

Webinar on World Interfaith Harmony Week 2024

Background

World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) is an annual event established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2010. It occurs during the first week of February and aims to promote harmony between people of all faiths. The General Assembly recognizes the importance of mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue in fostering a culture of peace. It encourages all states to participate in spreading the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill, utilizing their religious traditions or convictions. WIHW originated from a proposal by King Abdullah II of Jordan and was swiftly adopted by the UN General Assembly through resolution A/RES/65/5. Its objectives include promoting peace, nonviolence, and cooperation among people of different faiths through various programs and initiatives organized by governments, institutions, and civil society.

Youth Development Foundation, Lahore Pakistan conducted a webinar on interfaith harmony under World Interfaith Harmony Week 2024 celebrations. The main objective of the program was to discuss the need and the importance of interfaith harmony and ways and methods for attracting the public to our objective.

The following Guest speakers attended and participated in the discussion.

Name	Designation
Shahid Rehmat	Executive Director YDF
Dr. Shoain Akbar	Secretary-Human Rights and Minority Affairs Govt. of Punjab
Sabiha Shaheen	ED-Bargad
Gulbaz Ali Khan	CEO-Analytics Lab
Shahnawaz Khan	Regional Head-SPO

Proceeding:

Ms. Urooj Jahangir Sindhu was the moderator and she welcomed all the participants and said that the main purpose of all interfaith dialogue projects is to discuss the need and the importance of interfaith harmony and ways and methods for attracting the public to our objective.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Shoab Akbar, Secretary of Human Rights and Minority Affairs Government of Punjab, introduced the newly launched coordination committee on promoting Interfaith harmony in Punjab to promote Interfaith Harmony. He highlighted the crucial role of the civil society sector in promoting interfaith harmony. He stressed the need for partnerships that can effectively separate the promotion of interfaith harmony, acknowledging the collective responsibility of individuals from various religious and occupational backgrounds. He committed to supporting organizations to work for interfaith Harmony.

Furthermore, Mr. Shahid Rehmat, Executive Director of YDF, underscored the significance of Interfaith Harmony Week, emphasizing its importance in promoting understanding and cooperation among people of different faiths. He highlighted YDF's contribution to fostering interfaith harmony in the community, emphasizing the organization's commitment to engaging young people in such initiatives. Through specific programs and projects, YDF has successfully involved young individuals in interfaith activities,

demonstrating the positive impact of youth participation in promoting peace and unity across religious divides.

After that Ms. Sabiha Shaheen, Executive Director of Bargad, elaborated on the active involvement of women in interfaith initiatives and highlighted specific challenges and opportunities they face in promoting interfaith harmony. She emphasized the importance of empowering women to take on leadership roles in such initiatives, recognizing their unique perspectives and contributions. Ms. Shaheen also addressed the role of civil society in promoting interfaith harmony, stressing the need for collaborative efforts to bridge religious divides and foster understanding among communities. By actively engaging women and leveraging the resources of civil society, Ms. Shaheen emphasized the potential to create meaningful and lasting change in promoting interfaith harmony within society.

Mr. Gulbaz illuminated the path towards ensuring sustained engagement and commitment from youth and minority communities in ongoing interfaith initiatives by civil society organizations. He emphasized the importance of employing effective strategies to create a lasting impact in promoting understanding and cooperation among diverse groups. Mr. Gulbaz pledged his support to any organization working towards interfaith harmony in Pakistan, underscoring the collective responsibility to foster an inclusive society where all voices are heard and respected. His commitment highlights the vital role of collaboration and solidarity in achieving meaningful progress towards peace and harmony.

Mr. Shahnawaz Khan, Regional Head of SPO, addressed common challenges faced by religious minorities in Punjab, stressing the need for civil society organizations to address these issues. He highlighted the importance of initiatives aimed at promoting tolerance, understanding, and inclusivity. Mr. Khan emphasized the crucial role of government bodies in actively supporting and promoting interfaith harmony in Punjab. He proposed collaborative efforts between civil society organizations and government entities to implement policies and programs that safeguard the rights and dignity of religious minorities while fostering a culture of respect and cooperation among all communities.

Participant Engagement:

During the event, participants actively shared their views and posed questions to the speakers. The speakers, in turn, provided thoughtful answers and engaged in meaningful discussions, enriching the overall experience for all attendees.

Conclusion:

Ms. Urooj concluded the event, thanking all participants and speakers for their valuable contributions towards promoting interfaith harmony.

Challenges:

Technical issues during the webinar
Potential lack of participant interaction

Solutions:

Thorough technical preparation before the event
Establish a dedicated technical support team