



PEACE BUILDERS FORUM
— NONVIOLENCE AND PEACE —

Peace Builders Forum India

Women's Call for Global Peace National Campaign 17th April 2026 to 1st May 2026

Hyderabad Seminar

***Humanity on Brink through Wars & Sectarian Violence:
Responsibility & Role for Citizens and Global Civil Society***

Date: 27th April 2026

**Organised By
COVA – Amoomat Society – PUCAAR
PEACE NOT WAR**

www.peacebuildersforum.com

PROF HARAGOPAL

Academician & Human Rights Defender

Peace must be understood not as mere silence or the absence of conflict, but as a vibrant and life-affirming condition of society. It is not “graveyard peace,” but a dynamic state where people actively pursue meaning, happiness, and a fulfilling life. In today’s uncertain world—where even the future of humanity can seem fragile—peace must be consciously built as a collective social goal.

A truly peaceful society is one that is economically egalitarian, where all people have access to resources and a secure livelihood. It is also politically participative, where citizens are actively involved in shaping their future and that of their society. Equally important is social harmony—a condition in which people live together with mutual care, respect, and compassion.

Freedom, liberty, equality, and betterment are important values. After I explained what liberty, equality, and betterment mean, a student asked me a question—something I had never encountered in my 55 years of teaching. He said, “If liberty means freedom to think, act, and make our own choices, then why should I be told that I must make choices in love? If I truly have freedom, shouldn’t I have the choice to decide how I feel about others- including hating them?”

However, current trends raise concern. The growing acceptance of hatred, even among the younger generation, reflects a deeper erosion of values. Peaceful coexistence requires nurturing empathy and a sense of shared humanity, where living together becomes a positive and enriching experience. Beyond this, a peaceful society should be morally elevating, aesthetically fulfilling, and ecologically sustainable.



Peacebuilders must therefore communicate clearly that the peace they strive for is full of life, creativity, and dignity—not passive or imposed silence. War, by contrast, destroys societies, dehumanizes individuals, and prevents people from living meaningful and happy lives.

The crisis of dehumanization is evident in disturbing social realities, where, extreme distress and lack of support lead to tragic acts even within families. At the same time, the erosion of moral values contrasts sharply with earlier examples of compassion, where humanity and care transcended social barriers. This decline suggests that, instead of progressing, certain aspects of civilization may be regressing.

Globally, the persistence of war is also driven by systems that profit from conflict, including the production and sale of weapons, which fuel demand and perpetuate violence. This creates a cycle where nations increasingly prioritize militarization over peaceful resolution.

In this context, discussions on peace must address these fundamental issues—economic inequality, social fragmentation, moral decline, and the global war economy.

Only by confronting these challenges and promoting humane values can we build a society where life is truly worth living, and peace becomes a meaningful, shared reality.

—Prof Haragopal



LALITA RAMDAS

Peace Activist- Co Chair, PIPFPD

As a long time Peace Maker or [Peace Monger /Peacenik as we are often termed!]— and especially as a woman - the first response to the invitation from a Peace Builders Forum was an unambiguous and positive one of welcoming this move.

Given the current milieu of genocidal violence, war, ceasefires that don't seem to cease the fires, and alarming threats of wiping out some of the most ancient civilizations on the planet, every effort that raises hopes for Peace and shouts NO to WAR can only be greeted with praise.

Congratulations to all those associated with this call for Global Peace and it's good to feel a part of the large numbers of citizens and peace groups who have been marching in the streets and raising their voices to put an end to war across the world.

Sad to say – in my own country – we have not seen any large numbers out on the streets against war, or indeed the ongoing genocide in West Asia. And today amidst these few calls and small tentative efforts by the few intrepid groups, we have to acknowledge with sadness and honesty, that our efforts to say YES to peace, NO to war, have been largely unsuccessful!

In the above context, where those groups and voices talking of Peace, Non violence and No to War, especially in the context of Gaza, Palestine and now Iran, are being discouraged, silenced, often by the arms of the State, that too in the land of Gandhi, the Buddha and Ashoka – there are uncomfortable questions that arise and which require interrogation.

Who are We? Why are we meeting here today? Why now? What is the urgency? How is our present situation different from the one obtaining over the past two years?

Is it because we are suddenly worried about being unable to get gas to keep our vehicles and kitchens going and our family members fed and transported?!!!

I am starting with the Personal – that is our food supply, our petrol for transport the prices going up – but will connect it with the Political! And this is the first point we need to understand and which I will stress here. War or any police action against citizens, is basically a political action – taken as a conscious act by the politicians. The Military obey orders issued by the political leaders.



So, if we want to raise our voices against war, we need to understand very clearly that this emerges from a set of politically determined factors – and we either reject those decisions or tacitly accept them. Alas wars and hostilities cannot be halted by small groups of well-meaning peaceniks merely praying for peace or taking out Peace Marches, or writing letters of protest. If only it were so easy.

