



The FEDERATION of ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS of NORTH AMERICA
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FEZANA's activities in Intercultural Exchange & Global Co-operation

Report Presented by FEZANA Past President, Firdosh Mehta
At 9th Cultural Conference, Anaheim, California – 3 June 2006

Respected Mobeds, Community Elders, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We look at FEZANA as a two country-united body to represent the interests of mainstream Zarathushtis at a National level. Hence, it acts as an umbrella for its 25 Member Associations, 20 from USA & 5 from Canada.

FEZANA's primary focus is directed towards the enhancement and well-being of the Zarathushti community of North America. We have been doing this in many walks of life, increasing the prosperity of our community all over the world, for 19 years now. This is achieved by 21 different committees, of which **the UN-NGO and the External Affairs** committees are involved in Intercultural Exchange & Global Co-operation. Some times **Religious Education & Heritage Research & Preservations** committees also get involved in matters related to Interfaith and Multicultural Exchange & International networking.

Some of our activities in this area are as follows:

PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS (CPWR)

The value of interfaith dialogue has always been evident, but it was not until 1893 that a Chicago lawyer, Charles Bonney, took a bold step and organized the *first Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago*. There was an avalanche of enthusiasm at the Parliament, which tapered off and the Parliament was almost forgotten 10 years later.

It took another 100 years for the *next Parliament, also in Chicago in 1993*.

The 1993 Parliament has spawned a revival of the interfaith movement like never before. Yet it has not even scratched the surface. In the period between 1893 and 1993, only three worldwide interfaith organizations were established which still exist today. However, since the 1993 Parliament, literally hundreds have been formed all over the world.

Parliaments were held in *Capetown, South Africa in 1999*, and in *Barcelona in July 2004*. Many of us have participated in these Congresses and I was fortunate to attend the one in *Barcelona, Spain*.

The next Parliament is scheduled to take place in 2009. Melbourne, Singapore and India, among others, have filed proposals. The selected location will be announced in October 2006.

Those who were at the Barcelona Parliament, experienced the Sikh hospitality of serving *Langars* (free lunches) to more than 4,000 participants, daily. With this simple act they earned the love and respect of all. If the Sikhs can do it, so can others. ***Let our community blossom in togetherness*** and serve a *Gahambar* lunch at the next Parliament, particularly if India is the venue.

RELIGIONS FOR PEACE (RFP/WCRP)

Jehangir Sarosh of UK serves as Moderator for Religions for Peace – Europe. Homi Gandhi has been recently appointed to serve on RFP-USA, based in New York. On behalf of FEZANA, Rohinton Rivetna, has participated for the last several years.

In November 2005, Roxanna Mirza represented FEZANA's UN/NGO team at WCRP's Religious Youth Leaders summit in New York.

In January 2006, Rohinton participated as a FEZANA delegate at the National Gathering of Religious Leaders in Chicago.

One of our Youth leaders, Roxanna Mirza may participate in the VIII World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan in August 2006.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR COMMUNITY AND JUSTICE (NCCJ)

We continue to provide material for the Zarathushti page of the NCCJ Interfaith Calendar, of which thousands of copies are sold/distributed worldwide.

We participate in a similar Canadian Interfaith calendar through the Edmonton Interfaith Center for Education and Action, where I have served as their past vice-chair of the Board.

NORTH AMERICAN INTERFAITH NETWORK (NAIN)

FEZANA continues to be a member of NAIN and support its activities. We provide registration for one delegate from a local Member Association where their annual conference is held.

This year it will be hosted in Vancouver, Canada, this month.

UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE (URI)

“Cooperation Circles” are active all over the globe. We participate in local circles where possible.

HARVARD PLURALISM PROJECT (Diana Eck)

The Pluralism project periodically offers internships and scholarships. Such information is passed onto our interfaith e-group. Suzie Karani is working away in this sector.

PARTICIPATION AT UN CONTINUES, as FEZANA has a consultative status as an NGO with ECOSOC, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Behram Pastakia and Homi Gandhi have mobilized a FEZANA UN/NGO team of Zarathushtis including youth members to participate in conferences organized by the UN. Many of our young adult Zarathushtis have had the opportunity to participate in events and forum involving enhancement of human conditions, rural education and medicine, eradication of poverty, supply of potable water, waiver of over burdening debt of poorer nations, and many other similar programs.

FEZANA presented a workshop at the United Nations in the use of Micro-finance in the up-liftment of the status of women. Participated by Nina Bilimoria, Roxanna Mirza, Shahrokh Mehta, Homi Gandhi and others.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY AT THE UN

On March 2, 2006, on the occasion of International Women’s Day, the annual conference on Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was held at the Tillman chapel housed at the UN in New York city.

The theme of the conference was two-fold:

1. Equal participation of men and women in decision making.
2. Enabling environments in development, health and education.

Tenaz Dubash and others participated in discussions, where the topic was ... *“Women who were wrestling with the tensions between their political aspirations and their religious traditions”*.

WORLD’S RELIGIONS AFTER SEPTEMBER 11...A GLOBAL CONGRESS

FEZANA has supported the registration of Nikan Khatibi, Farishta Dinshaw, Roshni Kasad, Er Jehan Bagli and Dr. Dolly Dastoor, to attend this Congress in Montreal, Canada in September 2006.

The most recent program approved by the FEZANA Board is the **ZOROASTRIAN YOUTH VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES FUND**. This will serve as a short term Zarathushti “Peace Corps”, to assist young Zarathushtis to serve in developing parts of the globe, to make a world of difference. Jasmine Kapadia from Texas, is already sponsored.

Towards GLOBAL Co-operation and support, FEZANA has contributed to The Earthquake victims in Gujarat, Baam, Pakistan, for the Tsunami relief in Tamilnadu, Warm clothing collection and transport to the survivors of the earthquake in South Asia, eyeglasses collected and sent to Africa and Zoroastrian youth participation at Kharel, Gujarat, for food distribution to malnourished children.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as can be seen from some of our actions listed above, FEZANA is very active in the area of Intercultural Exchange & Global Co-operation.

I am grateful to the organizers for the opportunity to make this presentation about FEZANA's involvements. FEZANA is fortunate to have many volunteers working away in all walks of life, to make our world a better place to be.

Due to time constraints, I will be pleased to respond to any questions later.

LET THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH, AND LET IT BEGIN WITH ME.

Thank you very much.