

---

# ASEM Interfaith Retreat for Religious Leaders

## Summary

---

1. The ASEM Interfaith/ Intercultural Retreat for Religious Leaders was held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 9 – 12 September 2009. The Retreat was chaired by Indonesia and was attended by religious leaders/figures/officials from 24 ASEM Partners, including Austria, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Denmark, European Commission, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom, and Vietnam. The Retreat was also attended by a representative from Syria, as a special guest of the Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia. The Retreat was co-sponsored by Italy, Singapore, United Kingdom, the Philippines and Thailand.
2. In his keynote speech, at the Opening Session, the Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, H.E. M. Maftuh Basyuni, underlined the importance of building a human approach to religion, which emphasizes moderation that is evident in all religious teachings. Thus so, joint efforts to promote moderation, tolerance and peace can be done through cultural movement. In this regard, dialogue is seen as an important vehicle to solve issues amongst different faiths and cultures. Therefore, the Indonesian government supports efforts of interfaith dialogue to build harmony between religious communities in Indonesia and in the context of Asia-Europe through various forums, including ASEM.
3. The ASEM Indonesia SOM Leader, H.E. Retno LP Marsudi in her remarks underlined the important role of religious leaders in disseminating peaceful co-existence. She argued that differences between peoples will always remain, therefore efforts should be made to change the perceptions towards such differences. This can be achieved through dialogue which builds bridges and expands the networks between religious communities. In the context of ASEM, Indonesia has played a leading role in the promotion of interfaith as the host of the

1st the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in Bali 2005 and continues to support the dialogue through co-sponsorship in each ASEM IFD. Furthermore, in an effort to reach all sectors of society, Indonesia has also hosted the 2nd ASEM Youth IFD, 2008.

4. A representative of the European region, Juan Fereirro Gualgera from Ministry of Justice of Spain, explained that the state should play a double role, not only to promote, but also to participate in religious dialogues. He also stressed the importance of respecting the principle of separation, neutrality and cooperation in order to maintain good relations between government and religious communities.
5. The First Roundtable Discussion chaired by Prof. Abdurrahman Masud Ph.D, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Indonesia, took the theme “Strategic Roles of Religious Leaders in the Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue”. The Speakers for this session are Mr. Tarsius Erlip Vitarsa, Representative of the Community of Sant’ Egidio, Italy; Mr. Chung Kwang Tong, Representative of Taoist Federation of Singapore; Mr. Yousif Al-Khoei OBE, Director Al Khoei Foundation, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Mr. Nabil Mazhongping, Vice Secretary General of China Islamic Association, China.
6. In his presentation, Mr. Tarsisius Erlip Vitarsa conveyed that dialogue, mutual knowledge, cultural exchanges are essential for avoiding violence. The culture of peace can be found through dialogue. It is the task of all religions to promote co-existence in society. Religious leaders although different in practice are bound by a common search for peace. Friendliness between religious and ethnic communities should be promoted through dialogue, thereby fighting the culture of contempt, which is often the root of violence between groups.
7. Mr. Chung Kwang Tong described several aspects, which has helped create and maintain religious harmony in Singapore, such as the enactment of legislative measures through the maintenance of the Religious Harmony Act. To maintain such harmony, the Government of Singapore also adopts policy measures and maximizes the role of social institutions. Furthermore, he stated that the Taoist Federation’s role in promoting religious harmony in Singapore can be seen through various activities, such as interfaith gathering, charity, youth empowerment and development activities, and tours and visits to various religious places of worship.
8. Mr. Yousif Al-Khoei OBE provided a general overview of interfaith relations in the UK, home to many different faiths and communities. A very good network of religious leaders exists within the country and discussions of solidarity are carried out regularly between religious figures. He underlined the need to separate political

influences in the dialogues of interfaith and to concentrate more at the grass root level. He emphasized the role of religious leaders to challenge cultural stereotype and engage in joint interfaith projects.