2. In the covering note circulated regarding this important Seminar – there is explicit mention of violence, genocide in Ukraine, Gaza, Africa and Manipur! And of course the latest and most troubling – ie the attacks on Iran by the United States of America and Israel. There is no mention of a number of other wars, conflicts and hot spots of continuing tension – beginning with Kashmir in our own backyard, and the ‘paused’ Operation Sindoor against Pakistan.

It might also be helpful to get some facts on the table. Do we know how many wars are actually happening as we speak here today? Professor Google informs me that as of early 2026 there are over 130 Armed Conflicts worldwide. This makes it the highest number since World War II. And it is the most powerful nation, the only nation to have used the Nuclear

Bomb on innocent people, namely the USA, that has started /been involved in the maximum number of wars – including major ones like Vietnam, Korean War, Afghanistan, Cuba, many in Africa, and hundreds of other wars –And it will also tell us the terrible cost of these wars – in human lives the US actions alone have accounted for over 37.5 million lives between 1971 and 2021. In actual fiscal/financial costs – and the continuing astronomical sums that we continue to spend to arm ourselves against so called enemies and especially the unknown or manufactured ones ever since an American president invented the phrase The War on Terror – are documented in detail.

We antiwar activists need to stop and ask ourselves whether it is alright to attack and destroy anyone who has been defined as a **TERRORIST**, by any state who finds a group intransigent and therefore needs to be silenced or eliminated by force if necessary? Every country has made fullest use of this phrase – India and our closest neighbour Pakistan being no exception – and any and every act of violence and therefore of disagreement with the State, is now conveniently defined as a terrorist attack.



So as we set forth on our mission for Peace, perhaps we should begin by examining our own neighbourhood and region. Tragically, both India and Pakistan - have taken maximalist and intransigent positions – refusing to talk or dialogue -and between both countries have become the largest importer and spender on Arms and Weapons....This is shocking when we rank among the lowest percentile of countries from Africa and Asia which cannot feed their people; are unable to provide jobs, health care , and cannot send our children to school.

WHO ARE THE MOST AFFECTED BY WAR?

There is one answer – WOMEN – followed of course by innocent children. It is our men folk -our husbands, fathers, brothers and sons who die in the battle field – or on ships and planes . When our children are killed in drone and missile strikes it is us mothers who bleed and suffer – whether in Kashmir, or Manipur, or Pahalgam or a school in Teheran or the 30,000 children who have been massacred in Gaza.

WHY ARE WOMEN LARGELY SILENT AND WHY ARE THEY ABSENT FROM THE PEACE TABLES?

It is important for us to examine this question and the rather complex and difficult responses . If we don't do that – no dramatic demand to end this war, or any war for that matter, will have any lasting impact. For me this is an intensely personal and deeply political question. And this is why many of us in the womens' movement have always spoken of the personal being the political.

Let me briefly digress into this Personal is Political concept.

Let me explain why this is Personal. I am a Fauji Beti and Fauji Bibi – My father and husband were both in the Indian Navy – and both of them headed the 'fighting' Navy – as Chief no 1 and Chief no 13. As Fauji women we have largely been conditioned to believe that to be 'patriotic' is to unquestioningly accept decisions taken especially on Military matters and actions taken and celebrate the victories. Till my mid thirties this by and large describes my thinking. It was when I was exposed to an intense ten day workshop called Education to Reality while teaching in a well known Convent School in the late seventies, that I began a deeper process of questioning and rethinking several assumptions which my own schooling and socialization had ingrained in me and so many others. It was a turbulent time for us as a family – but one that defined so much of what we did individually and collectively in later years.



My husband fought in the Bangla Desh Liberation War in 1971 – and was part of the defeat of Pakistan and the creation of a new country. However, that same war threw up many questions in both our minds – how many angry young men, orphans and widows have we ended up creating? And has war actually solved any problems that we hoped it would? The answers to these and similar questions were deeply disturbing and led to role reversals – especially challenging for a Man ‘o War to become a Man o’ Peace.

That is how and why a military man – who won a gallantry award – and I, went on to spend his final three decades living in a village and working for Peace between India and Pakistan; saying NO to nuclear weapons; fighting together with local villagers against our land being taken over by Govt and large corporations; and setting up education programmes and libraries in nearly 200 villages. More on that another time.

In Conclusion - the moderator from COVA has asked me to suggest concrete actions – and I am going to list a few – one short term but others longer term.

1. BUILD A CULTURE OF PEACE –

Many of us have put out a call to observe May 1 – Buddha Jayanthi this year, and Workers Rights day globally – as a day of peace - to raise our voices against War, for abolition of nuclear weapons and for PEACE. Today we are increasingly victims of the culture of hate and violence beyond imagination as depicted in social media and our films. Can those of us gathered here today call friends, or family or students or colleagues to sit in a circle of anything from five to twenty five – hold hands – meditate for Peace and Harmony.

