

**Statement of the Inter-Religious Solidarity Council (IRSC) during its Assembly on  
20<sup>th</sup> July 2024, to give the message of tolerance and peaceful co-existence.**

On July 20th, 2024, the Inter-Religious Solidarity Council (IRSC) convened a significant and rich assembly of faith leaders and influencers from diverse religious communities. The gathering was facilitated by the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS), and the Institute of Indian Culture (IIC), Mumbai. This gathering reaffirmed the necessity of peaceful coexistence, in religiously diverse India.

The discussions held underscored the deep-rooted traditions and teachings of each religion, emphasizing values such as compassion, service to all, and acceptance of diverse path to divinity. Faith leaders from Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Bahai faith, Zoroastrianism, Jainism and rationalist perspective shared profound insights from their respective theological and philosophical perspectives. The common thread that emerged from the discussion were—universal values of oneness, acceptance of diverse paths and traditions, inclusion, and non-discrimination underscored by all religions towards all members of our communities.

Swami Dayadhipanandaji of the Ramakrishna Mission underlined that we live in a diverse society and that this diversity has to be embraced. He pointed out there is one ultimate reality realized through bliss, which is achieved by satchitanand or true consciousness arrived by tyag (sacrifice) and seva (service to the needy). Ramakrishna Mission is, according to Swamiji, a living example of the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda and Shri Krishna and serves all members of society equally without discrimination. Swami Devendra Brahamachariji, a Lord Mahavir motivational speaker and social reformer, similarly underscored *anekantwad* (multiple approaches to the truth), *syadvad* (all judgments are conditional, holding good only in certain conditions, circumstances, or senses) and non-violence. Peace could be achieved by creating spaces for dialogue and collectively seeking solutions to discords and minimize misunderstandings. Sadguru Yogiraj Dr. Mangesh Da, founder of Sadguru Mangesh Da Kriya Yoga Foundation, pointed out we are all one and religious diversity are not a barrier. According to him, God and nature does not discriminate and serves all. He cited the example of Swami Vivekananda who underlined this oneness as Hindu religion in his speech at Chicago. In Hindu religion follows the concept of '*athithi devo bhava*' (stranger or guest is God) and thus opens its arms to members of all religions. Swami Jahnudvipa Nitai Hari, Vice-President of ISKCON temple, said that according to Hindu religion, we are all *atma* of one Paramatma. That is, our real being is the soul and the spirit of same God. emphasized on taking this central message of oneness to the larger society. The message of universal brotherhood binds the society.

Dr. Nikhat Noumaan, visiting faculty at University of Mumbai, explained the inspiration for peaceful coexistence in Islam can be traced to two sources – that of the Holy Quran and Sunnah, or practices of Prophet Mohamed (PUBH). According to the Holy Quran, the diversity of human race in the form of tribes, religions and nations is deliberate act of Allah, so that they (human beings) know each other. Allah has sent messengers to guide all peoples and the messengers revealed the same truth. Islam has emphasized that there has to be equality and non-discrimination towards non-Muslims. Salim Khan, associated with Jamat-e-Islami, said Islam means submission to God. Islam also means peace. According to Mr. Khan, In Islam there is no compulsion in matters of religion and human beings have

agency. Allah places virtue in forgiveness. Justice for all is most honourable value in Islam. Masarrat Ahmed, President of the Ahmadiya community in Mumbai, emphasized on rejection of hatred and exclusion in Islam citing the Charter of Medina prepared by Prophet Muhammad (PUBH). The Charter guaranteed freedom of religion of all members irrespective of their religion. Most honourable to God is one who is most pious (s/he may belong to any religion).

Fr. S. M Michael pointed out that geography and other factors have given rise to differences in food habits, occupations and languages but common humanity is important. We are all created in the likeness and image of God. According to Christian understanding, all humans have dignity. Lord Jesus gave emphatically the message of service to all human beings. Sr. Sagaya Mary reminded us that peace is an active pursuit. Bible lays primacy on justice and voice for the voiceless. Differences make us appreciate divineness, creating symphony of faith.

Seema Indorewala explaining the tenets of Bahai faith underscored that Baha'u'llah emphasized there is unity, oneness and harmony in all religions. This earth is one country and the entire human race is its citizens. The Bahai faith embraces oneness of all human beings. Firdaus Pavri pointed out that in Zoroastrian religion, the key message is that one 'good thoughts, good words and good deeds' which helps human beings to follow the path of righteousness and has guided Parsis to integrate meaningfully in Indian society. Karl Sahukar too traced back the teachings of peaceful coexistence in Zoroastrian faith to King Cyrus and his cylinder of human rights which has guided human society for centuries.

Ranu Jain explained the central tenets of Jainism. "Anekanth, or many paths lead to Truth". This, according to her, was one of the important principles emphasized multi-dimensional nature of truth and thus fluidity of Jain religion. As Jainism doesn't impose a social code of conduct, it has helped members of the religion to integrate meaningfully in a multicultural society and adopt to the local cultures.

Ram Puniyani recounted Kabir's message of love as the essence of religion. Maharashtra's rich legacy defined by saints and reformists like Sane Guruji have taught us to live together with dignity and serve the needy.

In conclusion, this meeting reinforced our shared commitment to promoting a society where differences and diversity enrich our understanding and appreciation of each other's divinity. We pledge to continue fostering dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among all religious communities, guided by the principles of compassion, service, and peaceful coexistence. Prof. Ram Puniyani also suggested that we should be an alternative to growing intolerance around us and religious extremism whenever it raises its head.

The Assembly resolved to organise an event in Mumbai to celebrate 11<sup>th</sup> September as a day of tolerance, the day on which Swami Vivekananda addressed the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893. The Assembly also decided to explore monthly meetings of all faith leaders.