



Religions for Peace India

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INTRODUCTION

INDIA is a founder member of WCRP/RFP and ACRP. The source of our inspiration and interest in multi-religious approach to various problems is the age-old belief in, what we call, “**Sarva Dharma Smabhava**” (Equal respect for all religions). “Unity in Diversity” is India’s national creed. “**Ahimsa Paramo Dharma**” (Nonviolence is the Ultimate Righteousness) is yet another ancient exhortation we all believe in. These civilizational values and our secular democratic Constitution are the guarantee for equal respect and equal right to all the religions. So, believers of all the world religions live together in India from ancient times to the present in relative harmony and flourish and progress without any hitch or hindrance.

AREAS OF OUR CONCERN: WCRP/RFP provides a potent base at local, national, regional and global levels for a variety of peace-related activities. The areas of our concern include: interfaith and multi-religious activities; conflict resolution; disarmament; inter-religious and peace education; equitable and sustainable development; human rights; religious freedom; gender equality; welfare of children and youth; environmental protection, and climate change. Added to these now are: protecting Secularism and Constitutional democracy as well as countering the divisive communal hatred in the country.

CURRENT REPORT: After the last ACRP EC meeting in the month of May 2023, we have had a series of meetings in order to reorganize, expand and strengthen the National Chapter of RfP-India. Also, it became necessary because all the founder members of WCRP-India are by now dead. We have now enrolled more new members. Now we have a new All-India General Body comprising 25 bers. They are relatively young. They represent more States or province India.



From among the Governing Body, we have elected an Executive Committee of 11 members, including Office-bearers such as the President, Secretary-General and Treasurer.

We also have a Women's Wing chaired by Dr Deepali Bhanot, and Youth Wing chaired by Mr Shameer Rishad. Most of the earlier office-bearers will continue to serve in their respective positions for the sake of stability and continuity.

We have notified these changes to the local Government authorities, with whom we are registered as an NGO under the name "**World Conference of Religions for Peace (India)**" from 1976 onwards. Our registered official name will therefore continue to be "WCRP-India" and we will keep using the nomenclature WCRP-India and RfP India interchangeably.

After the reorganization, the new EC of RfP India met twice on --15 November 2023 and 4 May 2024 -- and transacted routine business.



Our official Email ID is: wcrpindia@gmail.com. We are also on the Facebook and Twitter and other social media platforms. We have also started a new Social Media Group called "Interfaith Fraternity" to promote and spread, globally, the idea of multi-religious approach to problem solving.

MEETING ON COMMUNAL HARMONY

India is witnessing increased incidents of communal tension, hate crimes and hate speeches, disturbing social and communal peace and harmony.

Keeping this in mind, RfP India, in collaboration with a couple of other like-minded sister institutions, organized a Round Table Conference on the need for Communal Harmony for development and progress. It was held at Fr Agnel School, New Delhi on 11 February last year. . Besides Fr Bento, Dr Deepali Bhanot and Abdul Mabood, several social and peace activists and representatives of several NGOs belonging to different religions participated in the discussions. They were all of the view that majoritarian communalism and hate speeches were against our age-old cultural ethos and values of pluralism, tolerance and ahimsa. They are also against our secular democratic Constitution.

The meeting resolved to continue to oppose religious intolerance and religious majoritarianism; and help generate necessary public opinion in the country for social and communal peace and brotherhood.

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION

On 15 August, India celebrated its 75th Independence Day. On this occasion, Religions for Peace India organised an all-Religion prayer meeting. The prayers were recited by youth members led by our youth leader Shameer Rishad.



Mr N. Vasudevan, Dr Deepali Bhanot and Mr Abdul Mabood spoke on various aspects of the nonviolent struggle for freedom of India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. They also spoke of the enormous problems faced by the country and its remarkable achievements during the last 75 years as well as the challenges lying ahead.

FPCC CAMPAIGN

Earlier on 29 April 2023, RfP India organized an interfaith National Consultation on the wellbeing of children and the role of Faith-based organizations. This was in preparation for the meeting of FPCC (Faith for Positive Change for Children) jointly sponsored by the RFP-International and UNICEF on 9 to 11 May 2023 at Katmandu, Nepal. Representatives from RfP India attended this meeting.

