

IARF Annual Report

2008/09

Published April 2009



international association for

religious freedom

belief with integrity

President's Report

After my predecessor Rev. Abhi Janamanchi declared his resignation at the council meeting in March 2008, I was a little reluctant to assume his office, but the support and encouragement provided by Council members inspired me to take on the responsibility of this new, streamlined, lower-cost phase in IARF's history. Let me firstly therefore express my gratitude to them showing faith and confidence in me.

Two years ago the IARF found itself in dire straits. Our finances were heavily depleted and our staff mostly laid off. But the Japanese member groups rallied round and offered to host the secretariat in Osaka, ensuring that operational costs were minimal. The important AGM held at Clearwater, Florida in July 2007 meant governance changes permitting decision-making by email, allowing us to reduce annual meetings from two to one, and halve air travel. The Oxford Office closed at the end of October 2007 and the sole remaining staff member, Robert Papini, transferred to establish the Osaka office. Treasurer Geoffrey Usher and Company Secretary Jeffrey Teagle now maintain the UK corporate identity with Companies House and the Charity Commission, supported by the part-time

services of Finance Officer Anthony Ball.

The 2008 annual Council meeting was therefore in a position to make interim plans for re-establishing programme activities, particularly the continuation of the well-proven Human Rights Education programmes in the Indian subcontinent and the Philippines. Also, it was agreed to co-sponsor a EuroMed young adult interfaith conference in Amman, Jordan in August 2008, which the IARF Dutch Chapter and our youth program the RFYN's long-time supporter The Hibbert Trust helped fund.

This successful re-animation of IARF has given new life to our regions, in particular the Europe and Middle East (EME) region who organized an acclaimed conference in Belfast in July 2008 which I attended. I was very impressed by the enthusiasm shown by the EME hosts, as such gatherings will greatly strengthen our efforts toward achieving our noble objectives of peace and freedom.

Likewise in my region, South Asia, the participation in various inter-religious dialogues and programmes organized by India Chapter branches on Human Rights Day, UN Foundation Day, and International Peace Day has been inspiring. The interfaith meeting organized by our South Asia member groups also deserves

special mention, as it brought leaders of almost all religions to a common forum for discussion about religious freedom, peace and harmony. I had the opportunity to attend a very constructive two-day conference of IARF member groups and Chapter leaders in Mysore, which took the decision to support IARF's continuing Human Rights Education (HRE) and interfaith programs. This past year, as president, I have been able to observe closely the ongoing HRE programmes in India. But I was especially reassured when the HRE facilitators' Training of Trainers workshop at Mysore took the courageous decision to conduct HRE programmes in troubled areas of India where communal clashes often occur. The South Asia Co-ordinating Council (SACC) has accordingly begun active intervention in issues relating to religious conflicts in India, with a petition to the Prime Minister of India requesting he look into the atrocities against religious minorities in the states of Karnataka and Orissa. I myself met with the Chief Minister of Karnataka, Mr. Yediyurappa, in this regard.

My presence, along with that of along with my fellow International Council member Dr. Homi Dhalla at the India Chapter's Executive Council meeting, general body meeting and during the assumption of

office of the new president, was welcomed by the members. A new executive council for the India Chapter was elected from the general body which comprises members from the different religions and languages.

The decision to endorse the choice of Kochi (Cochin) in Kerala State, India, for the 33rd IARF World Congress was taken at a SACC board meeting held at Chennai in August. But it has already become necessary for us to ponder the decade following Congress, and IARF initiatives for concrete projects for the protection of human rights and religious freedom. However in the present era of religious conflicts, war, terrorism and economic meltdown, to achieve its objectives IARF has to think more holistically. Along with our main mission of religious freedom and human rights, we need to plan operations in the areas of sustainable development and ecology. With this in mind, our 2008 Council meeting approved the Interfaith Village project in the Philippines, run by hard-working Council member Angie Grapa, which seeks to augment grassroots food security in the recognition that peace and intergroup harmony cannot be expected in the presence of material privation.

