



Bangladesh Peace & Harmony Week 2017

in accord with

United Nations (UN) World Interfaith Harmony Week 2017

annual UN observance week February 1-7

Local Organizer

Gen Lab

Global Partner

ACWAY, United Kingdom (HQ)



Project Details and Scope of Work

Preface:

"Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels"

- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals No.16

Globalization has shrunk our planet. Through the emergence of world citizenship, we are witnessing the intermingling of people on a worldwide scale that has never occurred before. Today, we come across a different religionist and even a non-religionist very often in our community. Nowadays, it is impossible to live in a separate place, far from the people of other religions. The war-torn world and its people are tired of clashes due to religions. They are looking for peace. Interfaith dialogue is the messenger of that peace and harmony.

Bangladesh, despite being a Muslim majority nation, boasts a diverse demography of multicultural ethnic groups. Besides Islam, a significant percentage of the population adheres to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Also present are the indigenous groups of people. According to the 2011 census, Bangladesh is home to 27 different ethnic groups.

The history of Bangladesh has always been of a tradition of pluralism, of people from various religious and cultural origins living together in interreligious harmony. Yet, unwanted developments in the political sphere, and inequality in the share of natural resources and disputes often have led to a conflict of interest and tension amongst the various religious and cultural groups. Extremist views have often taken ugly turns with incidences of attacks on people of minor religious groups and communities. This has instilled a climate of fear and intolerance within the communities, disrupting social harmony.

Evidently, there is scope to work on interreligious and intercultural issues in Bangladesh. The present generation needs to be understanding of diverse cultures, empathetic towards others and be instilled with values of togetherness which would help create a better society.





'Bridging the Divides - Bangladesh Peace & Harmony Week 2017' aimed to attain intercultural tolerance through building strong relationships among young people coming from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Young people can be powerful ambassadors of dialogue. Through social media, and in real life, they are influential change makers. We need them to speak for peace, and tolerance, at a time when their peers are being poisoned by hate speech and seduced by divisive discourse. Our conference is designed to help them advocate for pluralism.

The weeklong activity took place in Dhaka, from 1st to 7th February of 2017. In this week, participants from varying beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and educational backgrounds got the opportunity to voice their opinions, participate in various competitions, learn about diverse religious and faith based backgrounds through cultural events, portray human livelihood through photography, discuss their ideas and concerns on the social issues associated with inter-religion, intra-religion and inter-culture.

The weeklong activity brought together students from schools, colleges and universities; teachers, youth organizations, civil society under one roof. The key objective of the week was to encourage participation of Bangladeshi youth in an interfaith dialogue, increase understanding of cultural diversity and by doing so, attain interfaith and intercultural tolerance in Bangladesh.



Event Details and Timeframe

1st February 2017

Rendezvous among Muslims and Hindus in Hindu Festivals

It was a holy day for our Hindu community friends in Bangladesh as it was a religious day for them commemorating a major day of worship for Goddess of knowledge and wisdom, Goddess Saraswati. We decided to take a team from the Muslim community and attend the celebration. We tried to spread the message of the day among all and at the end all of us from both religions took part in the cultural celebration and food exchange. We visited different temples and academic institutions which celebrated the festival. This program influenced us to think beyond our own religious borders and we have learnt to respect other religious opinions and appreciate the ways they lead their lives. The friendship and bond we created among Muslim and Hindu friends was certainly noteworthy.

- Every religion celebrates their holy days differently but one thing that they all have in common is that people get together and celebrate. This celebration, however, must not be limited to people who follow a specific set of beliefs, and should be open to all. When people from different religious backgrounds participate in the celebration of a holiday of a religion different to their own, they get first-hand experience of what the faith is really like, and helps to create a bond between the two religious groups. This is exactly what Gen Lab had aimed to do and had successfully achieved through this rendezvous.





