



**FEZANA INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE**

**Presented by  
Homi Gandhi  
May 22-24, 2009**

**At the 22nd Fezana Annual General Meeting  
Orlando, Florida.**



## PURPOSE:

The objective of FEZANA's participation in the interfaith arena is not to proselytize. It is rather to provide a means where individual Zoroastrians can seek for themselves an avenue that enhances their own spirituality and their own identity as followers of the Mazdayasni faith. The purpose of interfaith participation is not of creating awareness of our faith community in the public square, though that may come as a side effect. Two effective avenues which work well, and which we endorse, are:

1. To participate in inter-religious dialogue to deepen understanding; and
2. To participate in action programs that promote social justice, religious freedom and world peace.

This Committee's role is to facilitate local associations, groups, families and individuals to subscribe to the idea of participating in Interfaith/Inter-religious activities from a sense of their own conviction that this is the right thing to do and in harmony with our own faith tradition; to take initiative, be creative and proceed with action programs they are most comfortable with, judging the local conditions and realities for themselves.

We have seen that Interfaith activities are included in many other FEZANA committee reports, specifically the reports of Dr. Bagli and Rohinton Rivetna and so we will not duplicate them once again here. We would like to thank Maneck Bhujwala and Rummy Mohta for attending many Interfaith activities in their respective areas. Their reports are included in the report of Dr. Jehan Bagli.

We noted many interfaith activities throughout the year at the local association level, including the celebration of NauRooz. These have been highlighted in detail on FEZANA yahoo groups and FEZANA Journal, in the Interfaith/Interalia section, so we will not repeat them here. We will highlight a few of those events and participation below.

We repeated the celebration of **NauRooz in 2009** on a wider scale by more associations than last year. A detailed account of activities will be coming out soon in the next issue of FEZANA Journal; Summer/June 2009.

Zoroastrians from New York (Ervad Rohinton Dadina) and Washington DC (Behram Pastakia, Dinyar Patel, Shara Godiwala, and Zal Damkevala) participated in the respective Unity Walks in September 2008.(see FEZANA Journal issue Fall/September 2008).

Zoroastrians from Washington DC and New York also participated in the Iftar prayers in Washington DC and New York respectively. Behram Pastakia, Dariush Jamasb, and Zal Damkevala represented in Washington DC. In New York, Ervad Rohinton Dadina and Homi Gandhi offered a Zoroastrian Prayer at the Iftar, which was followed by a dinner and an international dialogue between religious leaders and political figures, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, UN General Assembly President Miguel Brockmann, and Former Norwegian Prime Minister Rev. Kjell Bondevik. Dr. Lovji Cama, Deena Guzder, and Shananya Deboo also participated in the New York Iftar. (see FEZANA Journal issue Winter/December 2008).

We continue to be a member of **the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN)** and participate in its activities on a limited basis.

We are also a member of **Religions for Peace USA, Inc. (RFP-USA)** and Homi Gandhi represents FEZANA on its Council of Presidents, and its Executive and Steering Committees. We are thankful to Kersi Shroff for attending the Steering Committee meeting in Washington DC in February 2009. We are also thankful to Prof. K D Irani for participating in a roundtable discussion of religious freedom and diversity in the United States, for the benefit of four Moldovan religious leaders who were participants in the US Department of State International Visitor Leadership Program. Homi Gandhi participated in a panel discussions on “Religions, Peace and Power : Implications of the 2008 Elections” organized by RFP-USA at Macaulay Honors College at CUNY on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2008. Along with other religious leaders, Homi Gandhi represented Zoroastrians at a dinner and interfaith dialogue hosted by Kazakhstan Ambassador Erlan Idrissov. (see FEZANA Journal issue Spring/March 2009)

Our active participation at the RFP-USA has led to FEZANA being invited to a brainstorming meeting at Maryknoll, New York, to discuss **an Initiative for a UN Decade of Interreligious Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace**. The “Initiative for a UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace (2011-2020)” was proposed over a year ago, at a meeting hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) at Bossey, Switzerland.