Synergy with other global interfaith actors in our regions will be important to our future efforts, to which end I, along with India Chapter leaders, attended the IION (International Interfaith Organization Network) 2008 meeting at Kochi, and the URI 2008 International Conference at Mayapur, Kolkata. And in October 2008 I participated in the inaugural meeting of the World Fellowship of Interreligious Council

(WFIRC) at Kochi along with 75 young adults of IARF. We look forward to cost-effective collaborations in an era of lean prospects for project funding.

My thanks to all the member groups, chapters, staff and Council members for their support thus far. I greatly appreciate Morse Flores' and Angie Grapa's sacrifices of their free time and energy, the former leading the Young Adult Programme, the latter travelling widely through the Philippine islands setting up Interfaith Village programs. Thanks also to former president Ellen Campbell for her services to the Nominating Committee, and to the Visioning Committee for envisioning the second phase of HRE in India and Philippines. Above all this organization's gratitude goes out to the Japan Liaison Committee, without whose unwavering support and determination to keep alive the spirit of our founders, we would not be here to contribute our part, alongside our fellow allies in the interfaith movement, in taking up the challenges of working for peace and justice in the 21st century.

Thomas Mathew

Rev. Abhi Janamanchi, President until June 2008

From the Annual General Meeting in Clearwater, Florida in July 2007 until the end of his term in June 2008, he assisted with the coordination and completion of the Human Rights Education report that was submitted to the Dutch Government in December 2007. He reviewed the written report prepared by the office administrator, consulting with former president Ellen Campbell about editorial changes and revisions, and preparing a cover

letter for the final draft. He also provided supervision and direction to the office administrator in Oxford on day to day office issues, membership inquiries, the HRE report and office closure tasks.

He had conversations with Ms. Denny Davidoff at The Interfaith Alliance (TIAF) to explore the possibility of a collaborative project between the IARF and the Interfaith Alliance to train a group of international young adults in religious freedom issues and interfaith cooperation. In early December he participated in a visioning conversation in Chicago with other Unitarian Universalists about IARF's future, hosted by Dr. Lee Barker, President of Meadville Lombard Theological School. He also communicated with the Greeley Foundation about the grant from them for a young adult in interfaith to attend Congress.

He attended the inaugural function of the IARF-India Chapter's National Conference in Kanyakumari, India, where he met with some of the Chapter leaders and shared some of the recent developments within the organization. He represented Council at the memorial service for Ms. Natalie Gulbrandsen, former IARF President, in Boston, MA in November 2007 and presented a message of condolence to the bereaved family.

Following the 2008 Council meeting, he requested Ellen Campbell to chair the nominating committee. He worked with Margaret Paton and Robert Papini on website matters, and provided transitional information to the incoming president, Mr. Thomas Mathew.

Recent and current international Religious Freedom projects

<http://www.iarf.net/2008site/Projects/Currentprograms.htm>

I - Training and Education

The Religious Freedom Young Adult Network (RFYN)

After the 32nd IARF World Congress in Taiwan in 2006, a Young Adult Representative – Morse Flores – was elected International Council member which resulted in the creation of the RFYN Steering Committee – a young adult body of 12 members from various world regions which serves as the young adults' main decision making body of the organization.

During the RFYN network's April 2007 International Training Program on Human Rights Education conference held at Schoorl, Netherlands, participants workshopped ideas on developing an active international network between youth active in interfaith dialogue and promotion of religious tolerance and freedom of religion. The consensus was that a follow-up meeting was needed to sustain momentum, preferably in a region such as the Middle East where these issues have great significance, and real stories of people and communities are there to be learned. The Steering Committee subsequently began planning a 2008 meeting in conjunction with Jordan-based Youth Spirit Centre (YSC), which had played a vital role at Schoorl as representative of the Europe/Middle East region. At the IARF General Assembly Meeting held in Clearwater, Florida (July 2007), overwhelming support was expressed for young adult activities, which gave rise to a new dynamism and hope within the organization. A successful

funding application was jointly made with YSC to EuroMed, with the support of more than a dozen partner organizations within the MENA Region and the EU, and IARF offering partial sponsorship as well. The International Seminar on Human Rights & Freedom of Religion & Beliefs took place in Amman, from 19-26 August 2008, with 38 participants from 22 countries and religions around the Euro-Med region (and outside).