9. Mr. Nabil Mazhongping described the development of Islam as a minority religion in China. Several steps were taken in order to maintain and develop Islam as an important factor of the multi-cultural structure, including the promotion of the spirit of tolerance within Islam and the avoidance of factionalism within the religion.
10. The Second Roundtable Discussion chaired by Mr. Dian Wirengjurit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia, was done under the theme “Promoting Religious Tolerance in the Face of Global Interaction”. The Speakers for this session are Mr. Pablito Abad Baybado Jr, Assistant Professor 3, Institute of Religion, University of Santo Tomas, the Philippines; Prof. Dr. Phra Suthiworayan, Vice Rector for Foreign Affairs, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand; and Mr. Liu Jin Guang, Deputy Director-General, State Administration for Religious Affairs of P.R. China.
11. In his presentation, Mr. Pablito Abad Baybado called for the creation of a landscape of dialogue to bring about more dialogue. Moreover, in order to effectively fulfil its duty of bringing people to mutual understanding and harmony, the landscape must create opportunities for encounter between and among the various faith persuasions and must start with the young people. Landscape of dialogue can alter, transform and form young minds to be more open minded, appreciative, and to recognize and accept each other’s differences. It is from the landscape that the people derive the experience, the spirituality, and formation of brotherhood, sisterhood and mutual understanding.
12. Prof. Dr. Phra Suthiworayan explained that the Buddhist community in Thailand carries out various interfaith programs, such as seminars, dialogues, and educational youth programs, which include student tours to converse with various religions in Thailand. He also described the various efforts taken to create multicultural harmony in Southern Thailand.
13. Mr. Liu Jin Guang explained that China’s long history of upholding harmony has provided a rich growing soil for the tolerance and harmony among different religions and faith in China and this tradition has been carried forward in the new times. The Chinese government has also formed policies and laws to guarantee and maintain the tolerance and harmony of religions in China. These approaches are necessary for the Chinese religions to ensure religious tolerance and harmony in facing the impact of globalization and are a vital foundation for the Chinese

religions to make contribution to the promotion of global religious tolerance and harmony.

14. Dr, Taysir Abou Keshrif, Assistant to the Minister of Waqaf, Syria, special guest of Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia also shared his views on religious tolerance. Tolerance is a fundamental part of Islam and is a predominant part of the Holy Qur'an. Thus so, tolerance should be practiced and desired by mankind.
15. The Retreat exchanged views and experience of interfaith dialogue efforts in each other's ASEM Partner countries and the role of the government, religious organisations, religious leaders in promoting religious harmony and tolerance. Based on the two day discussions, a number of initial conclusions can be drawn:
  - a. The promotion of interfaith/intercultural dialogue has been practiced by ASEM Partners and is reflected within their national policy;
  - b. Interfaith Dialogue increases tolerance amongst the multicultural society of ASEM;
  - c. Religious leaders plays a crucial role in the promotion of dialogue and tolerance between differing faiths and cultures;
  - d. Such efforts should be developed continuously and should be further supported by all stakeholders;
  - e. Interfaith dialogue should include all faiths, beliefs and culture;
  - f. The use of language that results in cultural stereotype of other faiths and communities should be avoided. All other forms of racism and phobias should not be used, such as Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism and all other forms of marginalisation of communities.
16. As part of the Retreat, participants were also given an opportunity to experience firsthand harmonious religious life in Yogyakarta through on-site visits to different places of worship; Hindhu (Prambanan Temple), Protestant (Javanese Christian Gondokusuman Church), Muslim (Gedhe Kauman Mosque and Pabelan Islamic Boarding School), Catholic (Yogyakarta Kevikepan), and Buddha (Borobudur Temple).
17. Prior to the Closing Session, Prof. Atho Mudzhar Ph.D., Ministry of Religious Affairs, informed the Retreat of the Indonesian Government efforts in promoting

inter religious harmony, at both national and international level. He explained that one of the main aims of interfaith dialogue in Indonesia is to counter existing views which relates terrorism to a certain religion. For all religion teaches goodness.

18. At the Closing Session, the participants expressed their appreciation to the host for the excellent hospitality rendered by the people and authorities of Yogyakarta.
19. The Chair expressed his appreciation to the delegates for their active participation and valuable contributions to the discussion, and to further develop ASEM cooperation in interfaith and intercultural activities.
20. The results of the Meeting will be submitted to the 5th ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in Seoul, 23-25 September 2009.