PHOTO

As a follow-up of the Katmandu meeting, an online Consultation of representatives of RfP National Chapters in South Asia and experts and officials of UNICEF and RFP-International was held online on 15 July 2023. They discussed ways and means to expand, strengthen and broad-base the national chapters in order to be able to take up projects for the welfare and uplift of children.

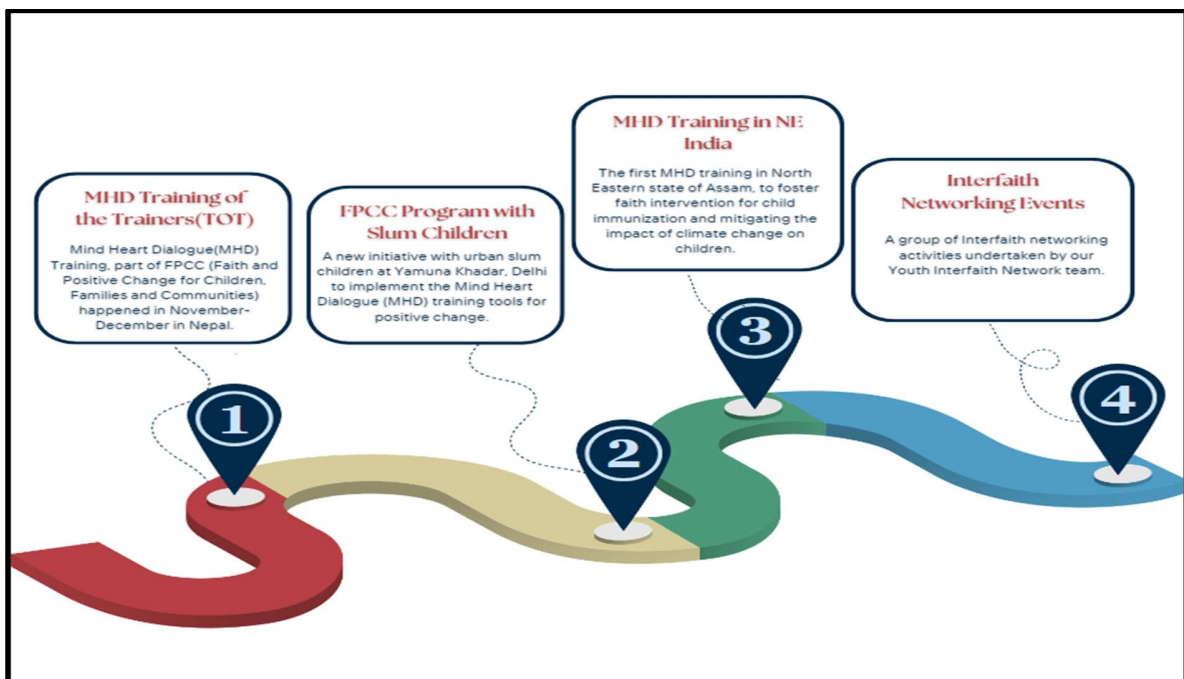
Dr Deepali Bhanot and Mr Shameer attended yet another meeting of FPCC campaign, on behalf of RfP India on 20 January 2024. They will help in collecting stories of religious leaders and faith-based organisations working in India for protection of child rights and their wellbeing. This online meeting was called Prof. Bong and attended by Mr Jimmy Obuya, who coordinates the FPCC program for RfP-International.

Over the past one year, RfP India has undertaken multiple initiatives to strengthen its presence on the field, particularly the plight of children and their wellbeing.

The following are the major events/ programs conducted by our Team member Mr Yash Dhamija between November 2023 and April 2024.

1. Training of the Trainers

The Mind-Heart Dialogue Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop was conducted from 27th November to 1st December, 2023 at UNICEF ROSA in Kathmandu, Nepal. Our team member from the Interfaith Youth Network, Mr. Yash participated in this training



2. FPCC Program

The first session was conducted on 3rd February, 2024 at Yamuna Khadar slum, Delhi. The program was attended by 30 + children from age group 10-14. The 3 major events were: Session

on Unity in Diversity, games and activities from the FPCC facilitators' guide, food distribution and interfaith prayers.