2nd February 2017

Soul Search (Cultural Night)

Music has long been an expression of people from different cultures around the world. The oldest artefacts that show people playing musical instruments are found in Asia and are around four thousand years old. Other archaeological findings suggest that different cultures around the world have always focused on their own special instruments and unique methods of playing them. However, no matter how much music may have differed in different parts of the world, it seems that music served a general common purpose: to bring people together.



Different faiths have tunes that connect with the soul and bring a common tranquil environment that brings peace of mind. With the songs, music the cultural coexistence of Bengal which got portrayed. Sufi, Kafi, Kirtan, folk, Marfati, Lalon, they have given the message of harmony. The love and peace that we perceive from tunes will be spread from the music and interpretation with music.

Religion has a long-held role in the history of music. It comes to no surprise that music was widely used in temples and religious ceremonies throughout the world. The involvement of community in each culture has caused music to evolve in a way that is unique to each one.

Gen Lab also believes that music can bring all religions, cultures and virtues in an unparalleled tune. Inspired by the theme of cooperative coexistence, we organized a musical event under the name of "Soul Search" where promising youth bands from renowned institutes and one national singer presented some authentic Sufi, Boul & Marfoti songs and moreover discussed the beauty of religious diversity and coexistence of different cultures.

- Religion might not be the place you'd think to look when in search of music, but hymns and other religious songs have been around for as long as religion. As the same religion makes its way through different cultures, its music is moulded into many different forms. "Soul





Search” had been organised in an attempt to bring together different kinds of music from various faiths and cultures to showcase how melodious and beautiful every form of music can be, and how music holds the power to bring people together, and induce peace and harmony.



3rd February 2017

Art Competition among School Kids

There was an art competition among the school kids on a theme related to interfaith harmony and peace. The participating kids were from the ages of 5-12. Through this art competition, we tried to promote the concept of harmony & peace among a diverse group of people.

We gave prizes to the best three pieces of art among the participants. We also shared these paintings among partners, supporters and youth organizations to promote the concept of peace among different faiths and beliefs.

This art competition not only created awareness among children but also made their parents conscious about peaceful coexistence among diverse groups of people. Partnership was established among different art schools of Dhaka. We believe that kids are our future and hence their encouragement in such social causes from a young age is important.





- Children have the purest of minds and the brightest of ideas but their way of expression is different from adults. Rather than putting their thoughts into words, most children prefer letting their imagination go wild with colours in hand. This art competition had been organised in order to introduce young minds to the concept of cultural diversity, interfaith and peaceful coexistence. We are in dire need of more people working towards peace and harmony, and hopefully these children will grow up to be enthusiastic about these issues.



5th February 2017 Essay Competition

As one of our goals are to create a space for the freethinking youth, a place where youth can take part in discussions and share their opinions on the social problems they persistently face. Gen Lab is an organization dedicated to create a platform for Bangladeshi youth to engage in social development process of the country by means of letting youths voice their idea and implement plans to eradicate the targeted problem.



With a light of our previous experiences and huge response from youths, we again called for Essays from youth during the celebration of 'Bridging the Divides - Bangladesh Peace & Harmony Week 2017'. This initiative aimed to engage youth to share their insight to achieve peace and social harmony. It helped to bring out positivity in them and our youths can use this medium to channel their thoughts on the recent incidence of intolerance and violence happening all around the world. Our main motive was to reach as many youths as possible.

- When it comes to issues like interfaith, the youth has a voice, but no real platform to use it. Therefore, we at Gen Lad decided to organise an essay competition directed towards the youth, encouraging them to write about their opinions on religious and cultural intolerance, and how they think peaceful coexistence can be achieved. This was the perfect way to exercise the youth's minds and get the message through that inter-religious and intercultural harmony is a requirement we need to fulfil as soon as possible.





6th -20th February 2017

Soft Launch of Photography Exhibition (Contest)

Photography contest and exhibition was an important part of our program. We promoted this contest online and through different photography institute, clubs & societies. The photographs were collected through online submission along with a small description of the photo. The theme of the photography contest was based on our country, its diversity and promoting peace among all.





