

The Sixth Regional Interfaith Dialogue, Semarang, Indonesia, 11-15 March 2012

Recommendations which stress the importance of developing people in each faith tradition who have expertise and experience in both their own faith traditions and interfaith dialogue, and for strengthening women's participation in interfaith forums have emerged from the Sixth Regional Interfaith Dialogue which took place in Semarang, Indonesia, 11-15 March 2012. Its theme was "Strengthening Collaborative Communities to Promote Regional Peace and Security."

Organized by the Governments of Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines and New Zealand, the conference participants consisted of faith/religious leaders, scholars, civil society and media practitioners from the ASEAN countries, including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste, and Vietnam. Each country sent ten delegates to the meeting.

The Semarang program included panels and presentations on topics such as "Building Collaborative Communities: Strengthening Civil Society in Peace Building and Conflict Prevention. Interfaith in Action" and "The Role of Education in Promoting Peace and Security."

As part of the Dialogue program the delegates visited the houses of worship of some of the main faith communities present in Semarang – Buddhist, Catholic, Chinese, Protestant, Hindu and Muslim. The Catholic Archbishop of Semarang, Johannes Pujasmarta, welcomed participants to his offices, and to the Cathedral where members of the community had gone to much trouble to prepare a luncheon feast.

Recommendations from the Dialogue included:

- that religious communities develop programs for emerging religious leadership to learn from and about other faiths,
- that countries be encouraged to develop and implement programs to support interfaith education, collaborative interfaith activities, including education on peace and ethical values,
- that religious communities make efforts to include young men and women in collaborative interfaith projects, and
- that participating countries explore the development of national women's interfaith networks and a regional women's interfaith network.

The Australian representatives at the Dialogue were Ms Maryum Chaudry, Islamic Council of Victoria, Priest Dilip Chirmley, Hindu Society of South Australia, Rev. Samuel Green, Anglican Church of Australia, Rev. Prof. James Haire, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Charles Sturt University, Ms Maysa Hassan, Affinity Intercultural Foundation, Mr Jeremy Jones AM, Australian Jewish Community, Dr Patricia Madigan OP, Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, Prof. Abd Malak AM, Australian Partnership of Religious Organizations,

Bishop Chris Prowse, Catholic Diocese of Sale, and Most Ven. Thich Quang Ba, Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils. They were accompanied by members of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade led by Special Envoy of the Prime Minister, Mr Tim Fischer AC.

The Semarang Dialogue continues on from the first Regional Interfaith Dialogue (RID) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2004, followed by RID-2 in Cebu, the Philippines (2006), RID-3 in Waitangi, New Zealand (2007), RID-4 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (2008) and RID-5 in Perth, Australia (2009). Outcomes of these Dialogues have resulted in undertakings such as between-country exchange visits by journalists, and resourcing of international education programs.



Australian delegates at the 6th Regional Interfaith Dialogue sponsored by the Governments of Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines and New Zealand



Ms Maryum Chaudry (left) from the Australian delegation makes a presentation at the 6th Regional Interfaith Dialogue.



Delegates at the 6th Regional Interfaith Dialogue were greeted by dancers at the Semarang Hindu Temple



During the 6th Regional Interfaith Dialogue delegates visited the place of the oldest Chinese temple in Semarang (17th century)



Older Hindu structures have been preserved inside the historic Menara Kudus Mosque (1549)



Hospitality was a feature of all the religious communities we visited.