



Bound for peace

So powerful is the light of *unity* that it can illuminate the *whole earth*.
From region....

“Interfaith is not about religions being the same, interfaith is about understanding our differences, recognizing our similarities and working together for peace and justice in our world”- Rev. Victor Kazanjian, Executive Director, URI

Keeping the above statement as our guiding principle all through 2018, we, at URI, endeavoured to stay true to its mission and vision of establishing harmony through interfaith dialogue. From vulnerable adult communities to college youth to even children from underprivileged backgrounds, our collaborations with and for different stakeholders served the purpose of inclusion and brought together multiple organisations widening our own circle and ensuring solidarity within. Moreover, conducting versatile set of activities ranging from peace walk, performing arts, to inaugurating a sewing center for sustainable women empowerment in rural areas, gave us an opportunity to explore and discover various ways to instill skills, foster awareness and harmony. With the new learnings and an uplifted spirit, we strive to do better, hope to make new associations while nourishing the old ones- to fulfill our sole purpose behind every work- to promote endurance, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

We hope you enjoy our updates from the past 6 months!

MoU between URI and United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect





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United Religion Initiatives (URI) and United Nations Office on *Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect* have signed a partnership agreement to promote a peaceful culture at a global level. Signed at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on September 10, 2018, the aim of the agreement is to provide a structure of cooperation between the two organizations in the areas of mutual interests.

Both the organizations have collaborated at the local, national, sub-regional and international levels to counter hate speech, prevent the instances of violence, and promote maximum implementation of Sustainable Development Goals with a special focus on Goal 16 that concerns building peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

The two organizations share a major common commitment to promote the right of every individual for them to lead a life of respect, dignity and equal opportunity.

Sensitizing faith based communities on health and rights based approach to drug use on World Mental Health Day



A multi-stakeholder meet was held by the Delhi government on October 10, 2018 on the UN World Mental Health Day in collaboration with Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of NCT Delhi, India HIV/AIDS Alliance, UNOICT, WHO, UNAIDS, NACO and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to engage Faith-based Organisations (FBO's) for developing comprehensive health and rights based response to drug use. The consultation provided an open platform for the stakeholders especially the faith based organizations to develop an understanding on issues of people who use drugs and other sub groups like women, adolescents and those in prisons, an overview on the legal and policy framework on health, human rights etc.

It was an important breakthrough program as the work of FBO's in advocacy for drug treatment policies has not been sufficiently documented and has unexplored potential for facilitating a change in the mind-set of the larger society. The event hoped to nurture community efforts in tackling issues related with drug use in the country and promote the cause of a healthy society where everyone co-exists.



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Ripple Academy Program: cross sectional role of interfaith in environment



As climate crises, oppressive governments, and environmental destruction cause deeper and more widespread damage, women from our most impacted communities carry the heaviest burden. From these frontlines, women are also uniquely positioned to design and develop solutions but are cut off from accessing the resources and networks they urgently need. That's why in 2017 the United Religions Initiative (URI) and Women's Earth Alliance (WEA) joined together to co-create the Ripple Academy, leveraging over 28 years of collective organizational best practices and integrating complementary grassroots networks of leaders in over 100 countries combined.

Because of Parmarth Niketan's generous invitation and powerful call to action, the Ripple Academy came to life this September, gathering 30 grassroots women leaders, selected from throughout URI and WEA's networks. The cohort comprised of environmental advocates, NGO leaders, community organizers, educators, interfaith practitioners, and social entrepreneurs—representing a multitude of faiths and backgrounds. The Ripple Academy 3-day workshop aimed to:

- *Connect and strengthen the networks of dedicated grassroots women leaders working on coordinated environmental protection, women's empowerment, and peace building efforts in India and Nepal;*
- *Equip these leaders with tangible skills, tools, partnerships, and support structures they need to facilitate the work of local interfaith groups in the development of community-led environmental projects. (Including: improved access to safe, sustainable WASH, improved resilience to drought and natural disasters, improved cooperation and conflict resolution capacities, greater safety for women and girls, and improved education and livelihood outcomes)*
- *Create measurable improvements in social and environmental conditions that also serve as replicable models across other global regions.*