3. MHD Training in NE India

The Mind-Heart Dialogue Training in the North Eastern Indian state of Assam took place from 19th-21st March 2024. The three-day training was the first Heart-Mind Dialogue for Faith-Based Organizations/Civil Society organizations and Government departments on Strengthening Civic Engagement for Routine Immunization and Climate Change and Environment Sustainability.



4. Interfaith Networking Events

Religions for Peace operates on the cardinal principle of building relationships with different

change-makers in society. The Mind and Heart Dialogue Trainer of our Indian chapter, Mr Yash Dhamija, crisscrosses the length and breadth of New Delhi, to strengthen the relationship with different FBOs, CSOs and schools. He also undertakes monthly “Interfaith Day: The Delhi Way” series, visiting different places of worship in and around New Delhi.

Outcomes

RfP India infuses 3 Cs in every program it undertakes: Courage, Compassion, and Commitment. We focus on creating an enduring ecosystem of change, which is self-sustaining with an organic shelf life of a considerable time. This vision and mission entail meticulous objectives and inputs. Such clarity of the processes ensure desired outcomes and success.

The following have been the major outcomes of the 4 programs that we have mentioned above.

1. Through the MHD TOT and North-East India workshop, our participants gained a comprehensive understanding about the MHD approach and were equipped with the tools of integrating it into their existing work.
2. Participants were empowered to further build and strengthen the capacities of FBOs/CSOs on MHD in their own respective states.
3. Through our intervention in urban slums at Yamuna Khadar, New Delhi, RfP India initiated the process of adapting FPCC approach to local issues, and communicating it to the community teachers.
4. Explored collaboration opportunities with prominent faith leaders and organizations in New Delhi through our 'Networking Yatras'.

Future Course of Action

To provide quantifiable markers of change in the lives of our stakeholders: team members, children, their families, communities and country, RfP India aspires for active, cross sectoral coordination between faith leaders, community workers and policy makers. We have been doing SWOT analysis of our programs and partnership models to come up with a more resilient organizational structure and operations. A few steps have been taken, and we have miles to traverse to achieve this goal.

The following points highlight the future roadmap guiding our chapter:

- * Implementing MHD Action Plan 2023-24 with active partnership with UNICEF and Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities.
- * Translating the MHD Facilitators' Guide in 2-3 regional languages.
- * Monthly meeting with different verticals to organize 10 MHD training in different schools and colleges in New Delhi by June 2024.

- Identifying 5 student faith leaders from different localities in New Delhi to lead MHD training.
- * Strengthening the volunteer vertical.
- * Induction of more Interfaith Activists in the Youth Interfaith Network.



BHARAT JODO YATRA: To show solidarity, our youth leader, Mr Shameer Rishad, participated in the Bharat Jodo Yatra (Walk for Unity of India) for a couple of days in January. The 4000-kilometre Walk from South to North of India, led by Rahul Gandhi, was organized by the Indian National Congress Party to foster communal harmony and brotherhood, and to further strengthen the unity and integrity of India, which is sought to be undermined by divisive communal forces. Shameer interviewed and interacted with the walking people from different Indian States.

Women’s Wing Report

- 1) Dr Deepali Bhanot presented a paper in an Interfaith Dialogue meeting on the Theme: “The Power of Prayer and Contemplation for World Peace” organised by the Focolare Movement at IIC, New Delhi on the 20th January, 2023.
- 2) She participated in the Round Table Conference on “Communal Harmony for Better Health” organised by RfP, India at Fr. Agnel School, New Delhi on the 11th February 2023.
- 3) In her capacity as the FPCC Coordinator, RfP, India, Dr. Deepali Bhanot participated in the FPCC Regional Advisory



Group Workshop on Faith Actors for Child Rights and Well-being: Enhancing Collaboration and Positive Change for Adolescent Girls in South Asia held in Colombo, Sri Lanka from Aug 13-15, 2023.