2. FOCUS EDUCATION: Everyone present has spoken of the need to make use of Education, cultural interventions, to encourage inter faith, inter caste, inter state ‘boli – baat cheet ‘– dialogue that is uninterrupted and uninteruptible . Let us begin by creating a group comprising a diverse selection of committed educators – youth – women to draw up a simple set of activities and lessons which would embed Peace, Non violence, Human Rights, Gender and all forms of Justice into our educational curricula at all levels. If possible, involve state and central level educationists – and take a pledge that we will no longer tolerate hate speech, discrimination of any kind.



3. CONSTITUTIONAL LITERACY – a simple formula – introduce reading, discussion on the meaning of the Constitution in every school – college. The hundreds of Young people – GEN Z from all Southasian countries had drawn up some of the most innovative and visionary ideas for peace and harmony in our region.

4. CULTURAL EXPRESSION AND EXCHANGE - the best form of winning hearts and minds

SO NOBLE PEOPLE IT IS BETTER THAT WAR IS AVOIDED”



—Lalita Ramdas



PROF RAM PUNIYANI

Historian & Peace Activist

Peace is one of the most essential values that must be preserved and promoted in today's world. Much of the disturbance to global and social harmony stems from greed—whether for power, resources like oil, or dominance. At such a critical juncture, it is imperative that we consciously choose the path of peace, guided by harmony, empathy, and collective responsibility.

One of the strongest inspirations for this path is Mahatma Gandhi, who not only emphasized truth and non-violence but also demonstrated the importance of effectively communicating these values to the masses. Today, while many people understand the importance of peace, the real challenge lies in reaching others in meaningful and impactful ways.

To address this, practical and accessible strategies must be adopted. Communication should be localized messages of peace should be translated into regional languages like Telugu and shared widely through existing social and community networks. Digital platforms, such as WhatsApp groups, can also be used effectively to spread positive messages and ideas.

Observing occasions like Peace Day, Independence Day (15th August), and Gandhi Jayanti (2nd October) can serve as opportunities to promote peace and constitutional values. Simple, clear leaflets highlighting themes like harmony, fraternity, and unity should be distributed through house-to-house campaigns. Schools, colleges, and teachers can play a crucial role by encouraging students to participate as volunteers, reaching out to communities and spreading awareness.

At the heart of this effort lies the Indian Constitution, which upholds values such as equality, justice, liberty, and fraternity. Promoting the idea of fraternity is especially important, as peace is often disrupted when this principle is ignored. Alongside this, universal values found in spiritual teachings—such as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) and “love thy neighbour”—should be emphasized in action, not just words.



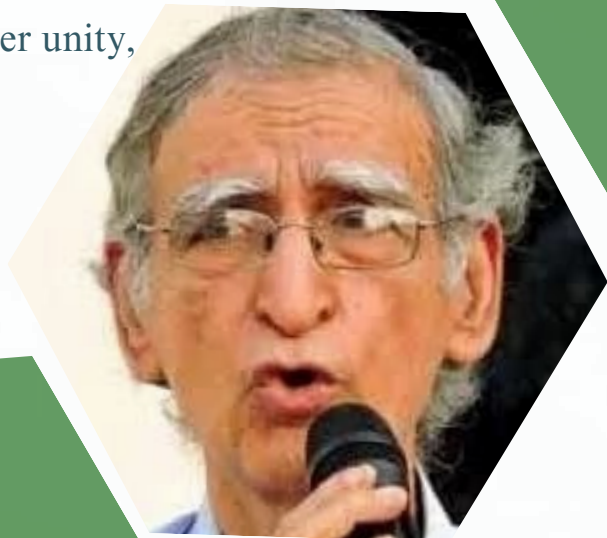
A sustainable peace movement must be built on Gandhian principles and expanded both “vertically” and “horizontally.” Vertically, individuals should engage closely with people around them, influencing their immediate communities. Horizontally, collaboration with like-minded organizations across regions should be strengthened to share ideas, avoid duplication of efforts, and build solidarity.

Youth, students, teachers, and community volunteers are key to this movement. By nurturing their idealism and involving them in meaningful campaigns, a strong foundation for peacebuilding can be created. Special attention must also be given to the role of women, who are often the most affected by violence and whose leadership in peace initiatives is vital.

An inspiring example comes from Pune, where a campaign called “Samvidhan Jagar Abhiyan” engaged students on Republic Day (26th January) to spread awareness about constitutional values through house-to-house outreach. Such models can be adapted in other regions by connecting peace messages with culturally significant occasions and local leaders.

Ultimately, promoting peace requires consistent effort, creativity, and community engagement. Anchoring this movement in the values of the Indian Constitution and the United Nations Charter of Human Rights can help foster unity, counter hate, and build a more harmonious society.

—Prof Ram Puniyani



JILL CARR HARIS

Peace Builders Forum India

Good evening, and thank you, Mazhar bhai. It is encouraging to see initiatives like “Women Against War” and this seminar focusing on how to counter war, sectarian violence, and the role of global civil society.