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Campaign with LEAD



North India region partnered with a campaign run by LEAD India and Sony YAY! to generate an awareness campaign for schools going children on Water Conservation. This workshop familiarizes children with day to day water uses and wastage, helps them reflect on their own water behaviour and enables their creativity to conserve water regularly through interactive and entertaining means. Our cc's and stakeholders -Choti Kushi, Love care Foundation, Tronica CC city, Sahas CC and You Can Foundation have been instrumental in helping the campaign reach over 1200 students between 3rd and 7th grade in Delhi. This project has been instrumental in inculcating a strong sense of conservation and sensitivity towards environmental concerns at a early age. We are extremely grateful to LEAD India, Salwan Public School, JM International, Queen valley school,SKV Matiala and kaushambi Convent school for supporting this collaboration and nourishing the knowledge structures.

Reasons to unite are more important than all the things which divide us:





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Under a week long initiative, the cooperation circles Love Care Foundation, Light Up and Zestreet and other facilitators from the regional network worked with 26 Rashtriya Rifles Regiment of the Indian Army in Kishtwar and Thathri Doda. Workshops on Social – Emotional Learning with adolescent school girls was held to empower and teach them how to express their emotions and share their opinions in a safe curated space. From identification and expression to management of emotions, this series of workshop hoped to work with students to nourish hope and a positive future amongst the students.

Parallel workshops were held with *anganwadi* women to empower them with vocational skills that could strengthen them economically by working from home. Cushions, bags, pillow covers and worli paintings were taught as part of this parallel workshop. Self-care activities and reflection exercises were also undertaken to nurture self confidence in women that

have been affected by decades of patriarchal structures and violence by non-state actors in the region.

The highlight of our trip was that we were awarded with the 26 Rashtriya Rifles Regiment – Ashoka Chakra Medal. We are truly honoured and humbled by this warm gesture by the Indian Army.



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Indo-Afghanistan Youth Meet



A cultural exchange and meeting was organized by the United Religion Initiatives - North India and Afghanistan on September 1, 2018 after 20 days of intensive training on conflict resolution, mental wellbeing, post conflict trauma healing and peacebuilding for 15 Afghan youth from Kabul. The volunteers and contributors along with NGO's like Chhoti Si Khushi, GS3 Foundation, U DAY Festival, Dwarka Peace Society, Abhiyane Foundation, My Perch and Music Basti, enthusiastically made this event fruitful. The aim was to create an environment to foster fruitful conversations around each other's culture and traditions in order to build a more cohesive relationship amongst different communities in India and Afghanistan. The day commenced with the official release of the URI newsletter and a group discussion on Community and Culture Engagement. The day also witnessed performances by youth from both the countries.

Workshop on Interfaith Harmony and Peace building at Banaras Hindu University



United Religion Initiatives along with Malaviya Center for Peace Research of Banaras Hindu University conducted an interfaith workshop on October 14 and October 15, 2018 on peace-building and social inclusion for PhD students and teachers. This multidimensional two day workshop was facilitated by Suchith Abeyewickreme- Global Trustee URI, and Subhi Dhupar- Regional Coordinator, North India and Afghanistan.

The workshop hoped to bridge the lacuna between academics and grassroots by drawing on real life examples and local conflicts that find their roots and shoots enmeshed in identity issues and manifest in complex ways in different situations. The workshop

revolved around the idea of identity, self-reflection, recognising identity related issues and their social manifestations, and lastly, how to incorporate this understanding into academics. The workshop also articulated key principles of interfaith peace-building based on URI experiences at grassroots level, connectors and dividers in the field, good practices and tools that exist within the field. Thereby, constantly



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reiterating the change and negotiations that need to be taken into account while drawing inferences, remarks and conclusions around people centred topics and issues. The whole endeavor of unlearning, learning and relearning would not have been possible without the cooperation and encouragement of UNESCO Chair Professor Priyanka Upadhyaya and Dr. Anjoo Sharan and the entire staff of the department. We are honored and grateful to have had this opportunity of working with the department.

