

Unity in Diversity Forum

Thiruvananthapuram, India (6 - 8 February, 2011)

Bridging Cultures

Building Peace & Development

Under the auspices of:



United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

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

The 'Unity in Diversity' - Bridging Cultures: Building Peace & Development Forum, will take place in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, on 6-8 February 2011. The event is being presented by Global Dialogue Foundation with co-organising partners SAGE Foundation, PeaceWorks and Pravasi Nivasi Cultural Association, under the auspices of United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).

The increasing diversity of our societies – be it ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural – is indeed generating anxiety among populations, driving communities apart and putting peace, development and democracy under mounting pressure.

Grassroots Solutions for Understanding and Cooperation Among Peoples and Cultures

To help open new pathways for increased understanding and collaboration, the Forum will offer an innovative platform for government representatives together with civil society leaders, religious groups, private sector representatives, academics, local authorities and youth, from India but also from neighboring countries, to discuss vital issues related to the following topics:

- a. The role of religions and beliefs in promoting peace and development: How to combine religion and secularism in Indian society in the 21st Century? How is Indian secularism different or similar to other models (i.e., USA, France, Turkey)?
- b. Shaping perceptions, challenging stereotypes: What is the role of the media today?
- c. Education for intercultural citizenship: What will be the cultural and societal impact of the “Demographic divide”? How to capitalize on the Youth “wave”?
- d. Maintaining and developing cultural identity and heritage in mainstream society: What are the defining factors of being Indian today? Is it India as a nation or Hinduism as a religion/civilization? How is the concept of the Indian family changing?
- e. India's intercultural relations with its immediate neighborhood in South Asia and its wider regional environment: How to build trust and cooperation? What is the societal support to the civil society, artistic groups at the grassroots level that are working on building trust and cooperation between the south Asian countries?
- f. How can bridging cultures to build peace encourage and support development?

The aims of the Forum are:

1. To create a platform for the exchange of practical experiences, solutions and policy aimed at developing cultural understanding and cooperation among communities in India and throughout the region, and in so doing contribute to the mission of the UN Alliance of Civilizations;
2. To learn from the experience of community leaders who are working successfully at the grassroots level to bring people of diverse cultures together, fostering dialogue, understanding and cooperation;
3. To adopt a Plan of Action for the next year and to come up with a list of pledges that individuals can implement in their daily lives to contribute to mutual understanding and cooperation.

Why Thiruvananthapuram?

- ▶ Kerala is the most religiously diverse state in India with 56 per cent of Hindus, 24 per cent of Muslims and 19 per cent Christians
- ▶ Highly literate Kerala is less industrialised
- ▶ Religious diversity has been a defining trait of India's population for centuries
- ▶ India has the world's single largest Hindu population together with the 2nd largest Muslim population
- ▶ India is a member of the UN Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends

The India Forum follows the successful 'Unity in Diversity' event held in Melbourne, Australia, in October 2010, under the auspices of the UN Alliance of Civilizations. Click [here](#) to read more. It also follows and builds on the most recent

major event, the '3rd Forum of UN Alliance of Civilizations', which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in May 2010. The Rio event was attended by President Lula da Silva, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, several other heads of state, civil society, religious leaders, academia, media and youth. Click [here](#), to read more.

The 'Unity in Diversity' project aims to; initiate, promote and foster dialogue, open new and wider avenues for closely learning about each others identities, customs, traditions faiths and beliefs, and to strengthen and establish a peaceful and safer co-existence. The project is lead by Chairman KK Sarachandra Bose and Vice Chairperson Maya Shahani -- the latter is also the Founder and Chairperson of SAGE Foundation. Both Mr. Bose and Ms Shahani are prominent figures in Indian society. Shri Suresh Keswani, former MP, now High Commissioner for language minorities and Huzaifa Khorakiwala, CEO Wockhardt Foundation have already confirmed their participation as well as other prominent Indian leaders.

India was featured prominently at the 'Unity in Diversity' Forum in Melbourne. One of the Forum's co-organising partners was the Federation of Indian Association Victoria, (the main state body for Indian organisations). Among key speakers were: Indian Country Manager from the University of Melbourne also representing SAGE Foundation, Indian community leader & Vice Chair of Ethnic Communities Council New South Wales, and a representative from India in the International Student discussion roundtable. Among organisations presenting were leading NGO's- The Art of Living, NGO visiting from Chennai, India - Service and Research Institute on Family and Children (SERFAC), and from the corporate sector -- Gujarat NRE Coaking Coal Limited. The event was supported strongly from India firstly by Maya Shahani and Asha Tapase, the Office of H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and many others.

It is anticipated that the India Forum will allow participants to develop new thinking, brainstorm and create innovative, collaborative ventures and establish a community of supporters for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in the Region and humankind in general.

An interface session (breakfast) in partnership with the [World Interfaith Harmony Week](#) initiative, will be held to celebrate the establishment of the Week through the recent adoption of a UN General Assembly [Resolution](#) upon an initial proposal by H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan on 23rd September 2010. The Resolution reaffirms that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitutes important dimensions of sustainable peace within and among societies and it proclaims the first week of February of every year the World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs.

The Forum will feature a "Marketplace of Ideas", which will showcase some of the most innovative 'grassroots' experiences and solutions from the South Asia region, providing organizations with exposure to media, policy makers and foundations. The Marketplace of Ideas serves as an advisory source for projects on how to scale-up and be replicated in other parts of the world.

The Organizing Committee welcomes your suggestions and ideas regarding participation of your organization in the Forum. Please do not hesitate to contact the Committee on email at info@globaldialoguefoundation.org.

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is an initiative of the UN Secretary-General which aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions, and to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism. Working in partnership with governments, international and regional organizations, civil society groups, foundations, and the private sector, the Alliance is supporting a range of projects and initiatives aimed at building bridges among a diversity of cultures and communities.

Global Dialogue Foundation was established in 2008 to initiate and promote dialogue and collaboration for increased understanding among cultures and civilizations; maintain the identity of original traditions and foster their impact on the development of mainstream society; strengthen the voice of the Asia Pacific Region in the debate on dialogue and understanding among peoples and cultures; contribute in supporting the work of the UN Alliance of Civilizations in the Region.

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