



WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

*LOVE OF GOD & LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR OR  
LOVE OF THE GOOD & LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR*

Annual UN Observance Week: Feb. 1-7

## FAITH WITHOUT BARRIERS

Based on the resolution of UN A/65/PV.34 World Interfaith Harmony Week is the first week of February of every year (01.02 – 07.02) and is aimed at achieving harmony between all people, no matter their faith.

Azerbaijan celebrated its first Interfaith Harmony Week this year in 2017. Farida Asgarzade and Nargiz A. Mammadli have carried out several projects that lasted a few days, gathering Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities together, with the help and support of the young HUMAN Foundation. The projects were the following:

07.02.2017 - Blood donation by representatives of different religions for the thalassemic children of all religious backgrounds.

08.02.2017 - An exhibition by children (aged 6-17) of different religious backgrounds who demonstrated their work together. The subject of the exhibition was how a representative of one faith describes and expresses another faith. There also was a brief introduction to Abrahamic religions during this event.

10.02.2017 - Visiting the residential school for children with physical and mental disabilities, with people from different religious backgrounds.

### FIRST EVENT – THE BLOOD DONATION:

First, Jews, Christians, and Muslims silently protested the bloodshed on religious basis by donating blood to the patients with thalassemia at the Central Blood Bank of Azerbaijan. The event started at 11 AM local time and lasted till 1 PM, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. Participants included members and employees of different religious organizations, one of them being a Rabbi from the Synagogue of Mountain Jews. The main purpose of this event was to show that our religions teach us not to shed blood, but to help those in need, and that we are ready to give our blood to people who need it no matter what their religion is.

### SECOND EVENT – THE ART EXHIBITION:

The project was followed by an art event that was held at Holiday INN Hotel on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February. It started at 11 AM local time and lasted for three hours. During the event children aged 6 to 17 who were students of Artlife Azerbaijan Art Center, and the Art School Named after Azim Azimzadeh were drawing pictures of how they see and imagine another faith. At the same time, representatives of each religion made a brief introduction to their faith. Among guests and





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speakers were people from different religious and social organizations and media, and just religious people who wanted to get familiar with other religions.

Azerbaijan is a multicultural and multi-religious country, with a rich history. Since ancient times, this place has been a center for many religions. It has been a holy place and center for Zoroastrianism for many centuries. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Albanian king Urnayr accepted Christianity and spread it in his kingdom (Albania was a historical kingdom that existed on the territory of present-day Azerbaijan). Thus, one of the oldest Churches in region – the Albanian Apostolic Church was established. Albania also had a big Jewish community, making these lands a homeland to many Jews for many years. During the early Islamic conquests in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Islam became the main religion of Azerbaijan. Followers of each religion have always lived in peace. All we wanted to show was that we have achieved peace. Harmony, love, respect, understanding, and friendship among religions is not something impossible or unreal. We have always had it here, and we wanted to show once more that being religious doesn't make you negative. God is the source of love and peace, and He commands us to love. As believers, we love Him, and all that He has created.

This was our main topic at the event, and the following people reminded us about it during their speeches:

First, Nargiz Askerova, the presenter of the event, greeted and welcomed everyone, and gave a short information about the World Interfaith Harmony Week. Later we started with representatives of Abrahamic religions in the historical order – Ms. Askerova introduced and invited our first speaker **the Rabbi of the Synagogue of Mountain Jews – Avraam Yakubov**. Rabbi Yakubov gave us information about Jews in Azerbaijan, about synagogues, and talked about his personal experiences. Our second speaker was **the Deputy Chairman of the Community of the European Jews (Ashkenazi) – Yevgeniy Brenneysen**. Mr. Brenneysen briefly talked about the history of European Jews in Azerbaijan and mentioned that the Jews here have never been oppressed, but have always been fairly treated by the government and the people. Jews have two synagogues (one for Mountain Jews, and the second for Ashkenazi), and two schools in Azerbaijan.





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Avraam Yakubov

Yevgeniy Brenneysen

Second, Ms. Askerova introduced and invited the Christian speakers. Azerbaijan has a very big Russian community, and consequently, a big Russian Orthodox Church and Orthodox community. Our third speaker was **the Spokesman for the Baku-Azerbaijan Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church – Archpriest Konstantin Pominov**. Father Konstantin started his speech with the words: “It is raining outside right now. It is raining on Jews and Christians, and Muslims equally. We are all human beings, and even more than that – we are all the children of the same father. We are the children of Adam.” His speech was about the common things among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and about God. As we already mentioned, Albanian kingdom adopted Christianity as the state religion and established Albanian Apostolic Church. There is a small Albanian-Udi Community still existing in Azerbaijan. Our fourth speaker was **the Chairman of the Albanian-Udi Christian Community – Robert Mobili**. Mr. Mobili proudly spoke about the Albanian-Udi community that preserved its language, religion, and culture for many ages, and the tolerance they have shown and seen for all this time. Azerbaijan has a very small Catholic community, and the representatives from there were also present among our guests. We would like to mention that there are Sunday schools in our country too.



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Konstantin Pominov



Robert Mobili

Third, Ms. Askerova introduced and invited the last speakers of the first part of our event. Our fifth speaker was the **Academician of the Institute of Oriental Studies at Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Philosophy – Elvusal Mammadov**. Mr. Mammadov talked about the misconceptions about Islam, especially radicalism and terrorism, and said they have nothing to do with religion, by giving examples from Quran and Hadith. Our sixth speaker was **the member of the Council of Qadi of the Religious Council of the Caucasus, Akhoond of the Bibiheybat Mosque – Rahib Babayev**. He gave examples of friendship among Muslim and Christians and Jews from the lives of Sahabah and our Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon them.



