

International Movement for a JUST World (JUST), Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), Inter- Religious Engagement Program 21 (IEP21), & World Council of Muslim in Interfaith Relations (WCMIR).

Inter- Civilizational Youth Engagement Program

Residence Hotel, University Tenaga Nasional, Kajang, Selangor.

17/6/2007- 20/6/2007

“Building a Universal Civilization of Peace”

Final Report

1. Objectives

- a) To initiate and foster closer relationship and rapport among youths of various world civilizations.
- b) To develop a deeper understanding of global challenges and how to cope with them.
- c) To identify and examine values which can contribute to peaceful co-existence of various peoples on the globe.
- d) To experience and share the essence and spirit of Malaysian pluralistic co-existence or *muhibah*.
- e) To create a core group of concerned individuals in order to promote civilizational coexistence in the future.

2. Participants

50 youths of various ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds between the ages of 20 to 25 from across Malaysia and around the world participated in the program. In total, including Malaysia, the youth from 15 countries were represented. The others were the USA, Indonesia, Thailand, Palestine, Pakistan, India, Jordan, Belize, Singapore, Guinea, Kosovo, Australia, Japan and Somalia. The medium of communication was English.

3. Speakers, Facilitators & Committee

3.1 The Speakers

- a) Miss Karen Armstrong
Religious Historian
- b) Professor Chandra Muzaffar
President of JUST
- c) Dr. Irfan Khan
President of WCMIR
- d) Mr. Jim Kenney
Executive Director of IEP21
- e) Dr. Kamar Oniah
Lecturer in IIUM

3.2 The Facilitators

- a) Evelyn Khoo
- b) Afiq Johar
- c) Bo Bo Lwin
- d) Hasrizal
- e) Tan Chien Liang Anthony

3.3 The Committee

- a) Chairman- Abdullah al-Ahsan (JUST)
Lecturer in IIUM
- b) IYEP Administrative Coordinator- Ms. Maria Yan
- c) Mr. Augustine Loorthusamy (JUST)
- d) Azril Mohd Amin (ABIM)
- e) Jufitri bin Joha (ABIM)
- f) Dr. Younes Soualhi
Regional Representative of WAMY

4. Program

Day 1

Welcoming Session- June 17, 2007

- Introductory remarks given by the committee Chairman, Professor Abdullah Ahsan.

Ice Breaking Session- Participants got to better know each other by sharing their values, interests, hobbies and tastes. The session lived up to its name and by its end, participants' personal prejudices were put aside and they were eager to discover and celebrate what they share in common.

Video- "Peace, Propaganda and the Promised Land" was an eye opening video describing the manipulation of the mass media to defend, in this case, the extreme Zionist Agenda. In the Question/ Answer session that followed, participants demonstrated an eagerness to find out more about this issue and even continued their discussions later in the hallways during their free time, to try and comprehend the extent of bias, and the degree of suffering, fellow brothers and sisters, in both Palestine and Israel face regularly.

DAY 2

"Building a Universal Civilization of Peace" by Karen Armstrong.

- Participants heard the esteemed religion historian explain how world religions truly share incredible common values of compassion. She argued that true religion can bridge communities to bring universal harmony, and not stand as an obstacle to peace.

Photograph Session with All Speakers, Facilitators and Participants.

"Obstacles to Peace and Peaceful Co-existence" by Professor Chandra Muzaffar.

- The second speaker explained how the injustices and violence re-enforced at times by global hegemony threatens a peaceful world. He further explained how youth can take up the challenges of today's world by better informing themselves and others of the situation, and perhaps join an NGO. Professor Muzaffar spoke of macro solutions for building peaceful co-existence. He stressed that the Youth should spend their time learning, and take up activism after they have completed their studies.

VISIT TO PLACES OF WORSHIP

Participants learned about the major religions in Malaysia. For many it was their first time visiting a House of Worship that was not of their own religion.

Hindu Temple- Participants gained a better understanding of Hinduism and its presence in Malaysia. They also learned that Hinduism is not a specific religion on its own, as practiced in India.

Buddhist Center- The center provided a brief history of itself and of the Buddha. More importantly, as visiting time was limited, booklets were distributed to the participants, so that they could independently learn a lot more about the Faith.

Catholic Church- in addition to describing its beliefs and practices the church informed participants of the various community services it provides to fellow members and beyond.

Mosque- Many participants were impressed to see the beautiful architectural design of the House of Worship, based on Islamic architecture. A short video was shown further informing all about the role of that specific Mosque, and Mosques in general in Muslim society. Volunteers from ABIM also helped out and described the basic tenets of Islam.

There were unfortunately administrative problems with the Mosque, which some participants noticed, as it caused argument and disappointment amongst the organizers.

