

Report on the Activities of Religions for Peace Bangladesh in 2023

Introduction

Religions for Peace (RfP) Bangladesh achieved significant achievement and engaged in collaborative efforts this year, which have strengthened the commitment to promoting interfaith harmony, child rights, and the empowerment of women across Bangladesh. The dedication to fostering peace and understanding among diverse communities is evident in these activities. Various initiatives were undertaken to achieve these goals. Below is a detailed account of the key activities throughout the year.

(1) AGM and Formation of New Committee for RfP Bangladesh Chapter

A new committee for the Religions for Peace (RfP) Bangladesh Chapter has been constituted. Professor Dr. Sukanta Bhattacharjee has been elected as the President and Professor Dr. Masum Ahmed as the Secretary General. Additionally, Professor Rasheda Khanam has been appointed as the Executive President and Mr. Biswajit Barua as the Treasurer for the next three years.

This announcement was made unanimously at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of RfP Bangladesh, held on Friday, December 22, 2023, in the Club Collegiate Auditorium of the Chattogram Press Club, Chittagong, Bangladesh. The meeting was presided over by the outgoing Executive President, Professor Ranjit Kumar Dey. The outgoing Secretary General, Professor Dr. NHM Abu Bakar, presented the organizational report, while the outgoing Treasurer, Mr. Kanchan Barua, presented the financial report. Congratulatory speeches were delivered by Professor Rasheda Khanam and Professor Sukanta Bhattacharjee.

The annual general meeting, conducted by Dr. Masum Ahmed, began with readings from sacred texts and the national anthem, marking the start of the first session. Necessary amendments and revisions to the constitution were unanimously approved.

The meeting included participation from organizational leaders from Dhaka, Chattogram, Rangamati, Khagrachari, Bandarban, and Cox's Bazar, alongside senior journalist Subhash Dey, Chittagong University teachers Asma Akhtar Akhi, Mishkatul Momtaj Mumu, Noor Jahan, filmmaker Nadim Hossain, and a large number of young peace activists. Artist Aditi Sen performed music at the event.

(2) Photo Exhibition on Freedom of Religion Towards Inclusive Culture

RfP Bangladesh collaborated with the Freedom of Religion or Belief Leadership Network (FoRBLN) and The Hunger Project Bangladesh to organize a photography competition and exhibition titled 'Building

Inclusive Culture’ on religious freedom. The contest and the ensuing touring exhibition aimed to explore the manifestation of religion and spirituality within society and cultures, focusing on the human condition and narratives of Society, Self, Morality, Nature, and History. Key participants included Professor Ranajit Kumar Dey, Principal Sukomal Barua, Prof. Dr. NHM Abu Bakar, and Dr. Sucharit Basu Neogi.

Several online and in-person meetings were held with Dr. Charles Reed, Shahidul Alam, Shanaz Karim, Niall Johnston, and others. The prize-giving ceremony and inauguration of the exhibition took place on October 21, 2023, at DRIK Picture Gallery, Dhaka. Principal Sukomal Barua and Prof. Dr. NHM Abu Bakar represented RfP Bangladesh at the event. Additionally, a reception was arranged by the British High Commissioner HE Mr. Robert Chatterton Dickson at the British Council Auditorium on March 14, 2023, to celebrate the exhibition.

(3) Online Pre-Kathmandu National Consultation on FPCC Initiative

RfP Bangladesh organized an online national consultation on April 30, 2023, focusing on the South Asia Regional Faith Engagement Strategy for Positive Change for Children, Families, and Communities (FPCC). This initiative aimed to engage faith-based organizations and leaders in promoting child rights and well-being in Bangladesh.

The consultation highlighted the role of faith-based organizations in shaping social norms and delivering services. Around 60 multi-faith activists participated, discussing child marriage, education for female children, value-based education, and the digital divide exacerbated by the pandemic. Recommendations were sent to UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), focusing on creating safe environments for children, building the capacity of faith leaders, engaging women of faith and youth, raising awareness, advocating for policy change, and strengthening media presence.

The consultation was led by Prof. Dr. NHM Abu Bakar and supported by Ms. Deepika Singh and Rev. Dr. Yoshinori Shinohara, with contributions from Dr. Sucharit Basu Neogi, Rev. Kanchan Barua, Nadia Afreen, Principal Sukomal Barua, and Prof. Ranajit Kumar Dey.

(4) AGM of APIWoN: The Special General Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Interfaith Women Network

The Special General Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Interfaith Women Network (APIWoN), Chittagong Chapter, was held at Thai Wa Restaurant, Chittagong. Led by Prof. Dr. Rashida Khanam, the meeting aimed to reorganize the Chittagong Regional Chapter of APIWoN.

Attended by approximately thirty-five members, the meeting involved discussions, planning, and decision-making. A new committee was formed, which was officially approved during the RfPB EC

meeting on March 1, 2023. Esteemed attendees included Principal Sukomal Barua, Rev. Kanchan Barua, Dilip Barua, and Ambrose Gomes.

Conclusion

The activities of RfP Bangladesh in 2023 have been marked by significant achievements and progress in our mission to foster interfaith harmony, child rights, and women's empowerment. The formation of a new committee ensures that our organization is well-positioned to continue its vital work with renewed leadership and vigor. Our collaborative efforts in organizing the photo exhibition on religious freedom and the national consultation on the FPCC initiative highlight our commitment to inclusive cultural development and the protection of child rights.

Moreover, the reorganization of the APIWoN Chittagong Chapter underscores our dedication to promoting interfaith dialogue and the empowerment of women at the regional level. These activities, supported by the active participation of our members and leaders, have strengthened our organizational capacity and broadened our impact across Bangladesh.

As we move forward, RfP Bangladesh remains committed to building on these achievements, fostering partnerships, and engaging with diverse communities to promote peace, understanding, and equitable development. We look forward to continuing our efforts in 2024 and beyond, working towards a harmonious and inclusive society.

Sincerely,



Prof. Dr. Masum Ahmed
Secretary General
Religions for Peace Bangladesh

Captions:

Photo 1: Outgoing leaders congratulating the newly formed committee of the Religions for Peace (RfP) Bangladesh Chapter with flowers.

Photo 2: Outgoing Secretary General Professor Dr. NHM Abu Bakar presenting the organizational report at the annual general meeting of the Religions for Peace (RfP) Bangladesh Chapter.

Photo 3: Representatives and distinguished guests participating in the annual general meeting with the newly formed committee of the Religions for Peace (RfP) Bangladesh Chapter.