The Peace Builders Forum India, under which this meeting is being held, aims to address both violence against women and the urgent need for global peace—especially considering the rising conflicts in West Asia, as well as in Ukraine, Russia, Sudan, and other regions.

These conflicts are not only causing immense human suffering but are also creating instability in the global economy and weakening the international relationships that have evolved over the past decades since the Second World War.

We are also witnessing the weakening of global institutions like the United Nations, which was established to maintain peace and security. Growing nationalism and rivalries among nations have reduced its effectiveness. In such a situation, it becomes even more important for civil society to step forward and work alongside governments to reduce violence and restore peace.

I am glad that this discussion is happening in the context of COVA’s work in Hyderabad. Organizations like COVA have played a vital role in promoting community harmony, resolving conflicts, and fostering compassionate citizenship. Their efforts not only impact India but also extend to South Asia, demonstrating that a peaceful narrative is both possible and necessary. At the Peace Builders Forum India, we believe that it is time to revive a strong global peace movement. India has historically played a significant role in global civil society—especially during the struggle against colonialism—and its voice remains important today, particularly for the Global South. Within this, women must play a stronger and more visible role in challenging growing authoritarianism and patriarchy.

One of our initiatives in this direction is “Peace 7,” which brings together seven countries with strong traditions of peacebuilding. This includes movements like the anti-nuclear efforts in Japan and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. India, with its rich legacy of peace and nonviolence, is also part of this effort to build a broader international peace movement that transcends boundaries.



At the same time, India faces multiple internal challenges—poverty, caste divisions, and social conflicts—along with the impact of global tensions. These realities make the need for a strong peace movement even more urgent.

We are living in a challenging time, but there are existing mechanisms and new ones we must develop—to build a stronger and more effective peace movement. In this effort, COVA stands out for its sustained work in community conflict resolution, reducing communal violence, and promoting compassionate citizenship through engagement with teachers and educators. Through these initiatives, COVA has emerged as a key leader in fostering solidarity, not only within different parts of India but also beyond.

Despite the dominance of narratives of war and conflict, we must actively promote the narrative of peace, especially for the sake of future generations. Initiatives like this seminar, along with similar programs conducted across different regions, contribute to this effort. The discussions and recommendations emerging from such platforms will help strengthen both national and international solidarity for peace.

In conclusion, India's legacy of nonviolence remains a powerful guiding force. The world continues to look to India for leadership in this regard, and it is important that we uphold and carry forward this tradition. I commend COVA and Mazhar Hussain for their commitment to peace, and I wish this seminar meaningful and impactful deliberations.

Thank you very much.

—**Jill Carr Haris**



DEBEN BACHASPATIMAYUM

Peace Builders India

Manipur has historically been a meeting point of diverse cultural influences, especially Indian and Chinese civilizations, creating a rich composite culture and serving as a bridge between regions.

The prolonged violence of the past five decades is largely linked to national security concerns along India's international border. Following its merger with India, doubts about local loyalty led to heavy militarization. Over time, insurgency narratives—whether real or constructed—have justified this presence, while also contributing to ethnic divisions, corruption, and recurring conflict.

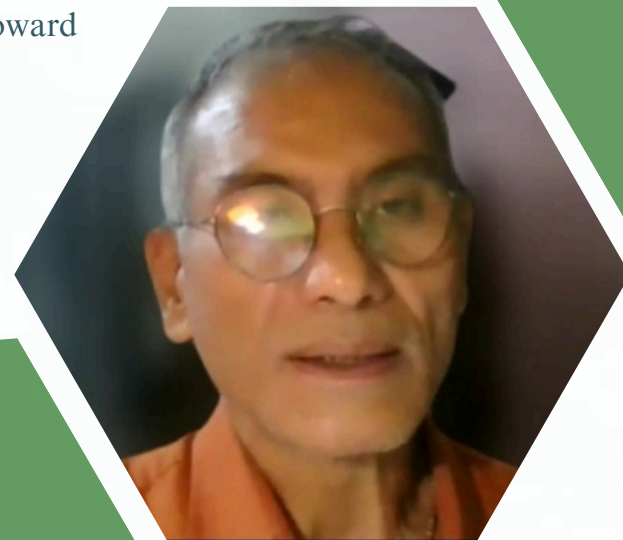
Today, Manipur faces deep social fragmentation, with mistrust among communities and a breakdown of harmony. However, a way forward lies in inclusive, multi-level dialogue involving both grassroots communities and policymakers. Such engagement can rebuild trust, address security concerns, and promote lasting peace through confidence-building measures.

India's constitutional values of equality, justice, and liberty provide a strong framework for reconciliation. Education is also crucial: by equipping people with knowledge and peacebuilding skills, they can shift from being part of the problem to becoming part of the solution.