Dialogues and open spaces were created for young people to speak out and share their experiences, but most importantly, network and create opportunities to communicate, develop action and formulate solutions. Participants identified the following as most important in relation to the situation of their community or organisation: Enforcement of Human Rights and Freedom of Religions & Beliefs in the UN System; Instruments and Mechanisms; Exercise on Human Rights Advocacy & Monitoring; Discussion and sharing on the issue of Freedom of Religion & Beliefs; Inter-Cultural Dialogues and Learning; organizational learning and institutional visits.

Envisaged follow-up activities are a UN Human Rights Advocacy Fellowship & Training Programme, and two Regional Human Rights Monitoring Workshops —a South-East Asia Regional Workshop (Bangkok, Thailand) with the ARF-AMAN (the RFYN Coordinator and ARF-AMAN Youth Coordinator who participated in the seminar have developed and submitted a project proposal to the Australian Embassy in Bangkok for funding); and, a European Regional Workshop (Spain & Hungary),

with a proposal developed during the training by these countries' participants. It has been reviewed by the RFYN Coordinator who is helping them find funders.

Human Rights Education and Religious Freedom

Over the period 2004-2007 the Human Rights Education (HRE) project was run successfully in India, Bangladesh and the Philippines, thanks to generous funding from the Dutch Government and member group Risho Kosei-Kai. At the 2008 Council meeting, Thomas Mathew (then Vice-President) and Angelina Grapa both expressed their desire to sustain the HRE training, confirming that those trained as educators are willing and motivated to further expand the learning process.

The Visioning Committee therefore invited proposals, and these were forthcoming from both regions:

- SACC in the form of Continuity with the Dutch-funded HRE program, proposing 50 more learning workshops across India over the next two years, starting August 2008, focusing a greater number of the workshops in a few selected cities in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka with a large concentration of Muslims, where the response has been found to be very encouraging.

- The Philippines in the form of an "Interfaith Village" project concept linking the HRE objectives with a poverty alleviation / sustainability project that, in the context of communities of different faith backgrounds, improves village livelihoods through training in duck-raising, to raise nutrition levels and – through income-generating – material living standards, and thereby obviate the identity-based tensions between communities that result from poverty.

These proposals were both approved, and launched in August and September after widespread community briefings in May. Across four Philippine regions (Kalinga, Nueva Viscaya, Negros Oriental, Cotabato) a total of 53 10-member training cells had been established by year-end, with 424 individuals trained in both human rights awareness and techniques for successful duck-breeding. Almost 400 ducks had been purchased and disbursed. One cell, which is a farming community, have created for themselves a Savings Cooperative, while another church-based cell which is developing home gardening and producing their own fertilizer, encourages members to link with other religious groups and churches for better coordination and monitoring.

In India, where many regions have serious religious intolerance problems and many youth can gravitate toward fanatical movements, 15 workshops have been held from December 2008 to March 2009, in six states — Kerala, Karnataka, TamilNadu, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Pondicherry. The first program was held in RamaKrishna Ashram in Kolkota, inaugurated by its head Swami Asaktanandaji Maharaja. Each gender-balanced and multi-religious workshop has attracted 30 to 40 participants due to interest from many educational institutions, social service groups and youth. English is the main medium of the three training films, but local vernacular versions are also used (Bengali, Hindi, Tamil). Facilitators report that HRE has given a new face to IARF in India, and that they were highly regarded by many social, political and religious leaders for introducing this important basic right of humankind. The next phase of HRE will start in August 2009 and end in August

2010. There have been requests to organize programs in some of the most religiously troubled areas of India: Kashmir, Tripura and wider North-East India, Jodhpur in Rajasthan, Ahmadabad in Gujarat State, and the metropolitan cities Mumbai, Bangalore