The FPCC Coordinators from the ACRP Chapters also participated in this workshop. Ms Dorina. A. Jitaru and Mr Humberto James from UNICEF and other experts conducted the sessions. Ms. Deepika Singh, RfP International, Mr. Jimmy Obuya, RfP International FPCC Coordinator, Rev. Yoshinori Shinohara, ACRP Secretary General, Rev. Nobuhiro Nemoto, ACRP Senior Advisor, Prof. Bong Baybado, ACRP FPCC Coordinator were also a part of the deliberations of the workshop.

- 4) Dr. Deepali Bhanot, Co-President, Religions for Peace, Asia & FPCC Coordinator, India, was invited as a Resource person to speak on the topic: “Children and Childhood as viewed in the faith traditions of the Indian Sub-continent” at the Event- “World Day of



Prayer and Action for Children 2023”: Caring for Our Children is Caring for Our Planet” jointly organised by Shanti Ashram, Arigatou International, Sarvodaya & Mahatma Gandhi Institute on 17th & 18th November, 2023, in Mumbai. The Children’s Huddle attended by about 500 children on the 18th was celebrated through artistic

presentations by children who shared their thoughts, ideas and experiences. The specific objective was honouring and encouraging children-led initiatives to end violence against children.

- 5) Dr. Bhanot participated in the Asia Pacific Women of Faith Network meeting held in Bali from November 22-23,2023 organised by ACRP Tokyo office and APWoFN. This meeting was attended by the Women Representatives from various ACRP chapters and representatives from the Tokyo office. The members presented their country reports and shared the plans for the future. The meeting also included a visit to the ancient Tenganan village and the Gandhi Ashram situated near the sea-shore.
- 6) For the RfP-UNICEF-FPCC Project, “Gathering of Stories”, Dr. Deepali Bhanot visited Fr. Agnel Balbhavan, NOIDA in Uttar Pradesh in May 2023 and wrote an illustrated Story about the President of RfP India, Fr. Bento Rodrigue’s wonderful contribution towards the rehabilitation, education and skill development programs for children in difficult situations.



APWoFN Meeting in Bali, November 22-23, 2023

- 7) As the FPCC Coordinator of RfP, India, she also wrote an illustrated story about **Sri Sri Sugunendra Theerthaswamiji's** Contribution to Children Welfare in South India. Swami Sugunendra is a Co-President of RfP/International representing the Hindu Community.
- 8) The two-part, illustrated story of **Rev. Bhikku Sanghasena**, a senior respected member of RfP India, representing the Buddhist faith was also prepared by Dr. Bhanot. Bhikku Sanghasena's contribution towards the education and holistic development in the far-flung areas in the harsh terrain of the Himalayan regions of Leh is indeed commendable.

All these four stories were greatly appreciated and were posted on the ACRP website.

- 9) Videos of the stories about Fr. Bento's Bal Bhavan & Swami Sugunendra were also prepared by Mr Shameer and submitted to ACRP Tokyo office.
- 10) For the FPCC Project on "**Voices of Children on Peace**", Eight entries were sent from RfP India and most of the videos of children were included in the full video prepared by RfP International who also gave certificates of appreciation for all the participating children.
- 11) Dr Deepali Bhanot and Mr. Yash Dhamija participated in the online Four-sessions training Programme on "**Impactful Communications**" conducted by RfP, International and Consulus Pte., Singapore from the 3 April-24 April, 2024.
- 12) Dr. Bhanot has been invited to participate in an **Inter-religious Conference, "One Human Family"** organized by the Center for Inter-faith Dialogue, Rome, Italy from the 28th of May -5th of June 2024.

CELEBRATION OF DEEPAVALI WITH ORPHAN & POOR CHILDREN

WCRP/RFP India co-organized celebration of Deepavali (Festival of Lights) in Madurai, Tamilnadu (South India) with orphan and single-parent dalit children on 9 November 2023. The function was held at the NMR Subbaraman Residential Primary School complex (run by the Tamilnadu Harijan Sevak Sangh), in Madurai.



A special Deepavali feast was also organized for the inmates of the local Home for Mentally Retarded persons.

Material like clothes, etc worth Rs.50,000, donated voluntarily by the local people in Madurai were distributed among the poor people. The event was organized by Dr T. Ravichandran, Executive Committee member of RFP India, and other local leaders.