The photos collected through the online submission was sorted and judged by the renowned photographers of the country. The best three photos got awarded with crest, certificate in the closing ceremony. The best twenty photos were printed and showcased in EMK Center for around two weeks. The photography exhibition had a grand opening in presence of US Ambassador to Bangladesh, Mercia Bernicat and Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam, Founder Chairperson, Department of World Religion & Culture, Dhaka University.

The photographs were also published online through our website, social media accounts. The best photographs got published in printing media. There was a brochure containing all the selected photographs along with the stories behind them. Through this photography contest and exhibition we reached the heart of the people with the concept of togetherness among different faiths and diverse background. We believe this photography contest bring out the true diversity prevailing in our country and make us visualize the importance of harmony, peace and togetherness to make the world a better place.

- A powerful photograph can speak a thousand words. Cultural diversity is something our country possesses in a great deal, but not many people notice it. To bring this topic into the spotlight, photographers were encouraged to capture these moments of diversity so they could be showcased in our exhibition to show as many people as we can how important it is to be tolerant towards every religion and culture.







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7th February 2017

Film Festival

Religion often plays an important role in film, but does film play an important role in religion? Perhaps the better question is, “Does film play an important role in the way people understand religious concepts? Although it may be that the best reasons for “going to the movies” are to be entertained and eat popcorn, understanding a film is actually quite involved. Movies not only reflect life, they also have the capability of shaping our norms, values, attitudes, and perception of life. Through the



media of film, one can find stories of practically anything imaginable and some things unimaginable. The moviemakers can use their art to entertain, to promote political agendas, peaceful coexistence, to educate harmony of society and culture, and to present life as it is, was, or could be. They can present truth, truth as they interpret it, or simply ignore truth altogether. A movie can be a work of fiction, non-fiction, or anything in-between. So, Gen Lab believe that film could be one of the vital tool to spread out the message of interfaith also.

Screened Films:

1. **Baraka** is a documentary film with no narrative or voice-over. It explores themes via a kaleidoscopic compilation of natural events, life, human activities and technological phenomena shot in 24 countries on six continents over a 14-month period. The film is Ron Fricke’s follow-up to Godfrey Reggio’s similar non-verbal documentary film Koyaanisqatsi. Fricke was cinematographer and collaborator on



Reggio's film, and for Baraka he struck out on his own to polish and expand the photographic techniques used on Koyaanisqatsi. Shot in 70mm, it includes a mixture of photographic styles including slow motion and time-lapse. To execute the film's time-lapse sequences, Fricke had a special camera built that combined time-lapse photography with perfectly controlled movements. Locations featured include the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Ryoan temple in Kyoto, Lake Natron in Tanzania, burning oil fields in Kuwait, the smouldering precipice of an active volcano, a busy subway terminal, tribal celebrations of the Maasai in Kenya, and chanting monks in the Dip Tse Chok Ling monastery.



The film features a number of long tracking shots through various settings, including Auschwitz and Tuol Sleng, over photos of the people involved, past skulls stacked in a room, to a spread of bones. It suggests a universal cultural perspective: a shot of an elaborate tattoo on a bathing Japanese yakuza precedes a view of tribal paint.

2. **Mr. and Mrs. Iyer:** Meenakshi Iyer (Konkona Sen Sharma), with her infant son, Santhanam, embarks on a bus journey to return to her husband, from her parents' place. At the bus station, Meenakshi and Raja Chowdhury (Rahul Bose) get introduced to each other through a common friend. Raja, a wildlife photographer, is requested by Meenakshi's parents to look after their daughter and baby grandson during the journey. The passengers of the bus include a boisterous group of youngsters, two Sikh men, an elderly Muslim couple, a young couple high on romance, a mentally challenged boy and his mother, and some card-playing men. The bus faces a roadblock and the bus driver attempts a detour, but is stopped by traffic jam caused by sectarian violence between Hindus and Muslims in nearby areas. Raja reveals his Muslim identity to Meenakshi. As someone who comes from a high caste and conservative Hindu Brahmin family, Meenakshi shudders at the very fact that during