Initiatives like youth peacebuilding fellowships are important steps, especially in a climate where fear limits open expression. At the same time, there is an urgent need for stronger institutional mechanisms—such as civil society groups and peace forums—to facilitate dialogue between communities and the government.

In sum, despite its complex challenges, Manipur can move toward peace through dialogue, constitutional principles, education, and sustained peacebuilding efforts.

—Deben Bachaspatimayum



SANDHYA

Progressive organisation of Women

Over the past decades, millions of people have been affected by war—either directly as victims or indirectly through its widespread consequences. When we speak about war today, we often refer to conflicts in regions like Gaza, Iran, and across the Middle East, where large-scale violence, displacement, and loss of life continue.

In many of these situations, indigenous and vulnerable communities are silenced, and the impact on women and children is especially severe, denying them safety, education, and basic human dignity.

Despite the magnitude of these crises, public response is uneven. While some regions witness strong anti-war movements, countries like India often lack large-scale anti-war mobilization and visible resistance. This raises questions about awareness, priorities, and the role of citizens in advocating for peace.

At the same time, conflict is not confined to international wars. Within our own country, we see “internal conflicts” in the form of land displacement, forced evictions, and development-driven projects that often overlook the needs of local communities.

Within our own regions, particularly around Hyderabad and Telangana, people face displacement and loss of livelihood in the name of development. Such processes often prioritize corporate interests over people’s welfare, creating what can be described as an “internal conflict.”

These internal and external conflicts share similar consequences: the breakdown of relationships, loss of livelihoods, and erosion of trust within communities. People become voiceless, and their struggles remain unheard.



The use of force—whether in war zones or in local conflicts—further intensifies suffering, particularly for women and children.

A significant concern is the lack of people-centered development. Many affected communities struggle to understand or benefit from these changes, as their needs and perspectives are often overlooked. This disconnect deepens social unrest and inequality.

In all these contexts, women and children bear the greatest burden. They face violence, disruption of education, and long-term trauma. This makes movements like “Women Against War” particularly important, as they highlight not only the impact of global wars but also the everyday conflicts within societies.

Ultimately, both global wars and local conflicts must be understood as interconnected issues. These challenges require us to rethink development and must be addressed with greater awareness, empathy, collective action, stronger public engagement, and a commitment to protecting the rights, dignity, and amplifying the voices of all people.

What is required is Voices Against War!

—**Sandhya**



R. VENKAT REDDY

Educationist & Social Activist

We are discussing about India, especially about Palestine, Tehran, Gaza.

All these have changed after we got independence.

Manipur, as you said, I don't know what is happening there. Maybe, if the speakers tell us, we will listen. Sometimes, we watch it on YouTube. But we don't know if it is an ethnic issue or a political issue.

But what can we do in Hyderabad? In Hyderabad, there are 1 crore 30 lakh people. How can we reach them? This is a big discussion. We work with 50-200 people on child rights. We should discuss about this in our organisation. If we discuss about this in our organisation, then something will happen. Otherwise, it will be difficult to make these into platforms. In my opinion, to make some progress with our organisation, we should have some material. If there is something, then we can do orientation.

We work in settlementd. We should come from global to local- to make the community understand.

Hatred is increasing. The hatred is increasing a lot. WhatsApp University is going on.

We have come to listen. We can say that as a citizen, what change can we bring in our neighbourhood? Can we change one thing? Can we change two things? How can we stop this war? We must think about this.



First, can we do something in our community? This is my aim. This is why we have come. War have come to the bedroom, war have come to the house, war have come to the community, war have come to the neighbourhood. War have come to the kitchen.

So, how can we stop this hatred and violence?

But my concern is children.

And children are devastated in this whole thing. The future is at loss, the future is at stake.

I think we will stay here for 10-15 years. But the future is completely gone. So, how are they thinking about the world?

What is happening in the classrooms? What is happening for the future? If there is some activity for schools and colleges, the material, we can work with that and talk to their children, kids. So, that is also my suggestion that we can do some intervention for the children.

—R. Venkat Reddy



SARA MATHEWS

Social Activist

In today's world, we must be cautious about how words and ideas are shared, especially on social media, where statements can be distorted or misused. One of the most dangerous elements fuelling conflict is dehumanization—the process of portraying others as less than human. This language is often used in wars and conflicts across the world, where entire communities are reduced to stereotypes or labelled as inferior. Such thinking makes violence seem acceptable and even justified.

Dehumanization is not limited to global conflicts; it is also visible within our own society. In places affected by conflict, as well as in everyday life, people—especially women and marginalized groups—are often objectified and treated with brutality. The normalization of violence, including frequent reports of assault, reflects a troubling desensitization. Social systems like caste discrimination further deepen this divide by denying dignity and equality to many.

Globally, conflicts in regions like Sudan or parts of the Middle East often receive unequal attention, revealing underlying biases and selective concern. Nobody talking about Sudan is a very racist thing. Who's interested in an African country? I'm not trying to lessen what's happening in Palestine or attacks in Iran, but who's interested in Sudan? This highlights how deeply prejudice and indifference are embedded in our collective mindset.