Youth Committee Report

Member List:

1. Shameer Rishad (Muslim, Youth Chairperson)
2. Ayesha Samah (Muslim, Secretary)
3. Yash Dhamija (Hindu, FPCC MHD Trainer)
4. Bala Ganesh (Hindu, Member)
5. Joel George Alex (Christian, Member)
6. Udayan Guhesh (Hindu, Intern)
7. Ammar Abidi (Muslim, Intern)

Snapshot of activities

Mr. Yash Dhamija completed the Mind-Heart Dialogue (MHD) Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop which was conducted from November 27 to December 01, 2023 at UNICEF ROSA in Kathmandu, Nepal. After completing the training Yash has conducted a string of activities for the Faith Positive Change for Children and Communities (FPCC) program, which are as follows:

1. FPCC Program in partnership with Ujjawal Trust at its learning center at Yamuna Khadar. Activities under this program included:
 - a. Session on Unity & Diversity
 - b. Games and activities from the FPCC facilitators guide
 - c. Food distribution after interfaith prayers
2. MHD training in Assam, India which focused on Strengthening Civic engagement for Routine Immunization and Climate Change and Environment Sustainability.
3. Speaking at various Interfaith Networking events and organizing a monthly Interfaith Day to better understand and promote Freedom of Religion and Belief in India

In addition to the above Yash has also attended the online training on Impactful Communication organized by RfP International.



Ms. Samah Ayesha applied for the Asia Pacific Interfaith Youth Network (APIYN) Grant which is a flagship initiative of RfP APIYN and is designed to strengthen youth peacebuilding efforts across the region.

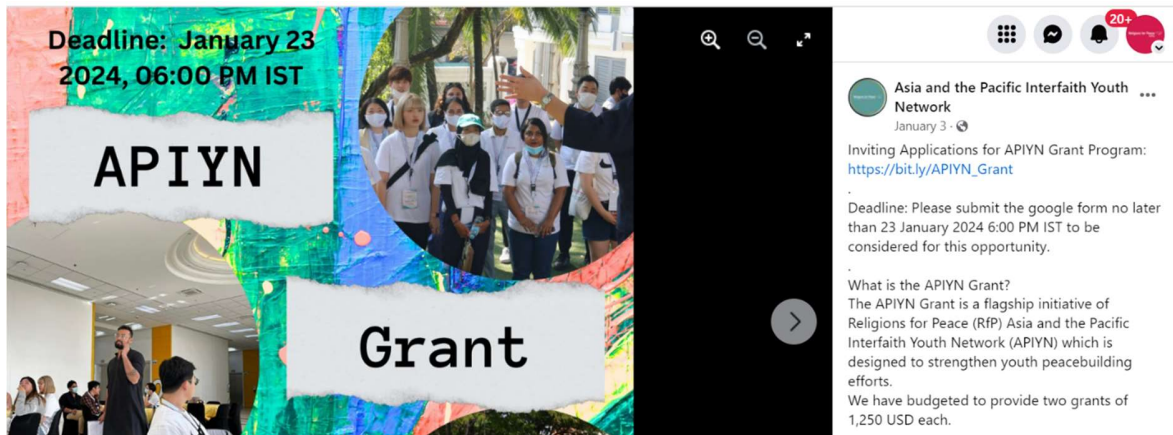
She won the grant after a competitive process and in her concept titled: Peace through Origami and Art Program she has proposed that RfP India Youth Committee undertakes the following activities:

1. 6 Workshops across two states in India targeting 500+ marginalised children
2. 3 Key Stakeholder Dialogues with Parents, Teachers & Public Administration about strengthening access to quality education and its impact on developing a peaceful, prosperous society, targeting 100+ beneficiaries.
3. 1 Short film to document the project along with multiple short videos to advocate for rights of children on social media.

We look forward to implementing the same before the end of the year.

Mr. Joel George Alex applied for the APIYN Jumpstart Program which is a pilot initiative of RfP APIYN and is designed kick start local peacebuilding projects.

He won the grant after a competitive process and in his concept titled: Wall of peace and social harmony, he has proposed that RfP India Youth Committee undertakes the following activities:



1. Engaging 10-20 young artists in dialogue related to peacebuilding, interfaith harmony, social cohesion, democratic principles and values
2. Developing a wall mural symbolizing a positive and peaceful expression of self-relating to aforementioned social issues & challenges
3. Photos & videos to document the program

We look forward to implementing the same before the end of the year.