their travel she drank water offered by Raja, a Muslim. "Please. Don't touch me" is her shocked reply. Raja contemplates leaving the bus, but is forced to get inside the bus by the patrolling police who informs that a curfew has been declared due to the riot. After the police leaves to scout other areas, a rioting Hindu mob arrives and forcibly enters the bus. They begin interrogating passengers about their religious identities and when in doubt, they even resort to check if the person is circumcised. Later the movie got a dramatized change and the Hindu woman saved the life of the Muslim.

- Films hold the power of captivating the audience and showing them entirely new perspectives, while also entertaining them. We therefore decided that the best way to convey our message of peace and harmony would be through screening films that capture cultural diversity and interfaith perfectly. The films were thought-provoking, which is what the main aim was: to get people to be concerned about interfaith and hence encourage them to work towards creating the peaceful world that we deserve.



Media Presence



US Ambassador to Dhaka Marcia Bernicat inaugurated the Bangladesh Peace & Harmony Week 2017 Photo Exhibition On February 6. The exhibition, at EMK Center for Public Services & Arts is a part of the week long events commemorating UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2017. Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam, founding chair of the Department of World Religions and Culture at Dhaka University and Ahmed Ashfaqur Rahman, president of Junior Chambers International, Bangladesh were present at the inauguration. The photography contest introduced 20 best photographs mostly focusing on religious coexistence and rich cultural ethnicity of Bangladesh.

Media Coverage-The Daily Star 7th February- 2017

Gen Lab celebrates UN Interfaith Harmony Week 2017



After organising 'Soul Search', a musical event to celebrate interreligious relations, an art competition was held for the students of We Foundation School. The Gen Lab organised the event, 'Bangladesh Peace & Harmony Week 2017 Photo Exhibition.' It was part of UN Interfaith Harmony Week 2017 celebration. The exhibition was inaugurated on February 6 at EMK Centre and it will run until the February 20. The United nation officially observes the first week of February as interfaith harmony week in order to raise awareness on inter religious harmony. In accordance to the UN event, Gen Lab, a youth led social enterprise in Bangladesh is holding a series of event including the photo exhibition.

The Gen Lab's wedding event included a musical night, art competition, photo exhibition and essay contest. Participants from different religious, cultural and educational backgrounds got to voice their opinions and exchange knowledge about inter religious harmony. They also gained

in-depth knowledge about the way religious practices enriched our culture. They got to experience the livelihood of individuals from different religious back grounds through

photographs. In essays, they shared their ideas of establishing interfaith harmony.

The photo exhibition was inaugurated by US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat. The



guest of honour was Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam, founding Chairperson, Department of World Religion and Culture, University of Dhaka. The president of Junior Chambers International Bangladesh, Ahmed Ashfaqur Rahman was also present at the event. The exhibit displays a total of 20 photographs which portrays the coexistence of different religions. The exhibition shows how such coexistence is part of South Asian historical tradition. It also displays the rich and vibrant ethnic diversity of Bangladesh.

Young photographers from different institutions expressed their ideas and stories behind their photos. They showcased century old Bangladeshi culture, yet demonstrated their present day status in our society.

The inauguration was followed by an award ceremony. The US ambassador was not present for this segment. Dr. Kazi Nurul Islam mentioned about his lifelong activity in promoting peace, religious and cultural harmony. He emphasised that the humanity should stand stronger than any so called division or divides. The diverse nature of religion or faith made it more beautiful to live in. The founder of Gen Lab, Ratul Dev said, 'Our country is crossing a pivotal stage in terms of youth development. In surge of extreme religious violence, it is now clear that today's youth will decide the future of our country whether we brand ourselves as a secular Bangladesh believing in coexistence and harmony or a nation blind with primitive notions leading violence and terrorism. I believe the celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week in Bangladesh is a step forward for Bangladeshi youth towards peaceful coexistence and religious harmony.'