II - United Nations Activities

IARF in the person of Dr John Taylor continued its role as secretary of the *NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief* (which functions as a sub-committee to the *Special Committee on Human Rights of CONGO* - the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the United Nations) until mid-2008, then was elected Vice-Chair of the NGO Committee in Geneva. During 2007 we remained an active participant in the NGO Committee on Human Rights Education and Learning, which presented various written and oral statements to the Human Rights Council (HRC). In October John attended the *High-level Dialogue on Interreligious & Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace* at the UN Headquarters in New York, and was asked to speak at the interactive hearing with civil society (only the fourth such event giving civil society a voice in the General Assembly). He evoked the 100-year engagement of IARF and the particular relevance of freedom of religion or belief and education for tolerance. For the September 2007 session of the HRC, IARF prepared the oral joint statement supporting the continuation of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms Asma Jahangir of Pakistan. Consensus about the work of the Special Rapporteur's mandate was however weakened over the 2008 year by the difference between the European Union (proposing the renewal of the Special Rapporteur's mandate) and the Organization of the Islamic

Conference (desiring amendments which would denounce defamation of religions and remove "change of religion" as a fundamental right), and indeed the issue of "defamation of religions" has meant that during 2008 freedom of religion has become more contentious.

IARF took part in the discussion around this controversy during the HRC's December 2007 session. After ongoing divisive discussions in 2008 HRC sessions, an Expert Seminar was held in October on the linkages between Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). John Taylor was asked by fellow NGOs to write a formal letter to the High Commissioner for Human Rights expressing disappointment at some *ad personam* attacks on Asma Jahangir due to her expert contribution having pointed to the dangers of trying to legislate against "defamation" suffered by whole communities as opposed to individuals, and also pointed to existing provisions which formally prohibit "incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence".

John also served on the planning committee for the December 2007 General Assembly of CONGO, being asked both to chair some of the business plenaries dealing with the Future of CONGO and to serve as rapporteur for the Round-table on Human Rights. Despite being approached for nomination, he did not stand for re-election to the Board of CONGO since there has been uncertainty about IARF being able to support its representatives in Geneva & New York, especially if they have onerous and sometimes costly duties as a CONGO Board member.

In November 2008 he took part in meetings in Geneva and in a conference call with New York about the proposed Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace involving all major inter-faith organizations, UN agencies and interested governments. He urged IARF participation in a formal coalition to promote the Decade.

The purpose of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)

To work for the freedom of belief because it is a precious human right that potentially enables the best within our religious lives, or our search for the truth or enlightenment, to flourish. It requires work on three aspects, any of which may constitute the core objectives of the IARF membership in any country or region.

- ❖ 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.

IARF Legal framework

The IARF is registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee and is also registered as a charity (number 1026699). Its objectives are contained in paragraph 3 of its memorandum of association which reads as follows.

The objects for which the association is established are:

- a) **To relieve in case of need people in countries where freedom of religion is prohibited or severely curtailed.**
- b) **To advance religion.**
- c) **To promote education for the public benefit concerning religion.**
- d) **To relieve poverty.**

Under its articles of association, regulation 2 defined membership of the IARF as follows:

MEMBERSHIP

a) **Members**

Members are organizations whose purposes are in agreement with those of the Association and which have been admitted as members by the Council. Members are entitled to be represented by one or more voting delegates at General Meetings. The Council shall determine the number of delegates to which each member is entitled.

b) **Associate Members**

Associate members shall be groups and organizations with principles closely akin to those of the Association, but which have a more limited field of work. Associate members are entitled to be represented by one or more non-voting delegates at General Meetings.

c) **Individual Members**

Individual members shall be persons who express their sympathy with the work of the Association by making an annual subscription.

d) **Chapters**

Individual members numbering twenty-five or more, may be authorized by the Council to form an IARF Chapter within a country, if there is not a Chapter in the country, to further the purposes of the Association, Each Chapter is entitled to be represented at General Meetings by one or more voting delegates, as determined by the Council

IARF STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (Incorporating an Income & Expenditure Account) For the Year ended 31 December 2008

