

Welcoming the Stranger: A New Peace Council

Transcript ENG



Welcoming the Stranger: A New Peace Council Documents the process of the 2010 Guestbook event in India, “Welcoming the Stranger” in which over one hundred people of varying backgrounds come together to share their testimonies, poetry, song, prayer, and the launch of the Bangalore Peace Council.

This documentary was produced by Richard Kearney and Siddhartha with the support of Fireflies Ashram, The Guestbook Project, FEDINA and YMCA, Bangalore.

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Siddhartha: The Guestbook Project is an ongoing global program concerned with the relationship between host and stranger, violence and recon-ciliation, the citizen and the alien. The theme of the 2010 India event was "Welcoming the Stranger" in the context of interreligious conflict.

In the context of rising identity politics and interreligious conflict, the Guestbook Project brought together about a hundred people from different faith traditions to acknowledge the pain of prejudice and go through a healing process that included testimonies, poetry, song, and prayer. This event was jointly organized by the Guestbook Project and People Tree on Sunday, May the 30th, 2010. Participants were drawn from all sections of the population: Youth from poor urban and rural communities, people from the teaching and professional classes, leaders from the different religious traditions, and from the police department.

In recent times there has been a lot of bloodshed in India from interreligious conflict. Thousands of people have been killed in the past decade, and the trust between Hindus and Muslims, Hindus and Christians, Muslims and Christians—this trust has been breached. So, the Guestbook Project—this event— comes at an appropriate time. This is the time for us to launch the Bangalore Peace Council.

The discussions brought out perspectives from the different religions. Here are what some of the participants said:

Siraj: The Quran tells us to respect all life. You should not kill anybody. If you kill anybody it is as if you have killed that entire humanity. If you save the life of another person, it is as if you have save the life of that entire humanity. So, don't try to ascribe or attribute all the violence that is going on in different places in the world to a particular religion. No religion preaches hatred, no religion preaches murder, no religion

preaches violence. In this land we need to be much more respectful for each other's religion.

Amir Khan: Four of us from our mosque have come for this event. We came and participated and we feel good that hindus, muslims, and Sikhs have come forward to create harmony and oneness. After coming here and listening to everybody speak we feel very positive. In the future we must all strive to make interreligious peace a reality.

L. Revanasiddaiah: The whole world is a family. This is a basic philosophy, the inspirational words of the people who spoke of Islam in this land. But that is not what is happening. We are not able to live together side by side. [...] We have built our own worlds, our own areas, our own families, our own homes. Ultimately, we are digging our own graves.

Siddhartha: It was also an occasion to celebrate with song. There was time for prayer and worship as well. The main outcome of the event was the launching of the Bangalore Peace Council to work towards interreligious conflict transformation. The participants sat together in groups to outline the objectives, the goals, and the activities of the organization.

Mr. Revanasiddaiah, the former police commissioner of Bangalore city was elected the president of the Bangalore Peace Council. And Mr. Siddhartha, its secretary. So the Guestbook Project in India was not only a day for religious and community leaders to appreciate and celebrate their differences, but also an occasion to launch an important peace initiative: The Bangalore Peace Council.

This document has been provided by the Guestbook Project, an international project committed to transforming hostility into hospitality, enmity into empathy, and conflict into conversation.

For more information on the Guestbook Project, please visit guestbookproject.org