



GDF NEWS

Unity in Diversity Forum, Kerala



(L-R: Adv. K.K. Sarachandra Bose- Chairman Unity in Diversity & Global Dialogue Foundation, Mrs. Maya Shahani- Vice Chairperson Unity in Diversity & Global Dialogue Foundation, Chairperson SAGE Foundation, Mr. Jean-Christophe Bas- Senior Adviser-Strategic Development and Partnerships, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, The Hon'ble T. Balakrishnan- IAS Additional Chief Secretary Government of Kerala, His Highness Shri Padmanabhadasa Uthradom Tirunal Marthanda Varma Maharaja, His Excellency Ambassador T.P. Sreenivasan)

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The second session of the “Unity in Diversity” Forum, an initiative of Global Dialogue Foundation, and convened under the auspices of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), was held in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala India from 6-8 February 2011.

The event witnessed participants of several nationalities in the Asia Pacific region, such as, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Japan, Thailand, India and Australia. The delegates represented widely varying backgrounds and professions including social entrepreneurs, policy makers, teachers, students, representatives of NGO's and foundations, corporate, senior government officials and spiritual and religious leaders. Such a prolific diversity contributed greatly towards the aims of the Forum by giving fresh insights and perspectives to the issues raised.

A Forum of this nature was a first of its kind to be held in India. The state of Kerala was an appropriate choice to host this forum, given its status among all the states in India with respect to its religious diversity and literacy rate. Mr. Kodyeri Balakrishnan, the Minister for Home, Vigilance and Tourism, graced the Forum with his presence. He conveyed his satisfaction at Kerala being host to this Forum, and described the importance of achieving harmony through cross cultural dialogue. His Highness Shri Padmanabhadasa Uthradom Tirunal Marthanda Varma Maharaja, also addressed

the Forum, and spoke about the urgent need for unity among nations, and the crucial role for such as this one played in bringing about a positive change.

The United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and former President of Portugal Jorge Sampaio addressed the Forum by video message and emphasized the crucial role played by civil society organizations working together with governments to promote understanding and cooperation among peoples and cultures.

The Forum celebrated the World Interfaith Harmony Week, observed by the United Nations from 1-7 February 2011, addressed by faith leaders and with multicultural dance presentations.

The two roundtable discussions held addressed the South Asian view point on multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue focusing on attainment of peace among individuals through adoption of certain values; the need for building public-private partnerships to retain cultural plurality and to attain intercultural understanding.

“Our aim is to bring Unity among different cultures throughout the world and also to resolve dispute through dialogue”, stated the Forum Chairman KK Bose.

In his keynote address, Jean-Christophe Bas, senior advisor UN Alliance of Civilizations said that “building inclusive societies is indispensable to achieve peace and economic and social development; it represents one of the greatest challenges of our time and requires the participation of all”.

Another feature of this Forum was the introduction of five concurrent workshops on the following topics: the media’s role in challenging stereotypes, the maintenance of cultural identity in today’s society, education for intercultural citizenship, India’s cultural relations with its neighbors and role of religion for propagating peace. There were several practical solutions discussed in these workshops.

At the closing of the Forum, a concrete action plan was discussed. Some of the solutions suggested were engagement of the media for a positive coverage of cultural harmony, development and introduction of vocational training programmes in mainstream education, a close tie up of different individuals and organizations to achieve the effective interfaith dialogue, to create Unity in Diversity cities throughout India and the rest of the world.

The event was co-organized by Pravasi Nivasi Cultural Association, SAGE Foundation and PeaceWorks. The support partners were Royal Fashion, Astic General Trading LLC, Excel, Stallion, Truebell Marketing and Trading LLC, World Championships and Alphabetics.