WORKSHOP 1- “Conflict Resolution”

Participants were divided into groups of ten. Each group was given a ‘conflict’ to resolve. They had to present their ideas to the other groups on how conflicts can be resolved within communities. The exercise was to help the individuals to better grasp how such conflicts arise in and across our cultures and how difficult or easy it is to compromise for the sake of living in harmony

DAY 3

“The Role of Religion in the Life of a Civilization” by Dr. Irfan Ahmad Khan –

Participants heard this philosopher with great understanding of Western and Islamic Sciences explain how each of the established religions can facilitate the growth of a harmonious civilization. He also pointed out that what we have to fear is not really religious values, but pseudo religiosity, which inevitably damages the life and image of the faith as a whole. Dr. Irfan Khan elaborated that communities have to commit to intra faith activities where solid relationships can lead to a successful and civilized inter faith dialogue.

WORKSHOP 2- “Religion and Public Life”

Teams were given the task of discussing issues in the communal spotlight, such as “Government and Politics”, “Business and Economy”, “Media and Culture”, “School and Education” and “Science and the Environment” in relation to religion. As debating religion is a sensitive issue, participants respectfully presented their points, relating to the pros and cons of religion in community life.

They looked at the other side of the coin, and better understood each other's perspective, and agreed that whether one was for or against religion, the chief concern was to preserve justice and peace for all.

“Youth and the Future” by Dr. Jim Kenney

- This speaker encouraged participants to realize the uniqueness of the circumstances of our age today. He described the waves of values, of the old and new, leading towards an evolution of great inter- civilization understanding. He explained how today, with globalization and the internet age upon us, the youth are facing an unprecedented global renaissance, stating that the youth should take this opportunity to strive for peace and justice in this ever changing world. That future generations will realize how conducive circumstances were today for making a difference.

WORKSHOP 3- “Youth Take Charge”

This was probably the most challenging workshop, as participants attempted to build a bridge from newspaper and tape that was strong enough to withstand the weight of a water bottle. As if that was not challenging enough they had to do it with extra obstacles, some were tied up, some were blindfolded and others gagged so no verbal communication was allowed. This workshop proved how sensitive, cooperative leadership and participants ensure the success of a team project as all the teams managed to complete their assignment.

Presentations

Participants were free to perform a sketch, dance or song underlying the theme “Building a Universal Civilization of Peace”. Considering the little time teams were given to prepare, the productions went very well, as they each shared a positive message to enlighten the mood and to make the audience strive for peace. There was rap. There was Tai Chi. There was an interactive game show. But most were sketches. There were no two presentations the same. However, one could see, that some presentations dragged on for longer time than necessary, and that a few could have been better planned, or structured. The moderators could have also helped speed up the program, as they didn't stop teams taking the stage for longer than necessary (as earlier teams posed for cameras whilst still on stage).

Once the presentations were officially over, many of the participants stayed on in the hall for their own impromptu musical shows. One participant demonstrated his ability to sing fifty anthems in their original language. They then let their hair down and relaxed to the sound of Indian and Pakistani music.

DAY 4

“Harnessing Strength for Building Peace among Civilizations” by Dr. Kamar Oniah.

- This inspirational scholar shared her remarkable experiences in interfaith dialogues and personal struggles for peace. She touched the chord of many

of the participants as they grasped the importance and responsibility to mend the world.

WORKSHOP 4 “Action Plan”

An Action Plan was finally presented from amongst the participants to display their pledge to keep on the spirit of the IYEP. On a personal level, many agreed to keep increasing their knowledge and spectrum, and to restrain from committing something out of ignorance.

On a community level, participants agreed to keep in contact and to network with each other, to understand, learn and to keep the spirit of IYEP strong. Several individuals agreed on the importance of joining an NGO, and to give personal time for a greater good.

Graduation Ceremony

Participants received their certificates and heard the concluding remarks from the organizers. Dr. Chandra Muzaffar reminded participants that seeking common values between different civilizations will help attain a universal civilization of peace.

5. Participants: An Evaluation

Participants generally felt that they had enjoyed their experience in the program, Most stated that they would come back if they could, and that they would recommend the program to their peers. A few did however comment that the program was rushed, and that they would prefer more time to socialize and to relax in between activities.

6. Conclusion

Success of the program will be judged by the ability to follow-up on its objectives. The formation of a core group is essential to promote the ideas of civilizational engagement. The core group may be an e-group, but the initiative must come from Malaysia. One or two individuals from among the Malaysian participants may want to initiate the formation of the e-group.

It is also necessary to disseminate the information about the successful holding of the program to others. A ten minute video posted on You-Tube may serve the purpose. It is also necessary to discuss whether or not it is possible to hold the program next year. Perhaps this program could be permanently integrated into JUST’s YLP.

If it is decided that the program should continue, then it is necessary to discuss funding, number of participants, length of the program, potential speakers and potential sponsor organizations.