



World Interfaith Harmony Week



Interfaith Harmony Week Dialog Organized by SUNFO at BMICH

In line with the United Nations' declaration of February as Interfaith Harmony Week, the Sri Lanka United Nations Friendship Organization (SUNFO) organized a grand dialogue session on 4th February 2025 at the globally famous Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH), specifically in the Olympus Diplomatic Auditorium, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka. The event brought together religious leaders, social activists, youth peacebuilders, and a limited number of members of the general public, with over 150 participants taking part. The event was a powerful demonstration of Sri Lanka's commitment to fostering interfaith harmony, promoting mutual understanding, and building a culture of peace and coexistence.



The conference was initiated by a cordial welcome address from the Director General of SUNFO Dr. Deshapriya S Wijetunga, who highlighted the importance of interfaith dialogue in a multicultural and multi-religious society like Sri Lanka. He emphasized that interfaith harmony is not just a moral imperative but also a pragmatic necessity for enduring development and peace.

Prominent religious leaders from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and other faiths delivered inspiring speeches. Each leader shared insights from their respective religious traditions, emphasizing common values such as compassion, love, justice, and respect for all humanity. They also discussed the role of religious communities in addressing contemporary challenges, including social inequality, environmental degradation, and conflict.



To celebrate the diversity of Sri Lanka's religious and cultural heritage, the event featured cultural performances by artists from different faith communities. These performances included traditional music, dance, and poetry, showcasing the rich tapestry of Sri Lanka's multicultural identity.

Faith and Spirituality - Rev Nanda Thero

Rev Nanda Thero started off discussing the topic of faith, comparing trusting in our day-to-day lives to trusting in a greater power. He clarified that faith is not specifically religion but is an essential element of human life. An example would be going to see a doctor or dining at a restaurant, and we automatically trust that doing such things will have positive effects on us. This mutual trust is also applied to our trust in a higher power that governs the world, something which is universal to all religions.

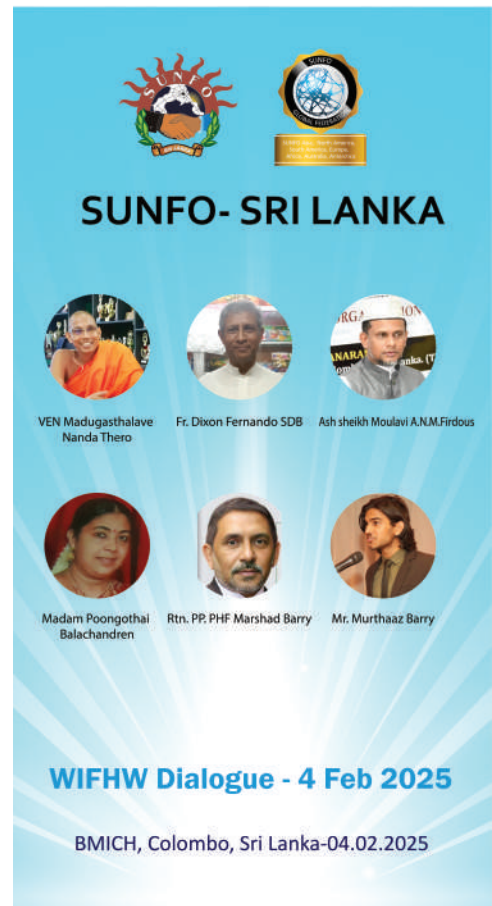
Rev Nanda Thero noted the interdependence of humanity, noting that while we embrace independence, we are also interdependent on one another to live and prosper. He emphasized the importance of respecting such interdependence and utilizing it in our spiritual lives. In Christianity, he noted, the paramount commandment is love—love for God and love for neighbor. This summary of two commands encapsulates the essence of Christian teachings and makes a foundation for coexistence across faiths.

Rev Nanda Thero also drew a line between religion and spirituality, stating that whereas religions have structure and laws, spirituality goes beyond religious boundaries. He called on the people to embrace spiritual values, which promote harmony and love across any given one denomination. He concluded by stating how vital it was to live each day by these values, for this is the way one could measure his or her faith.

<https://youtu.be/1UsJXltmfww>



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Harmonizing Through Awareness - Fr. Dixon Fernando SDB

Fr. Dixon Fernando SDB began with thanks for having been given a chance to contribute to the summit that was jointly organized by SUNFO. He emphasized the immediate need for coexistence among the religions in contemporary times. Referring to an admission that religions have, as a matter of fact, traditionally been a point of contention, he attributed that not to their teachings but rather to ignorance and misinterpretation of religious thought.



Fr. Dixon Fernando SDB identified hate, greed, and splits as the root causes of conflict. He felt that by the cultivation of mental clarity and awareness, individuals could overcome these negative tendencies and bring about harmony. To achieve this, he recommended four key things:

1. Study your own religion thoroughly: Deepen your understanding of your faith.
2. Practice your faith sincerely: Live according to its teachings.
3. Cultivate a clear mind: Develop mental discipline to overcome biases.
4. Respect other faiths: Acknowledge and honor the beliefs of others.

Fr. Dixon Fernando SDB concluded his speech by quoting Buddha, who has taught that a man's worth is determined by actions, not by birth or creed. The speaker called everyone to shared action for a better world, inviting all to come together in the spirit of interfaith cooperation.

<https://youtu.be/85h5I7BFvD4>



Interfaith Harmony Week Charity Dinner for SUNFO Children's Home

In observance of the World Interfaith Harmony Week, which is celebrated annually during the month of February, Mr. Eranda Peiris, National Coordinator of the Sustainable Development Goals Youth Network of Sri Lanka (SDGYNSL), hosted a Charity Dinner to "SUNFO Southern Province Child Development Center" on 22nd February 2025 in Elpitiya, Sri Lanka. The event was conducted for the sake of 35 children of the SUNFO Children's Home, a residential facility for underprivileged and orphaned children. The event was a genuine display of interfaith solidarity, as individuals from various religious and cultural backgrounds united to work together towards a common goal—spreading love, joy, and hope to the less fortunate. The event was absolutely in accordance with the mission of Interfaith Harmony Week.

The interfaith charity dinner was a colorful and welcoming occasion aimed at giving the children of the SUNFO Children's Home a night to remember. It reflected the strength of togetherness and kindness beyond religious and cultural differences. The dinner was not just a festival of interfaith unity but also a tangible step towards realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Key Activities and Highlights

Charity Dinner:

A special dinner was prepared for the children, featuring a variety of dishes that catered to different cultural and dietary preferences. The meal was not only a treat for the children but also a symbol of unity and shared humanity. Volunteers from different faiths worked together to prepare and serve the food, embodying the spirit of interfaith cooperation.



Interfaith Art Talent Programme :

The Interfaith Art Talent Programme was one of the highlights of the charity dinner and provided the children with a chance to showcase their artistry and creativity. The programme was organized with the vision of promoting interfaith understanding and co-operation, where children learned to put their ideas of peace, love, and harmony on canvas. Volunteers from different religious backgrounds led the activity, teaching the children to create artwork symbolic of the principles of interfaith harmony.



Awareness Session on Interfaith Harmony:

It was a short session to enlighten the children and participants on the importance of interfaith harmony and respect, tolerance, and understanding values. The session underscored the role that young people can play in building a tolerant society. Quotations and teachings from all religions were used to demonstrate that there is a common ground that unites human beings.