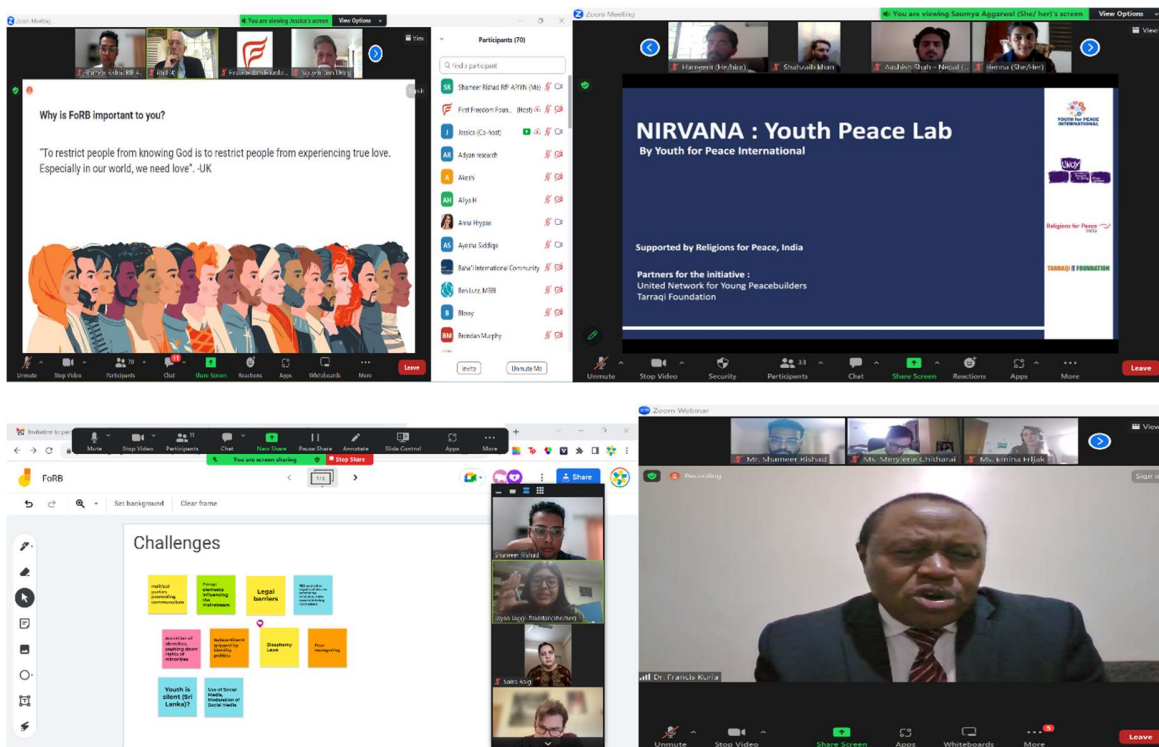


Mr. Shameer Rishad supported the youth committee by having key meetings with members, enabling others to act while also conducting a few activities with the support of the team, which are as follows:

1. In partnership with Youth for Peace International (YfPI) Implemented the Nirvana program: Training over 30 youth leaders from South Asia region in youth peacebuilding
2. Speaker at RfP International Earth Day 2024 Virtual Event
3. Presenting FPCC at RfP APIYN Youth Peace Camp, with a highlight on India
4. Facilitating session Titled: Assessing the status on FORB in South and South East Asia at virtual FORB Conference

Further to develop his skills in the area of mediation and better understand the peacebuilding space Shameer participated in Harmonious Connection Program funded by the government of Oman representing RfP India and International at the same.

He also completed a three-month comprehensive FORB ToT with the The FORB Learning Platform to better understand the nexus of Human Rights, Peace Education, FORB, PCVE and YPS.



APIYN YOUTH CAMP

Mr Shameer Rishad represented India at the Asia Pacific Interfaith Youth Peace Camp held in Seoul, South Korea on 20-24 February 2024. The Camp was sponsored by Seoul Peace Education Society (SPEC).

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19 May 2024