During the fall of 2008, Philippines championed the General Assembly resolution A/RES/63/22, which was approved by unanimity. The resolution *inter alia* “requests the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination in the Department of Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, which plays the focal point role on interreligious, intercultural and intercivilized matters, to coordinate with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in facilitating consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace”.

The chance to build on this and other prior UN decisions, in conjunction with mobilizing the immense spiritual, human and organizational resources of the religious communities, spiritual traditions, interfaith organizations, and value-based movements, makes this the opportune time to call for a United Nations Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace (the UN Decade). A resolution to that effect is to be brought to the General Assembly for endorsement in the 64<sup>th</sup> Session (September-December 2009) and then the UN Decade would be proclaimed.

A few prominent personalities who have been taking a keen interest in the interfaith movement globally were invited by the United Nations to attend a meeting at Maryknoll (which is located about an hour from the New York city) from March 2-4, 2009. Homi Gandhi represented FEZANA at this meeting. Dr. Homi Dhalla also attended the meeting. He was deputed by the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), Osaka, Japan At Maryknoll, a number of interfaith organizations, religious communities and value-based organizations came together to promote the acceptance of this Initiative, and to constitute this Coalition. In his message to the Coalition, HE Miguel D’Escoto Brockmann, President of the current UN General Assembly, supported the Coalition’s Initiative and stated that “I will do what I can to facilitate its adoption” by the Member States. Until now, 59 organizations have expressed support to join the Coalition, and out of these 43 were present at Maryknoll.

The Coalition is not a new organization, but is action-oriented to facilitate co-operation. A Steering Committee that would have 12-15 organizational members was also established through voting. The UN Decade is aimed at promoting partnership between UN member states, UN agencies, as well as religious communities, spiritual movements, organizations representing indigenous traditions and other important value-based civil society organizations to advance sustainable peace.

The Decade provides a framework to:

1. Encourage individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures to co-operate in UN initiatives such as: the Millennium Development Goals, enhancement of human rights, decent work for all, dialogue among civilizations, promoting a culture of peace and non-violence, peace building and shared security.
2. Encourage Member States publicly and constructively to engage individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures for the common good.
3. Strengthen and deepen the co-operation of individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures, locally, nationally, regionally and internationally for building a world of justice and peace.
4. To promote mutual respect and trust between individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures through dialogue and shared action.

On March 4, a formal meeting was convened at the ECOSOC chamber of the UN where a briefing on the UN Decade took place. The members of the Steering Committee and ECOSOC addressed this meeting, which was well attended by UN agencies, other NGOs and individuals. Both Homi were present at the ECOSOC meeting that took place at the UN headquarters in New York.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

1. Prepare a "**Directory of Interfaith Resources**" for FEZANA, which would include Zarathushti contacts, past and present participants, organization's purpose and activities, etc.
2. Identify **Interfaith Activities contact** at each association to serve as liaison/coordination with the Committee.

#### **COMING EVENTS:**

The **Unity Walk** will be held in September 2009 as in years past in New York and Washington DC. The vision is to facilitate such events in major metropolitan cities in North America. For details and resources visit [www.911unitywalk.org](http://www.911unitywalk.org)

**A Season of Peace:** From 21st September [International Day of Prayer and Peace] to 2nd October [International Day of Non-Violence]. Local associations are urged to create their own events in this time frame that promotes the message of world peace and increasing understanding through dialogue and concerted action in promoting harmony between faiths.

**Fifth World Parliament of Religions** is scheduled to take place in the first week of December 2009 in Melbourne, Australia. We are trying to join hands with the local Zoroastrian organizations in planning a major contribution at that event.

#### **FINANCIALS:**

Our budget for 2008 was fixed at \$3,000. Out of this, the Committee has spent the following:

\$1,823.35 One-half of the cost of printing of 1575 copies of the JudChrist booklet\*  
400.00 Cost of Gandhi books paid to Gujarat Vidyapith\*  
300.0 2008 Membership fees for RFP-USA Inc.  
125.00 2008 Membership fees for NAIN  
\$2,648.35 Total Expenses

\* Paid in 2009 and hence applied against 2009 Budget

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