



Activity Detail	Self Initiative of Youth Development Foundation
Activity Title:	Promoting Interfaith Harmony through Diversity Tour & Plantation for Peace
Activity Location:	Shiri Krishna Mandir, Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Shahi Masjid, Raiwind Diocese, Church of Pakistan - Lahore
Activity Date:	02 February 2022

### Activity Summary

To celebrate diversity and disseminate the message of interfaith harmony, Youth Development Foundation (YDF), in close coordination with the Ministry of Human Rights, Minorities Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Punjab, hosted a diversity tour of religious places of different religions, including Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity. YDF invited young peacemakers from diverse religious backgrounds like Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Christian to be part of this diversity tour with a vision to promote togetherness and contribute to UN World Interfaith Harmony Week. The youth and YDF team visited the following religious and historical places during the diversity tour.

- Shiri Krishna Mandir Ravi Road Lahore
- Samadhi Raja Ranjeet Singh Lahore
- Gurdwara Dera Sahib Shahi Qila Lahore
- The Royal Mosque Lahore
- Raiwind Diocese, Church of Pakistan - Lahore

During the diversity, tour the young peacemakers (students of different universities having diverse religious backgrounds) got the opportunity to interact with the religious leaders of different faiths and discourse the importance of interfaith harmony among the communities of different beliefs. As a result, valuable information about all the religions and their peace perspective was exchanged. In addition, other peacebuilding and religious harmony topics became under discussion. The participants reinforced the need for religious harmony for a peaceful and sustainable co-existence.

### Proceedings

#### Welcome and Tour Orientation

YDF team welcomed the young peacemakers at the YDF office, where team members oriented them about the objectives of the diversity tour and were served with hi-tea. Then, the whole day diversity tour schedule was shared with the young peacemakers, and everyone expressed great enthusiasm to contribute to UN World Interfaith Harmony Week through the activity. Young peacemakers were from diverse religious backgrounds, including Muslim, Sikh, Christian, and Hindu; each denomination took responsibility to host the tour during the visit of their religious places. YDF organized a van for the tour and displayed a "Plantation for Peace



and Diversity Visit” banner. The diversity tour started from the YDF office visiting the following religious places of a different faith.

**Shiri Krishna Mandir:** As the first destination of this diversity tour, participants visited Shiri Krishna Mandir at Ravi Road Lahore. The Pandit of the Mandir Kashi Raam welcomed the participants at the Mandir. The tour leader Ms Urooj Jahangir from YDF, presented sweets to the Mandir administration. Ms Roshini Kumari (Hindu), one of the young peacemakers, took the lead at Mandir and explained Hinduism and its preachings for peace and harmony to the participants. She shared that peace is essential and core teachings in Hinduism. She referred to the holy book Gita as a key to achieving peace and harmony. To remove their misconceptions, participants of the tour asked several questions from Roshini Kumari, to which she replied in entirely satisfactory manners by presenting Hinduism as a religion of tolerance. Participants’ misconceptions were dispelled, and they thanked Roshini Kumari for sharing about all the information Hinduism. Then, they went to the holy place where the Hindus worship their Gods. An environment of peace, harmony and joyfulness was created due to understanding developed after the briefing and questions answer session. Finally, participants ate prasad presented by the Mandir administration and gifted a plant to the Mandir as a gesture of peace.

**Samadhi Raja Ranjeet Singh & Gurdwara Dera Sahib:** Continuing the tour, participants headed towards the Samadhi of Raja Ranjeet Singh (Sikh historical emperors, also followed as religious Sikh religious leader). Upon reaching there, Balbir Singh from the Sikh community, one of the diversity tour participants, started guiding and sharing information about Sikhism and its notions of peace and harmony. He shared that Sikhism does not believe in war, but it is only accepted as a final resort. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, has shown the peaceful method that involves dialogue and non-violence approaches. Participants visited the Samadhi of Raja Ranjeet Singh after washing their feet and taking peace of cloth on their heads to respect the values of the Sikh religion. The participants asked different questions about Sikhism, which Balbir Singh answered satisfactorily. As a result, participants removed their misunderstandings and fallacies about the Sikh religion and learned about the peaceful leverage being promoted by the followers of the Sikh religion.

Meanwhile, Mahindar Pal Singh (a famous cricketer of Pakistan) arrived there. He took the troupe to the **Gurdwara Dera Sahib** and introduced them to the importance of Gurdwara Dera Sahib for Sikhism followers. Mahindar Pal, while talking about interfaith harmony, explained that not any religion is wrong. Still, its follower can be, so to blame any religion for the act of violence and intolerance is inappropriate. Meeting with Mahindar Pal and his discourse increased participants' knowledge and confiscated their misconceptions and myths. Finally, the participants presented the sweet to the Gurdwara administration, ate parsad from there, and planted a sapling as a gesture of peace.

**The Royal Mosque:** Next stop of the participants was the Badshahi Mosque (Royal Mosque of Lahore), a historical religious place of Muslims. One of the Muslim participants, Abu Bakar, took the lead and provided a glimpse of Islam and peace. He enlightened the Islamic preachings and reinforcements of peace and tolerance in society. Participants of other religions asked a



few questions to clear their concepts and mythologies. Abu Bakar shared that Islam keeps the peace as the eternal constitution. Islam, like other religions, invites people to live a peaceful life with co-existence, justice, respect, acceptance and tolerance. Next, participants visited the Royal Mosque and got familiar with its history. Finally, the participants presented sweet to the Royal Mosque Administration and planted a sapling there to grow one more tree in the name of peace.

