the other religions.

In the evening session there were cultural programs and I came to know about different cultures of different countries. The mime program performed by Sri Lankan students was very impressive, and I had full faith with them because the same thing is happening with us (Kashmiri people). Sometimes Human Rights violations are led by governments themselves around the world, against their own citizens

I am again very thankful to IARF for covering our all expenses to reach the spot, and allowing us to participate in the program.

Thanks...

For the full report on this event, and SLIDESHOW, please visit **[www.iarf.net](http://www.iarf.net)**  
<http://www.iarf.net/2008site/YoungAdults/RFYNConferences/RFYNConferencesHome.htm>  
For video of the event, search for 'RFYN' on YouTube



**International Peace Day at Mysore – young adult program organizers & dignitaries holding peace candles**

**Human Rights Day** (December 10<sup>th</sup>) was celebrated by many Chapter branches in four states.

In Vizag (Andhra Pradesh), Chapter branch president Mr. Prakas Rao convened a gathering at the Vasavi Degree College, with the Chief Guest being Prof. Y. Sathya Narayana, Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University of Law. Well covered in the local press and attended by around 50 youth, the meeting focused on the human rights violations that occur in many parts of India despite her being a civilized society, and advocated listening to the voiceless who suffer these violations as well as ecological instability.

International Peace Day was celebrated with programs in Chennai and Mysore.

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## Intl. Peace Day observed



Mayor Puroshotham is seen inaugurating the function as (from left) M.A. Hemalatha, National Treasurer, IARF-IC, Sr. Joyces, Principal, Teresian College, MP H. Viswanath, MLA M. Satyanarayana and Md. Shabeer Ahmed, National Secretary of IARF-IC, look on.



Left: Human Rights Day celebrated in Vizag



Below: Play on the life of Gandhiji, Mysore



## HRE Philippines Update: **Interfaith Village duck-cooking event**

In spite of the super-typhoons that have wrought havoc in the pilot areas, IARF Philippines' **Bayanihan Para sa Kaunlaran** Interfaith Village Project reports good progress, such that it was able to hold a *duck-cooking contest* on Sunday December 19, 2009. It was a dry run for the planned **duck festival** which will happen next year for members and beneficiaries.



**left: Angie Grapa heads out to the project site**





**The feast**



**The award-winners**



## Dutch Chapter at the launch of the Charter for Compassion



Delegates of the Dutch Chapter of IARF were present at the launching of the [Charter for Compassion](#) in Amsterdam.

*From left: At Ipenburg, Annelies Trenning, Wytske Dijkstra, Corrie Jacobs, Jeanne Traas*

A video message from **Karen Armstrong**, initiator of the project, was shown, after which the mayor of Amsterdam, Job Cohen, gave the opening address.

The big moment came when **Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp**, one of the authors, made public the text of the charter by reading it out in public for the first time. All members of the audience were then provided with their own copy by pupils of the ROC. **Tariq Ramadan**, philosopher and **Herman Wijffels**, economist, then presented their views on the theme 'Compassion'.

The programme was interspersed with music and complemented with other forms of art.

## **Forthcoming** <http://www.iarf.net/2008site/ForthcomingEvents/index.htm>

- **January 14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> 2010**

**IARF U. S. Chapter Conference** – Clearwater, Florida, USA

***"Reconciliation with the Earth, Each Other and the Stranger"***

<http://home.iarfus.org/home/>

- **September 4<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> 2010**

**33rd World Congress** - Kochi, Kerala, India

***"Beyond Conflict to Reconciliation: The Challenge of the 21st Century"***

Please note: *Online registration is now open*, link at:

<http://www.iarf.net/2008site/Congress/2010/index2010.htm>