Elvusal Mammadov



Rahib Babayev

After the speeches were given, Ms. Askerova announced a short coffee break. During the coffee break, the speakers and guests had a chance to have friendly conversations and get to know one another better.



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The second part started with the speech of **the Representative of Tatar Diaspora, the Deputy Chairman of the “Tatarstan” Public Union, the Chief Editor of InCity.Az, the portal of information and culture – Emin Ramazanov**. Mr. Ramazanov talked about tolerance, harmony, and peace in our country on the example of Tatars who have always lived here peacefully. We continued with another ethnic group living in Azerbaijan, the Cossacks. Our eighth speaker was **the President of the Cossack Union of Azerbaijan – Chieftain Sergey Samuylov**. Chieftain Samuylov also talked about how different nations have always lived here in harmony, and how everyone could keep their cultures, traditions, religions and languages, and have very strong relations with locals.



Emin Ramazanov

Sergey Samuylov

Speaking about culture, we had a very important person in this field among our speakers. Our ninth speaker was **the professor of Culturology and Chair of the History Department at the Academy of Public Administration, founder of Culturology in Azerbaijan, and the President of the Cultural Association “Simurgh” – Fuad Mammadov**. The speech of Mr. Mammadov was about faith, and he mentioned a very popular verse from the Bible, “What does it profit if someone says he has faith but does not have works? A man is justified by works, and not by faith only. As the body without the spirit is dead, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” He called people to help, and be good to everyone no matter their religion.





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Fuad Mammadov



Nijat Mammadli

Our tenth speaker was **the Head of the Foreign Relations Department of the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations – Nijat Mammadli**. SCWRO has supported our idea of holding these events and celebrating Interfaith Harmony Week in Azerbaijan from the beginning. Mr. Mammadli expressed the support from the side of government and praised the idea. He also talked about his personal experiences, especially about the pilgrimage to Holy Mecca. He said it really doesn't matter what your race, nationality, or gender is. God commands to love all, and we do.

Later we had a very special guest from Russia, **Andrey Krupin and "Tandem of Baku"**. Mr. Krupin is a Russian singer who uses religious motives in his songs. Before performing his songs, he talked about Saint Nicholas and encouraged people to do good deeds.



Andrey Krupin



Nargiz A. Mammadli

The last speaker was **Nargiz A. Mammadli, one of the organizers of the Interfaith Harmony Week in Azerbaijan**. Ms. Mammadli talked about the behind-the-scenes preparations, worries,





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and work. She finished her speech with the words: “We didn’t come together to call people to be tolerant and to love their neighbor. We came together to show that we have already achieved peace, and we only wish to keep it going the way it is now.”

The event ended with the children showing their works about how they see and express the other faith. The children were the students of Artlife Azerbaijan Art Center, and the Art School Named after Azim Azimzadeh. The children also expressed their ideas about how they see religions and explained what they wanted to say with their pictures. Ms. Askerova thanked the speakers and the guests and ended the event.

### THIRD EVENT – VISITING THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DISABILITIES

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, at 11.30 AM local time, several representatives of Abrahamic religions visited the residential school for children with physical and mental disabilities. Among participants, there was **a nun from Catholic Church in Azerbaijan – Sister Andrea**. Participants went to Shagan municipality, where the residential school was located. They brought food with themselves. On lunch time, participants had lunch together with the children and fed those who couldn’t eat their food themselves. To not invade the privacy of the children, we were not allowed to make videos, but could take pictures and made a group photo at the end of the event.

### ABOUT US:

**Farida Asgarzade**, born in 1992, is a lecturer at Baku State University, Faculty of International Relations and Economics, and the founder of HUMAN Foundation and an Ambassador of One Young World. She has graduated from Baku State University, Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy, and earned a master’s degree in Business Administration at Azerbaijani State Economic University. Her education in Diplomacy and International Business, and active involvement in social activities, especially an interest in social business made her confident enough to establish a social entrepreneurship called HUMAN Foundation. She has also attended various conferences and summits, such as 3rd Think Tanks Forum of the Organization of Islamic Conference, Emirates International Model UN, Moscow International Model UN, Vienna International Model UN, One Young World in Canada, and organized projects such as Boccia Championships by Azerbaijan National Paralympic Committee.

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**Nargiz A. Mammadli**, born in 1993, is a graduate of Baku State University, Faculty of Theology. She is, currently, earning a master's degree in Communication, Public Relations at Turiba University. Being a religious person and having an interest and a degree in Religious Studies, she plans to work as an advisor on interreligious issues. She has been a member of several organizations, such as AIESEC, Azerbaijan Arabists Network, HUMAN Foundation, and participated in many projects, including projects at the Academy of International Relations, Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation - an affiliated institution to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the International Moderation Centre in Kuwait, Human Resources Academy, Start-Up Fest, and WoWoman – Women Empowerment Platform.

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#### **About HUMAN Foundation:**

HUMAN Foundation is a union of people irrespective of nationality, religion, and race. It is a foundation where everybody continuously shares their knowledge, skills, kindness, support and love. HUMAN Foundation has organized and successfully accomplished social development projects such as "You Can", "Life Guide" - Mentorship Program, "HUMAN Deaf Community", "HUMAN Art", "HUMAN Woman", "HUMAN against Cancer" and "HUMAN Interfaith". Team members are young and experienced people who share an uninhibited passion in making the world more equal, tolerant and developed.

<http://www.hmnfund.org>

**Baku, Azerbaijan.**

**2017**