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A major reason for this situation is the way we educate and shape young minds. Today, there is an overwhelming focus on technical subjects, while social sciences—such as history, sociology, and political science—are undervalued. Yet, these disciplines are essential for understanding society, conflict, and human relationships. Without them, we risk raising generations who lack critical thinking and empathy.

Education must go beyond rote learning and digital dependency. Over-reliance on the internet has reduced originality, critical analysis, and communication skills among students. Earlier practices like debates, discussions, and collaborative learning encouraged independent thinking and the ability to see multiple perspectives—skills that are now diminishing.

At the same time, technology, though useful, has also limited social interaction. Children increasingly engage with screens rather than with people, weakening their social and emotional development. Parents, too, play a role by prioritizing convenience and material comfort over discipline, values, and meaningful engagement.

To counter this, change must begin at the grassroots level. Communities can create tech-free spaces, revive debate and quiz clubs, and actively engage with schools and colleges to promote critical thinking and dialogue. Parents and educators must work together to nurture curiosity, empathy, and responsible use of technology.



Another important aspect is addressing misinformation and misinterpretation, especially in matters of history and religion. Many false narratives spread easily through social media because people accept and share them without verification. There is a need to educate both the public and faith leaders so that teachings are understood in context and used to promote humanity rather than division.

Ultimately, building a more humane society requires collective effort—through education, community engagement, and responsible leadership. Encouraging greater participation of women in leadership roles can also bring more inclusive and compassionate perspectives to decision-making.

In conclusion, countering dehumanization and promoting peace begins with how we think, learn, and interact. By strengthening education, fostering empathy, and encouraging critical awareness, we can work toward a society that values dignity, understanding, and coexistence.

—**Sara Mathews**



PROF. GITA DHARAMPAL

Gandhi Research Foundation, Jalgaon, Maharashtra

A Call beyond the Fire

When the skies burn over West Asia, do not say—this is far from me. For every bomb that falls on a child falls also on our shared humanity.

We scroll, we sigh, we move on. But history is watching— and it will ask: Did you stand with life, or did you stand aside?

The world today worships speed and power, machines and markets, weapons and wealth— and calls this ‘progress’. But as Mahatma Gandhi warned us, this is no civilisation— only a passing wonder, a glittering illusion, a disease of the soul.

What kind of progress leads us to perfect the art of killing, while forgetting the art of living?

Violence is not strength. It is fear wearing armour. It is failure disguised as force.

And yet—we are told there is no alternative.

But there is. There has always been.

Nonviolence is not weakness. It is the courage to refuse hatred, the discipline to resist injustice without becoming unjust.

It is harder than war. And therefore, it is greater.



Youth of today— you are not meant to inherit ashes. You are meant to reclaim the human future.

Refuse the lie that violence is inevitable. Refuse the numbness that makes it acceptable.

Refuse the modern myth that power alone can secure peace. Only truth can. Only compassion can. Only nonviolence can.

Let this not be another moment that passes like smoke in the wind.

Let it be a turning.

From domination to dignity, from fear to courage, from violence to life. n. Only compassion can. Only nonviolence can.

For if we do not choose this path— there may soon be no path left to choose.



—Prof Gita Dharampal



MADHOO SUDHAN

Activist

We work closely with young people from Dalit, OBC, and Muslim minority communities, particularly in rural Telangana. Through our youth centre, we provide a space where they openly discuss the growing polarization in their surroundings and how communal divisions—especially between Hindus and Muslims—are affecting their lives.

Hate campaigns and social tensions are increasingly shaping their experiences, and it is important that they understand these developments critically.

Our primary role is to help young people engage with these issues through political education—understanding dominant narratives, questioning them, and becoming aware of how such divisions are created and sustained. This enables them to think independently and respond thoughtfully rather than being influenced by divisive ideologies.

In the context of global discussions on peace, especially when women are leading calls for peace, it becomes important to reflect on what this signifies. Women, who are often the most affected by conflict, are increasingly at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts worldwide. At the same time, global conflicts—whether wars between nations or struggles over resources like oil and minerals—are causing widespread destruction, displacement, and loss of life.

These conflicts do not remain distant; their impact reaches into our own lives. Beyond economic effects such as rising fuel costs, they influence social stability, community relations, and even the perceptions of children about war and violence.



This makes it essential for us to understand not just the visible impacts, but also the deeper consequences on society and future generations.

As civil society activists, our responsibility is to keep dialogue alive—especially among young people who may be vulnerable to polarizing influences. We must help them understand the broader context: why conflicts occur, how global politics operates, and why certain nations, including our own, respond in typical ways or sometimes remain silent.

At the same time, citizens must ask critical questions—about resources, policies, and narratives presented to them—and seek informed answers. Encouraging this culture of questioning and awareness is vital for building a more informed and peaceful society.