The winners of the essay competition were Sopheia Uchi Biwas, Tania Khandaker Prova and Tanjin-Ul-Islam. They were first, second and third respectively. Photo Contest Winners were Hasan Mahmud Prottoy was first, Ehsanul Siddiq Aranya was second and Faria Talukder was third. *

- Sheikh Sadaf Tassin

Media Coverage-New Age-February12-2017



Gen Lab Celebrates UN Interfaith Harmony Week 2017



the importance of religious tolerance throughout their performances. Mebedi Hasan Dew, one of the performers from BRAC University said about the event. 'The event was about peace and harmony. As musicians, our main goal is to spread our music to the world and create a bond through that music. It was a fun event. We along with NSU team and Joy Shahrir did a few songs. Everyone cheered. This is a way of creating bond and spreading harmony. The event if goes properly can surely create an impact among the vast population.'

The next day an art competition was held amongst the students of We Foundation School on the theme, interfaith harmony and peace. Founder of Dreamcast Marketing & Communications Mohiuddin Chowdhury Shaon and JCI Dhaka North President Delwar Hossain were guest of honor. 30

children participated who were given a talk on inter religious tolerance. This is believed to not only make them aware on this issue but their families as well.

Overall about the event Kafil Dev, the founder and president of Gen Lab said, 'Our country is crossing a pivotal stage in terms of youth development. In surge of extreme religious violence, it is now clear that today's youth will decide the future of our country whether we brand ourselves as a secular Bangladesh believing in coexistence and harmony or a nation blind with primitive notions leading violence and terrorism. I believe the celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week in Bangladesh is a step forward for Bangladeshi youth towards peaceful coexistence and religious harmony.'*

- Sheikh Sadaf Tasin

Even though Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country there are large communities of Hindus, Buddhists and Christians living in harmony along each other. However, there are instances of religious discrimination and violence which leaves a mark on the brotherhood that the people of this country share. In order to raise awareness about religious tolerance, Gen Lab celebrated UN Interfaith Harmony Week 2017. To do so they held 'Bridging the Divides - Bangladesh Peace & Harmony Week 2017' from February 1 to February 7, 2017. The aim is to increase inter religious tolerance amongst the youth by dialogue and discussion within people from various backgrounds and cultures. Gen Lab, a Bangladeshi youth organization, is working on the promotion and event management, overall coordination for the Peace & Harmony Week and the event is

being held in accordance to the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week 2017 and will be registered under UN World Interfaith Harmony Week global events database. Two of the main events, 'Soul Search' and 'Art Competition among School Kids' took place on February 2 and 3 respectively.

'Soul Search' was a musical night, held in the EMK center on February 2, evening. The purpose of it was to show the importance of music; to portray how vital a role religion plays in the order to influence the history of music in this part of the world and to show how the differences between the communities can be resolve by music. Students from North South University, BRAC University and renowned musician Joy Shahrir performed several Sufi, Baul & Marfati, Folk, Classical numbers to entertain the audience. They also discussed



Media Coverage-New Age-February 5-2017



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12:00 AM, February 16, 2017 / LAST MODIFIED: 12:00 AM, February 16, 2017

Bridging the Divides

Observing World Interfaith Peace and Harmony Week

Anupoma Joyeeta Joyee

Since October 2010, the United Nations has adopted the first week of February as World Interfaith Peace and Harmony Week. Bangladesh's long fostered culture of religious harmony is under a threat now more than ever. Gen Lab, a youth organisation aims to create a platform for youth to engage in social development process of the country by acting together to bring about positive change. "Bridging the Divides - Bangladesh Peace & Harmony Week" has been Gen Lab's success story. With a view to attaining intercultural tolerance among young people coming from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, it is a platform to speak for peace, and tolerance, at a time when their peers are being poisoned by hate speech and seduced by divisive discourse. Bridging the Divides is an award-winning project of KAICIID, Morocco grant by Anupoma Niloya Troyee who is the Bangladeshi peace ambassador of A Common Word Among the Youth.



