

INTERFAITH SESSIONS

Refreshing humanitarian action

Role of interfaith organisations in changing humanitarian landscape

and

Bhai Ghanaiya ji, Sikh faith and International Humanitarian Law
paying homage to Bhai Ghanaiya ji

Saturday 27 October 2018 10:30 hrs
Jacaranda Hall, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi - 110003



RAPPORTEUR'S REPORT

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SATURDAY, 27 OCTOBER 2018

JACARANDA HALL, INDIA HABITAT CENTRE, LODHI ROAD, NEW DELHI - 110003

JOINTLY ORGANISED BY

DELHI SIKH GURDWARA MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (DSGMC)

CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (CASH); RGNUL

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC)



ICRC



INTRODUCTION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Regional Delegation for India, Nepal, Bhutan & the Maldives held a discussion on “Refreshing Humanitarian Action: Role of Interfaith Organisations in Changing Humanitarian Landscape” and “Bhai Ghanaiya Ji, Sikh Faith and International Humanitarian Law Paying Homage To Bhai Ghanaiya Ji” at the India Habitat Centre on 27 October 2018. The discussions were held in collaboration with the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) and the Centre for Advanced Studies in International Humanitarian Law (CASH); Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law (RGNUL), Patiala. Surinder Singh Oberoi, Political Adviser, ICRC welcomed the dignitaries.

INAUGURAL SESSION

MASTER OF CEREMONY



Professor Harbans Kaur Sagoo
Director, International Centre for Sikh Studies, New Delhi

Professor Harbans Kaur Sagoo invited Jeremy England, Head of the Regional Delegation to deliver the welcome address.

WELCOME ADDRESS



Jeremy England

Head of Regional Delegation, ICRC New Delhi

Jeremy England stated that the ICRC was delighted to contribute to raising greater awareness of Bhai Ghanaiya’s example of principled humanitarian action. He noted that even though Bhai Ghanaiya’s story pre-dates the establishment of the Red Cross, it shares many similarities with the founder of the ICRC– Henry Dunant. He said that all distinguished religions of the world espouse the cause of kindness and humanity and it is precisely these principles that have been codified within International Humanitarian Law (IHL). He emphasised that we all need to reassert our common values and strengths to resist prejudice, exclusion, intolerance and polarisation. He underscored the need to learn from one another’s wisdom, traditions and practices and jointly work towards the cause of humanity. He highlighted the role of religion and religious leaders in Asia in preserving human dignity and protecting human beings in times of need and the critical role played by all actors in spreading the spirit of humanitarianism. He explained that the neutral, impartial and universal character of the ICRC facilitates the work of the organisation to reach people and communities in need. He concluded by stating that religious organisations and humanitarian

agencies can preserve their own identities and yet, deliver complementary humanitarian response in times of need.

GUEST OF HONOUR



Sardar Tarlochan Singh
Former Member of the Parliament

Sardar Tarlochan Singh appreciated the programme that focussed on the role of an Indian (Bhai Ghanaiya) for the cause of humanity. He stated that in 1702, during the battle of Anantpur Shahib, Bhai Ghanaiya assisted and cared for not only the injured Sikh soldiers but also the wounded Mughal soldiers. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which reflects similar principles of humanity and service to all came into existence 162 years after Bhai Ghanaiya's service. He emphasised that all human beings are children of the same God and should be accorded equal status and rights.

CHAIRPERSON



Sardar Manjit Singh GK
President, Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and President, Shiromani Akali Dal, Delhi & National Spokesperson

Sardar Manjit Singh GK highlighted that all religions have heroes but many remain anonymous. He observed that Bhai Ghanaiya followed values of Sikhism and the teachings of Guru Nanak were central to his work. Guru Nanak's teachings and practices remain relevant to the entire humanity. He ended by explaining that historically, Sikh Generals adopted resolutions prohibiting attacks on women, children and the elderly when waging

wars and that Sikhism espoused humanitarian principles in its true sense.

SESSION I

ROLE OF INTERFAITH ORGANISATIONS IN CHANGING HUMANITARIAN LANDSCAPE

MODERATOR/CHAIRPERSON



Professor Akhtarul Wasey
President, Maulana Azad University

PRESENTATIONS

PANELLISTS



Dr Binny Sareen
Hon Advisor to Brahma Kumaris Academy for a Better World

Dr Binny Sareen pointed out that the word 'human' is universal and that the need of the hour is to identify ways and means to preserve and sustain universal values. She explained that the tenets and cause of humanity emanated in our thoughts and that bodily wounds eventually heal but the wounds of the mind take a lot longer. Thus, it is imperative to empower our mind with positive thoughts and actions. She ended by stating that meditation and prayers go a long way in achieving positivity.



Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas
SFX Secretary General, CBCI

Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas observed that our hearts should go out to the poor and the marginalised. He stated that we all are children of the common creator and irrespective of our religious beliefs and practices, we must join hands for the larger good of the humanity. He emphasised that we, as a community, must carry forward the humanitarian goals that exist.



Puja Swami Chidanand Saraswati ji
President and Spiritual Head of Parmarth Niketan Ashram

Puja Swami Chidanand Saraswati ji argued that all religious leaders must work together for the survival of humanity. He stated that, in the 21st century, the synergy of oneness and togetherness remains critical. He complimented the ICRC for transcending all borders and barriers to serve those in need.



Acharya Dr Lokesh Muni Ji
Founder President at Ahimsa Vishwa Bharti, India Religious Institutions Development

Acharya Dr Lokesh Muni Ji too began by highlighting the words of Lord Mahavir, "humans have only one creed, they are distinguished only by their conduct and not birth." He explained that the service of Bhai Ghanaiya was not only the product of the teachings of religious leaders but also transcended religion and seeped into humanitarianism. He observed that religious leaders can encourage this spirit of commonness and humanity among their followers and communities.



Bhikkhu Sanghasena
Founder, Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre, Ladakh

Bhikkhu Sanghasena insisted that rendering humanitarian service to those suffering is the core of all religious teachings and practices. He stated that we tend to confine our thoughts and beliefs to teachings of our own religion but the unbelievable development in science and technology has greatly reduced the size of this world. Living in such proximity and closeness means that the feeling of oneness is required more than ever now. Hence, we have to go beyond our religion, country and identity to serve the entire humanity.



Participants attending the panel discussion



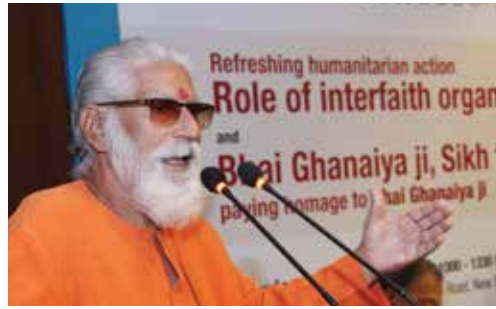
Dr A K Merchant
National Trustee-cum-Secretary, Loyus Temple & Bahá'í Community of India

Dr A K Merchant stated that today one is witness to several incidents of inhumanity, intolerance, social prejudice and we increasingly grapple with a humanity that has become dehumanised. He emphasised that we need to rise above our narrow thoughts and actions and emerge as better human beings. Human beings today are treated as commodities and selflessness and oneness is on the decline. He said that all religious leaders must ensure that resources are diverted for the welfare of the humanity. According to him, the redemption of humanity is based on how well these challenges are addressed.



S Bahadur Singh Sunet
Coordinator, Bhai Ghaniya ji Mission

S Bahadur Singh Sunet expressed his despair at the frequency of clashes that take place based on religion, caste and other identity markers. He reiterated that focussing on humanity remains the only way to overcome such hindrances. He pointed out that values and principles of humanity and interfaith organisations are inter-related and narrated the story of Noor Mohammad Afghani, who fought against the Sikh forces but when injured, he was served by Bhai Ghaniya. This inspired Noor Mohammad to initiate a similar selfless service for others. He concluded by stating that strengthening the interfaith movement was crucial for addressing all ills that plague the society.



Goswami Sushil Ji Maharaj
Head of Monastery, Maharashi Bhriгу Foundation

Goswami Sushil Ji Maharaj highlighted the potential of interfaith initiatives and called for many more such dialogues to promote harmony between different traditions and religions. He viewed this as crucial for serving humanity in its true sense.

SESSION II **BHAI GHANAIYA JI, SIKH FAITH AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**

CHAIRPERSON



Prof (Dr) Tasneem Meenai
Director, Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia

Dr Tasneem Meenai, the Chair for the session introduced the topic of discussion and wished everyone a fruitful session.