I would like to express my appreciation to organizations like COVA, PUCAAR, and others for creating platforms for such meaningful discussions.

I wish the Seminar great success in taking these conversations forward.

Thank you.

—**Madhoo Sudhan**



DR. EVITA FERNANDEZ

Chair Person , MD Fernandez Foundation

To be honest, I've come here because I saw your message. My colleague, Dr. Maimuna, who was with me, we both felt compelled to come and listen. We are novices in this, because we've spent our professional lives delivering mothers.

So it's a different world. But I was absolutely zapped with what Sarah has said and what you (Lalita Ramdas) has said. I'm not sure what we can do and how we can contribute.

So we are here really to listen and ask, how can we help? I'm being dead honest. What we try and do in our organisation is to remain secular. That's something we both feel strongly about. And I hope that that will continue. That's our contribution, at least in the work culture, because we have about 1,600 employees. We've never selected people because of religion or lost people because of religion.

So we've tried to bring in that level of harmony and respect and work against prejudice.

Thank you very much. I think this is very important.

—Dr Evita Fernandez



TAJAMUL ALI MIRZA

Educationist

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Tajamul Mirza, and it is a privilege to address this distinguished gathering.

This is my first interaction with this organization, and while I am grateful for the opportunity, the subject I speak on is concerning—both for our country and the world.

Much has already been said about the challenges we face today, so I will focus on two key issues that deeply concern me, especially after returning to India following 30 years abroad.

The first is our education system. Despite the introduction of the National Education Policy (2020), our system remains largely one-dimensional, focused mainly on academic scores and grades. Admissions and success are measured by marks, while essential human values—such as empathy, discipline, tolerance, and social responsibility—receive far less attention.

Although subjects like moral science exist, their impact today appears limited. In earlier times, such values were more actively nurtured. There is an urgent need to rebalance education by integrating character-building alongside academics.

As individuals and organizations, we can contribute by engaging with schools, interacting with students, and promoting these values through discussions, activities, and digital platforms.



The second concern is the reliability of information. Today, access to unbiased and accurate news is increasingly challenging. Much of what we receive appears filtered or incomplete, making it difficult to fully understand situations or respond effectively. Without clarity and transparency in information, addressing societal issues becomes even more complex. Therefore, it is important to explore ways to connect with authentic sources and encourage critical thinking when consuming information.

A valuable insight comes from the book *Our Iceberg is Melting* by John Kotter, which highlights the importance of recognizing change and acting proactively. Its message is relevant not only to organizations but also to society at large.

Ultimately, meaningful change must begin at the grassroots level. While we may not be able to influence large systems immediately, we can work within our own communities—especially with children and youth—to cultivate empathy, humility, and awareness. By strengthening these foundational values, we can gradually contribute to a more responsible and compassionate society.

I look forward to continuing this engagement and working together toward these goals.

—Tajamul Ali Mirza



MOHD AFZAL

Advocate & Social Activist

There is deep frustration and concern about the ongoing conflicts in the world, particularly the immense suffering of civilians—especially children and women. Many feel that global institutions and powerful nations are not doing enough to stop the violence or ensure accountability.

This perceived inaction has led to a sense that ordinary people are indirectly bearing the consequences, whether through rising costs of living or growing insecurity. This has led to frustration and a sense that justice is not being delivered equally across the world. Another concern is the silence or hesitation seen among sections of civil society, including NGOs and citizens, in speaking out strongly against such issues. This silence raises important questions about accountability, courage, and the responsibility of both governments and civil society.

Rather than remaining silent, there is a need for constructive engagement. Civil society can contribute by raising awareness, encouraging informed discussions, and advocating for peace and justice through democratic and lawful means.

It is also important to engage with children and young people, helping them understand these complex issues and guiding them toward values of empathy, critical thinking, and non-violence.

The suffering caused by war—especially the loss of innocent lives, including women and children—demands a stronger moral response. It is important for people to question, engage, and hold institutions accountable. Awareness alone is not enough; it must lead to action.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups have a crucial role to play. They must move beyond discussions and actively engage at multiple levels—political, social, and media—to promote dialogue, accountability, peace and justice.



While global conflicts may seem beyond immediate control, meaningful change can begin with collective awareness, responsible action, and sustained commitment to peace. Working with communities, especially young people, is essential to build resilience against hatred and violence.

Ultimately, addressing these challenges requires collective effort, critical thinking, and the courage to speak out against the real perpetrators who are US and Isreal. But everyone is afraid to name them and hold them to account.

It is time for individuals and organizations alike to rethink their roles and contribute meaningfully toward peace, justice, and a more humane world.



—Mohd Afzal



NOORJAHAN SIDDIQUI

Women's Activist

My work is at the grassroots level, particularly in the Old City with COVA, and my experience shows that real change happens when we engage directly with people and address their immediate concerns.