On February 2, a cultural programme called Soul Search set the tone for the week. Bangladeshis have, since time immemorial, united to the rhythm of Sufi, Kafi, Kirtan, folk, Lalon, Marfati which convey the message of humanity and peace. Young performers from NSU and BRACU and musician Joy Shahriar offered some Sufi, Baul & Marfati, folk, classical songs while giving insights behind their lyrics, beauty of religious diversity and synchronicity of different cultures.

Following this event, an art competition among school kids on the theme of interfaith harmony was conducted the next day in We Foundation School. The aim was to sow the seeds of intercultural diversity in the young minds of children from grade 1 to 3. On February 6, US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat inaugurated the photo exhibition. The exhibition introduced 20 best photographs focusing religious coexistence and rich cultural ethnicity of Bangladesh. During the award giving ceremony, awards were handed over to the winners of essay competition as well – school-goers who demonstrated unprecedented consideration of the theme. Ratul Dev, founder of Gen Lab, said, "In surge of extreme religious violence, it is now clear that today's youth will decide the future of our country whether we brand ourselves as a secular Bangladesh believing in coexistence and harmony or a nation blind with primitive notions leading violence and terrorism."

Media Coverage-The Daily Star Feb 16-2017





About the Organizer

Gen Lab

Gen Lab aims to create a platform for Bangladeshi youth to engage in social development process of the country by means of acting together to bring about positive change. Gen Lab believes in the potential of young change agents and understands that a whole generation of youth working together can create the impetus that is required to build the nation we all have dreamt and long for. Young people bring in fresh perspectives, innovative ways to look at things and when provided with directions and adequate support they can generate ideas to mitigate even the most pressing social issues that currently prevail in this country. Gen Lab thinks of itself as a space for the freethinking Bangladeshi youth, a place where they can take part in discussions and share their opinions on the social problems they persistently face, brainstorm to design actions plans to combat the problems and eventually see off the implementation of the plan in eradicating the targeted problem. This, Gen Lab proposes can be done through getting the youth involved in funded projects that concern the social development, or by enabling the youth to create their own enterprise which would address the social needs. For Gen Lab, the goal is to reach the youth, both urban and rural, and include them in the process of bringing change in important areas – education, environment, gender, governance and health, that affect their lives and that of the future generation. Gen Lab then wants to approach the youth, even beyond the domestic boundary, in order to create an international network of change agents and address the issues of global affair, and in doing so, envisions of a world that is free of inequality and injustice, conflict and unrest.

Sustainability is one of the essential values of Gen Lab and it resonates in the organization's concern for bringing changes that would positively affect the lives of the future generation. Gen Lab aspires to be a link between the present generation of youth and that of the future while drawing inspiration from the one that has passed, of the elders, who had once helped create this nation from the scratch.

WWW.GEN-LAB.ORG





About the Global Partner

ACWAY

'A Common Word Among the Youth', is a movement the aim is to develop a multi-religious network of active youth who will deliver grass-root activities such that they become the agents of change for the coming generations. This is an initiative by Right Start Foundation (RSFI),UK that believes in the role young people can play in initiating change and translating international issues into local community activities. There are several initiatives that tackle the issue of inter-faith dialogue, the majority of which involve senior faith scholars and leaders.

ACWAY
A Common Word Among the Youth

One of the most successful and notable initiatives is that of 'A Common Word'. This initiative was a historic agreement that gave the right keynote for relations between different religions in the 21st century. It has received numerous awards, has been the basis for government resolutions and peace initiatives, and gave birth to the **UN World Interfaith Harmony Week**.

On the back of RSFI's involvement in 'A Common Word', we want to take this initiative further by:

- Involving more religions (At least 5 of the worlds' major religions)
- Involving young people (18-35 age criterion) to be the agents of change through
- Civic action as the tangible outcome for the community

WWW.ACWAY.ORG





For Further Details

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