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Endowment Funds £	Total 2008 £	Total 2007 £
INCOMING RESOURCES					
Incoming resources from generated funds					
Voluntary income	60,688	9,093	0	69,781	82,207
Investment income	4,111	0	1,081	5,192	3,736
Incoming resources from charitable activities	0	0	0	0	1,467
Other incoming resources	31,542	0	0	31,542	0
Total incoming resources	<u>96,341</u>	<u>9,093</u>	<u>1,081</u>	<u>106,515</u>	<u>87,410</u>
RESOURCES EXPENDED					
Costs of generating funds					
Investment management costs	0	0	0	0	1,178
Charitable activities	27,659	9,093	0	36,752	28,625
Support costs	37,976	0	0	37,976	95,682
Governance costs	4,427	0	0	4,427	13,841
Total resources expended	<u>79,155</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>79,155</u>	<u>139,326</u>
NET MOVEMENT IN RESOURCES					
- NET INCOME FOR THE YEAR	26,279	0	1,081	27,360	(51,916)
OTHER RECOGNISED GAINS/LOSSES					
Realised on disposal of investments	0	0	0	0	1,573
Unrealised movement on revaluation reserve	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(24,458)
	<u>(0)</u>	<u>(0)</u>	<u>(0)</u>	<u>(0)</u>	<u>(22,885)</u>
Net movement in funds	17,186	9,093	1,081	27,360	(74,801)
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS					
Total funds brought forward	<u>255,504</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>26,777</u>	<u>282,281</u>	<u>357,082</u>
Total funds carried forward	<u>272,690</u>	<u>9,093</u>	<u>27,858</u>	<u>309,641</u>	<u>282,281</u>

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Page 8

BALANCE SHEET

At 31 December 2008

	Note	2008	2007
		£	£
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible assets	6	1,279	0
CURRENT ASSETS			
Investments	7	0	172,009
Debtors	8	44,427	39,888
Cash at bank and in hand		274,294	76,351
		<u>318,721</u>	<u>288,248</u>
CREDITORS: Amounts falling due within one year	9	<u>(10,359)</u>	<u>(5,967)</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS		308,362	282,281
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>309,641</u>	<u>282,281</u>
FUNDS			
Endowment Funds	11	27,858	26,777
Restricted Income Funds	12	9,093	0
Unrestricted Income Funds		272,690	240,806
Revaluation Reserve	10	0	14,698
		<u>309,641</u>	<u>282,281</u>

The Council has taken advantage of special exemptions conferred by Part VII of the Companies Act 1985 applicable to small companies in the preparation of the accounts and have done so on the grounds that, in their opinion, the Association is entitled to those exemptions.

Approved by the Council on 2009.

REV GEOFFREY R USHER
Treasurer

The notes attached form part of these accounts

The accounts in this report have been received by Council and are now subject to audit by Shaw Gibbs LLP of Oxford, UK, Registered Auditors. The 2007 accounts were audited by Shaw Gibbs LLP, approved by Council on 30 September 2008 and submitted to Companies House and the Charity Commission by 30 October 2008. Copies of the 2007 full accounts and auditor's report are available from the Secretariat or the Treasurer on request. Copies of the 2008 full accounts and auditor's report will be available by 31 October 2009.

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL:

PRESIDENT: Thomas Mathew - *India*
VICE-PRESIDENT: Rev. Takashi Nishida
TREASURER: Rev. Geoff Usher – *UK*
COMPANY SECRETARY: Jeffrey Teagle – *UK*

Dr Shlomo Alon – *Israel*
Ms Fredelle Brief – *Canada*
Dr Homi Dhalla – *India*
Mr Morse Flores – *Switzerland*
Ms Angelina Grapa – *Philippines*
Rev. Dr. Doris Hunter - *USA*
Rev. Takeshi Kawabata – *Japan*
Mrs Esther Kopmels – *Netherlands*
Ven. Man Ruen – *RoC Taiwan*
Guji Takahiro Miwa – *Japan*
Rev. Yoshinobu Miyake – *Japan*
Rev. Bill Sinkford – *USA*
Guji Yukiyasu Yamamoto – *Japan*

CHAPTERS:

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Ireland
Japan
Nepal
Netherlands
Pakistan
Philippines
Sri Lanka
Thailand
USA

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Rev Orlanda Brugnola – *New York*
Ms Sue Nichols – *New York*
Dr John Taylor - *Geneva*

REGIONAL CO-ORDINATORS:

Europe & Middle East: Ms Wytyske Dijkstra

South Asia: Adv. V.Rengapashyam

Japanese Liaison Committee: Mr Yuji Inokuma

North America: Rev. Orlanda Brugnola

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NGO in General Consultative Status with the Economic & Social Council of the United Nations.

For more information about Chapters and Regional Offices, please contact the Secretariat.