When we begin, our focus is not on discussing conflict or riots in abstract terms, but on first understanding and solving people's day-to-day problems. This helped build trust. Only then did we begin conversations about peace, conflict, and social harmony, in ways that people could relate to their own situations.

We also encouraged collaboration among NGOs by suggesting that each organization adopt a specific area, identify local volunteers, and work consistently within that community. These volunteers became key in spreading awareness, reducing fear and stigma, and engaging both adults and children in meaningful dialogue.

Often, many conferences are held, but they do not translate into action. What is truly needed is fieldwork—meeting people, listening to them, and working with them directly. Our experience has shown that when communities are involved and informed, they become more resilient and better prepared to prevent conflict. After all, it is the common people who suffer the most in times of unrest.



In our efforts, we formed local groups, including youth groups and women's groups. For example, near Charminar in Hyderabad, a women's group formed a Human Chain between the police and the public that helped to maintain peace and prevent tensions from escalating. Such community-based initiatives proved highly effective.

The way forward is clear: we must strengthen grassroots engagement, build local leadership, and create practical action plans. By working together, meeting regularly, and staying connected with communities, we can foster understanding, prevent conflict, and promote lasting peace.

This has been my experience, and I believe that sustained, people-centered efforts at the ground level are the key to meaningful change.

Thank you.



—Noorjahan Siddiqui



IGNETIOS XAVIOR

Ahimsa Artist

Peace to everyone present here. I am Ignatius Xavier, an artist dedicated to promoting peace and non-violence through art among students across different districts and states of India, as well as neighbouring countries. For over four decades, I have been conducting workshops, often in collaboration with organizations like COVA, to engage young minds on issues of peace, social justice, and humanity.

My work focuses especially on students, including young women, encouraging them to express their thoughts through creative mediums such as painting, poetry, and grassroots comics. I have developed a unique art form called Ainsaism, where art is created without brushes and often linked with themes of compassion and non-violence. Each artwork is usually accompanied by a poem or a real-life story, helping students connect emotionally with the subject.

During workshops, students have addressed powerful issues such as violence against women, inspired by incidents like the Nirbhaya case. In one such session, two young girls created a moving painting with colour and in black and white with their hands along with a poem expressing the voice of a victim who chooses to stand up against injustice. This piece of artwork is included in the book, Ainsaism New Invent Art Style.

Similarly, students in different regions like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Gujarat have explored themes such as the value of the girl child, mother and child, social inequality, and human dignity through their artwork.



On the theme of war, students have also created impactful pieces. For instance, a young student in Kerala illustrated a grassroots comic reflecting on war and global leadership, expressing hope for peace and wisdom. These creative expressions show how deeply young people can understand and respond to global issues when given the right platform.

I have also participated in community initiatives, including peace exhibitions in Hyderabad after incidents of violence, where people from different religions came together to promote harmony. Many of these works and experiences are documented in my book on Ainsaism, which showcases art as a tool for social change.

We co-organized several initiatives in response to the Hyderabad bombings, including the incident at Gokul Chat. As part of these efforts, we held a live exhibition near Charminar, bringing together people from different communities. The program featured speakers from various religions, including Mazhar Hussain, and aimed to promote unity, dialogue, and peace in the aftermath of the tragedy.

For 44 years, I have been independently visiting schools and colleges, without institutional support, to conduct such workshops. I strongly believe that NGOs, educational institutions, and community groups should come forward to support and expand these efforts. Art can be a powerful medium to educate, sensitize, and inspire students about issues like war, violence, and peace.



Through drawings, paintings, and comics, students can express their thoughts and influence others.

Exhibiting these works in schools and public spaces can further spread awareness and encourage dialogue. In this way, we can nurture a culture of peace, address critical global issues, and inspire future generations to work towards non-violence and harmony.

I remain committed to this cause and am always ready to contribute.

Thank you.



—Ignetios Xavier



KRISHNA MOHAN

Bharatiya Peoples Science Network

I am Krishna Mohan, representing the Bharatiya People's Science Network and Bharat Jnana Vidhyan Samiti. On behalf of Jnana Vidhyan Vedika in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, we are actively engaging children in peacebuilding efforts, especially through art. In our science magazines for children, we encourage them to express their thoughts through drawings, articles, and creative writing on themes of peace and anti-war awareness.

However, while working with children, we are noticing a disturbing trend. Even those raised in secular and inclusive families are beginning to develop feelings of hatred, particularly towards certain communities such as Muslims. This reflects a larger social reality, not just in Hyderabad but across the country.

Much of this influence seems to come from social media, including WhatsApp and other digital platforms, where divisive narratives and misinformation are spreading rapidly among young minds. This is a serious challenge that needs urgent attention.

Through platforms like the All-India Peace and Solidarity Organisation, we are organizing state-level conferences and initiatives to counter these trends and promote values of harmony, critical thinking, and unity among children.

Thank you.

—Krishna Mohan