**Raiwind Diocese, Church of Pakistan:** As a last stay of the day, participants reached Raiwind Diocese, Church of Pakistan situated at Waris Road Lahore. Pastor Saleem Khokhar warmly welcomed the young peacemakers and took them inside the Church, where they observed the tranquillity and watched historical holy pictures. Pastor Saleem Khokhar introduced the young peacemakers to basic notions of Christianity that strongly link peace and co-existence. He shared the constructive contribution of the Christian community, making the country peaceful and prospering. Participants shared their misconceptions which Paster Saleem Khokhar satisfactorily addressed. Young peace leaders were provided with the knowledge to support their vision of peacebuilding among the communities of different faiths. Pastor Saleem Khokhar extended the support from the Church side to strengthen the efforts of young peacemakers promoting interfaith harmony and constructive narrative in the society. Finally, the participants presented sweet to the Church administration, planted a sapling, and completed the campaign of plantation for peace and diversity tour.

The diversity tour was completed here, and the young peacemakers returned to the Youth Development Foundation office. Young peacemakers shared their feedback through video messages appreciating the initiative of promoting co-existence and contributing to the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week to support the religious harmony efforts in the globe.

### Key Achievements

- YDF successfully organized a diversity tour and plantation for peace by engaging young peacemakers from different faiths, including Sikh, Hindu, Christian and Muslim.
- YDF celebrated the diversity to contribute to UN World Interfaith Harmony Week.
- Young peacemakers were provided with knowledge about the peace-promoting ideologies in different faiths that removed their misconceptions and strengthened their vision of peace promotion.
- Ministry of Human Rights, Minority Affairs and Interfaith Harmony were taken onboard for the collaborative peacebuilding efforts in Punjab.
- The religious leaders of different faiths extended their support for peace promotion activities and to make society harmonious with co-existence.
- Although YDF has been involved in interfaith harmony promotion activities for more than ten years, contributing to UN World Interfaith Harmony Week broadened its vision.
- Young Peacemakers connected to an active stakeholder, YDF, to collaborate for future initiatives of promoting interfaith harmony and co-existence.

### Quotes



- I appreciate YDF for providing us with the opportunity of diversity tours that has removed our misconceptions, and the discussions have increased our interaction with people of other faiths, especially religious leaders. (Roshini Kumari, a Hindu participant)
- Being Muslim, I rarely get a chance to interact with people of other religions; today, a diversity visit allowed me to learn about other faiths' ideologies. I will continue meeting with communities of other faiths as today's opportunity has fascinated me about diversity and peaceful co-existence. (Muhammad Abu Bakar, a student of Punjab University)
- Today, the inclusivity tool has sensitized us a lot and visiting the Mandir, Gurdwara, Mosque, and Church left us mindful that being one nation, we should live together without differences of the religious base. (Areeba, a student of International Relations)
- Today's initiative of diversity tour by YDF has taught me how to live together irrespective of being from different religions. I strongly felt the element of togetherness today, and such tours can bridge the gaps among communities of different faiths. (Sheron Sarfraz, a Christian Participant)
- Youth only get information from social and traditional media. But, today, we got a chance to visit religious places of other faiths and learn about their preaching of peace and harmony. Today's learning will support me in promoting peace among the communities. (Sana Shoukat, Muslim participants)
- Visiting today religious places of Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, and Christians, and through discussion with religious leaders, removed our myths about them. Such initiatives can promote peace and love among people of diverse religious backgrounds. (Sarah Parvez, a Muslim participant)

Pictures:



WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK



The Official UN Observance in the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of February



*Diversity Tour Van is ready to move for the promotion of interfaith harmony*



*Young Peacemakers starting their tour to disseminate constructive narrative and promote interfaith harmony*



*Participants at Shiri Krishna Mandir knowing about Hinduism and its preaching of peace and harmony*



*Roshini Kumari addressed the queries of tour participants and removed their misconceptions about Hinduism*



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*Group photo of young peacemakers at Shiri Krishna Mandir*



*Young Peacemakers, with the support of YDF, initiated the campaign of "plantation for peace."*



Participants at their next destination "Samadhi Raja Ranjeet Singh", Balbir Singh sharing the norms of entering at



Young Peacemakers wash their hands and feet, covering their heads before entering the Samadhi of Raja Ranjeet Singh



*Balbir Singh performing prayers in front of Guru Granth Sahib to demonstrate the Sikh ritual performances*



*Balbir Singh sharing about Sikhism and its preaching of peace and harmony*



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*Young peacemakers' group photo at Samadhi of Raja Ranjeet Singh*



*Mahindar Pal (First Pakistani Sikh Cricketer) answered the questions of young peacemakers at Gurdwara Dera Sahib*



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*Plantation of peace at Gurdwara Dera Sahib*



*Next destination "Badshahi Masjid" Royal Mosque, Lahore*



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*Abu Bakar addressed the questions of participants and removed their myths about Islam*



*Group photo of young peacemakers at "Badshahi Masjid" Royal Mosque, Lahore*



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*Pastor Saleem Khokhar welcomed the young peacemakers at Raiwind Dicese, Waris Road Lahore*



*Participants visited the Church to learn about Christianity.*



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*Pastor Saleem Khokhar addressed the questions of young peacemakers*



*Group photo of young peacemakers at Raiwind Dicese Church Lahore*