PRESENTATIONS

PANELLISTS



Dr Sangeeta Taak
Assistant Professor, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab

Dr Sangeeta Taak shared the observation that even though Guru Nanak is known as the founder of Sikhism, he himself never believed in any religion and possessed a secular outlook, which explains his belief in humanitarian values and practices. She elaborated that the first five Gurus believed and taught the lesson of peace but the sixth Guru modified this tradition by allowing fighting only when absolutely necessary. Finally, she explained the similarities between the major principles of Sikhism and the codified rules of IHL.



Madeeha Majid
Student, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab

Madeeha Majid highlighted that Sikhism embodies humanity and the development of the self through self-realisation. She mentioned that Guru Nanak preached altruism as the essence of all knowledge and that humans must abandon the sense of the other indicating his belief in the concept of brotherhood amongst people. She also highlighted that through the concept of *seva*, he promoted service to mankind. Speaking of Sikhism and its practices, she noted that during war, plundering or destruction of the property belonging to the enemy and intentional injury to women, children or the aged was prohibited.

She ended with the observation that Sikh scriptures also promote harmony with the natural environment.



Sugandha Sawhney
Student Coordinator, Centre for Advanced Study in International Humanitarian Law, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab

Sugandha Sawhney discussed the life of Bhai Ganaiya at length, his contribution to humanitarianism and his teachings, which reflect the principles of Sikhism and principles put forward by Guru Tegh Bahadur. She noted that there is a stark similarity between Bhai Ghanaiya's notion of serving others and Henry Dunant's own practice of catering to the needs of the vulnerable. She noted that his principles of selfless service, equal treatment and compassion are similar to the seven fundamental principles of the Red Cross Movement. Finally, she highlighted the establishment of the concept of *Sevapanthi* by Bhai Ghanaiya which encapsulates the notion of selfless service.



Dr Jaswinder Singh
Principal, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College, University of Delhi

Dr Jaswinder Singh discussed Bhai Gahaniya's sacrifice of an affluent lifestyle to render service to the society. He reiterated the glorious work of Bhai Gahaniya and how the basic philosophy of Guru Nanak Sahib had shaped his thinking and activities. He observed that Bhai Ghanaiya served humanity without any discrimination or prejudice and that this continues to inspire many people even today.



Dr Harpreet Kaur
Vice-Principal, Shri Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi

Dr Harpreet Kaur noted that much before the anvil of the Geneva Conventions, religion and customs were the repository of the principles of humanity. She argued that IHL codified rules and regulation regarding warfare and the protection to be guaranteed to vulnerable population and this can be found in the tenets of the prominent religions of the world too. She further observed that the Sikh concept of a “just war” endorses humanitarian values. She also noted that Sikhism came into existence during a period of turmoil but adhered strictly to the norms of “just war”.



Dr Anuradha Saibaba
Head, International Humanitarian Law Department, ICRC New Delhi

Dr Anuradha Saibaba began by remarking that law and religion don't necessarily have to be at crossroads and that several components of IHL have found its legal, ethical and cultural base in major religions of civilisations across the world. She noted that the common thread running between the ICRC and the interfaith organisations is selfless service and the promise to cater to humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations. She stressed that interfaith organisations and religious leaders can play a pivotal role in sending a powerful message to their followers, to the communities and to all actors who are party to the conflict in terms of following basic norms of humanity. She ended with the observation that the work of the ICRC and interfaith groups is complementary as it is always based on humanitarian needs.

CLOSING REMARKS

Surinder Singh Oberoi
Political Adviser, ICRC New Delhi

Surinder Singh Oberoi thanked the panel and the audience and reiterated that many more such engagements were on the anvil. He observed that God has given us many faiths but we co-exist on one planet and we must find ways to live together.

RAPPORTEUR

Santosh Anand
Doctoral Candidate, Faculty of Legal Studies, South Asian University, New Delhi



Photograph of the participants

WHO WE ARE

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an independent and non-political organisation with a large scope of strictly humanitarian activities which it undertakes through its presence in over 80 countries around the world. It has a universally recognised responsibility to promote International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and to respond to the needs of people affected by situations of humanitarian concern, in particular armed conflict and violence.

Working in partnership with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, local authorities and others, the ICRC provides humanitarian aid and expertise in areas such as: international humanitarian law, emergency response, health and rehabilitative services, water and habitat, livelihood support, humanitarian forensics, detention management and the restoration of family links.

The ICRC has a proven record and long history in Asia and works by engaging with all parties concerned through a unique approach based on confidential dialogue, transparent activities, sharing of expertise and partnerships in order to be able to reach and meet the needs of vulnerable persons.

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