

Welcoming the Strangers!  
Interfaith Dialogue on Altruism in Religions for Refugees and Migrants  
5<sup>th</sup> July 2014

A Report

COVA in association with Indialogue Foundation, Kimse Yok Mu and UNHCR organised Interfaith Dialogue on *Altruism in Religions for Refugees and Migrants* on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2014 at Hotel Fortune Park Vallabha, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad. Renowned religious leaders from seven major religions shared teachings of their religions on the subject with the audience. Elite from diverse backgrounds, friends of refugees and refugees from different countries were invited to this program.

**Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani** started his discourse saying there is close relation of the subject with Islam. He narrated the instances of migration of Prophet Muhammad *SAS pbuh* and his associates from Mecca to Medina where people of Medina treated them like their family, offered them equal share in their homes, agricultural lands and property as a matter of entitlement and did not treat them as destitute to be offered charity. This is an ideal and unparallel example that the world can emulate in treating not only refugees but all those in need. The need of the hour is to establish peace and without equal rights and justice to all peace will cannot be established.

**Bhikku Khemachara** in his discourse shared teachings of Lord Buddha and said there are 10 perfections in Buddhism. One of the perfection is to donate something to the needy. This virtue keeps us free from greed. Hence we should share whatever we have with the people in need. He also described beauty of life in multi-religious and multi-cultural society and appealed to share love and kindness with each other.

**Shobha kosa** said that she is a practitioner in the field for providing help to refugees. “Altruism” means something to be done; to provide help for needy. She quoted reference of Prophet Abraham and Issac who also migrated from one place to another place for search of economic security. She told that “god loves migrates” god commands us to extend hospitality, love and care to foreigner or guest who come to our house or to our State. If only we can imagine ourselves as migrants then we can become empathetic and understand them better. Church is providing help to refugees who have fled from many war affected countries and migrated to other countries. They are providing them with food, accommodation, jobs, teaching in schools and empowering their women and children.

**Dr Anand Raj Varma** said that there was no concept of refugee in Indian religion. There is concept of “*Atithi*” – Atithi Deva Bhava (guest is equal to god) is a precept of the Hindu culture. According to him first refugee to India was Vibheeshan, brother of Ravana, from Sri Lanka. And during Qutubshah’s rule when his brother was forced to leave Golconda he went to Vijaynagarm as a refugee and received hospitality, love and care from the rulers of that kingdom. Parsees came to India as refugees. Indians provided them traditional hospitality and space to establish themselves. Now they are world famous industrialists.

**Shri Nanak Singh Nishtar** spoke about altruism in Sikh discipline and cited the practice of *Langar* in Gurudwaras where everyone without any discrimination is offered food and shelter. Through history, not only refugees, people in need and travelers but even kings including emperor Akber enjoyed the hospitalities of gurudwaras. Sikhism believes in love and care for humanity and the ultimate example of this was exhibited by Bhai\_\_\_\_\_ when he offered water and balm not only to the wounded soldiers of his own army but also to the wounded enemy soldiers purely on grounds of compassion and humanity. Paper presented by Shri Nanak Singh Nishtar is attached.

***Omim Maneckshaw Debara*** narrated that Parsees came to India as refugees 900 years ago and landed in Sanjan, Gujarat. The local king Jadav Rana and people welcomed them and offered refuge with the conditions that they would give up arms, speak the local language, wear local dress, have their marriage ceremonies in the evening instead of at mid night(as was their traditional custom) and will not convert locals. The Zoroastrians, who later came to be known as Parsees, accepted all the conditions and still continue to live in India in harmony with their identity intact. As benefactors of local hospitality, they learnt to provide every comfort to anyone who comes to our house. He advised the refugees to respect culture and traditions of the place wherever they go.

***Osman Kayaoglu*** speaking about the philosophy of Maulana Rumi and Fatehullah Gulen said that altruism is a behavior where benefits to others are provided without expecting anything in return. There should be a passion of giving and not accepting in return. It is the essence of humanity. We feel bad if we hear somewhere a boy is dying because of lack of food, a girl is not getting education because there is no school. This is happening because there is no love and care in that country. We need to change the strategy to change the world; we should concentrate more in our practices rather than on just talk.

***Kasturchand Jhabak*** reached the venue at the concluding point of the program. For want of time he could not speak to the gathering. However, he was welcomed and received on the dais and as a token of gratitude felicitated with a memento along with other speakers.

***Dr. Mazher Hussain*** moderated the program and made a power point presentation on the situation of refugees in the world today and the problems and difficulties by them and initiatives by different agencies including UNHCR and COVA to mitigate their suffering. He stated that there are 51 million refugees in the world today, more than the number of refugees during World War II and ever before in history.

Copy of the Power Point Presentation on the Situation of Refugees is attached.

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