Interfaith Peace-building Workshop at O.P. Jindal Global University



URI along with the Center for Afghanistan Studies organized a two-day workshop on interfaith peace-building. The students of O. P Jindal Global University along with the members of cooperation circles of URI participated in this event. These two days were filled with learning through games and open platform for discussion. The main key learning objectives was to help students reflect on identities (their own and others) and social manifestations of identities including identity-based conflicts, articulate key principles of interfaith peace building based on URI experiences and lastly, identify an agenda for change that students themselves can lead building on their own strengths, passions and contexts. We express our heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Raghav Sharma and the entire department for their support and cooperation.

Aman Dosti Yatra, Fostering Peace





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United Religion Initiatives, North India and Afghanistan along with its cooperation circles G3S Foundation, Mahela Chetna Kendra, Nirmala Deshpande Sanstha and UNOY, were a part of a journey called Aman-Dosti Yatra which aimed to promote the ideas of peace and non-violence. On August 13, 2018, a group comprising of men, women and youth began a journey from New Delhi to Wagah Border, to celebrate the Independence Day.

This new endeavor was a new ray of light and hope amidst the increasing communal and national tensions between the two nations. The idea was to promote the message of peace and communal harmony and counter the voice of separation, violence and hatred.

The group reached Punjab on August 14, 2018 and organized a session called India – Pakistan Relations, discussing the existing problems and the various possibilities of fostering peace and harmony between both the nations. On the same day, the group held a candlelight vigil to mark the 72nd Independence Day at Wagah Border. The Yatra was aimed at creating a peaceful environment and promote the ideals of peace, harmony, non-violence and brotherhood.

Chhoti Si Khushi by Children



We at the regional office hold a strong belief in the power of relationship building as a major tool to overcome resource gaps within an organization. One such initiative was between Chhoti Si Khushi, one of the cooperation circles of URI and Music Basti. The five month long workshop with kids connected them with music and rhythms that kids of all ages enjoy. The children also learnt about intonation, stage language, performing for an audience and many more soft skills. Music Basti team infused a lot of fun element and energy, as a result of which the kids were quick to adapt and learn new things.

A final big event was organised at Sir Aurobindo Center for Arts and Communication (SACAC) by Music Basti, on November 4, 2018 where kids participated in a choir performance. This event was a huge opportunity for children as it provided them with exposure to develop confidence and grow as a performer.

Women Empowerment Initiative



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The regional office supported GS3 Foundation, one of its cooperation circles, in beginning a sewing machine center as a part of the ‘Project Swawlambi’ at Machhahi village, Sakra thana, Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

As a student run initiative Project Swawlambi aims to improve the condition of the poor women who reside in the village and belong to one of the most overlooked spaces in the state. It is designed to teach them sewing at the center thereby helping them to develop skills to earn a livelihood. After the completion of the training, the center intends to enable women to feel self-dependent (hence, swawlambi) so that they can work from home too. This new endeavor’s objective is to empower them with sustainable living to lead a life with dignity and respect which they are entitled to.

Third Asia Assembly conducted by URI



United Religion Initiatives conducted its 3rd Asia Assembly in Sri Lanka. The theme of the meeting was United for Peace – Transcending Boundaries. It welcomed people from all over the world representing different cultures, ethnicities, religion and nationalities. The two day conference was full of celebration of diversity and a discourse on promotion of peaceful and harmonious environment. We are thankful to all our members for joining us and celebrating the spirit of unity in diversity.

Want to know more?

Check out our work on our Facebook page: United Religions Initiative-North India and Afghanistan
<https://www.facebook.com/uri.northindia.afghanistan/?eid=ARBi62oyw0U48XGd49tXtqsqfvsB8Eu0-D07TE81GMPn9uaduEq78DBnZ-bXheFogtXGXowfCoauHDB>



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