



ICRD Monthly Update

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ICRD Establishes Interfaith Leadership Network to Tackle Critical Challenges

Over the past decade, Pakistan and the United States have increasingly struggled with intolerance in their religious communities and distrust between their governments and societies. While some religious leaders and interfaith organizations in Pakistan and the United States have been making valiant efforts to deal with religious discrimination, many lack the capacity, networks, and know-how to transition from surface dialogue to substantive action and follow-through.



To address those challenges, ICRD recently convened a meeting of 19 Pakistani and American religious and interfaith leaders in Dhulikhel, Nepal to launch an Interfaith Leadership Network (ILN), with an overarching goal of **facilitating collaborative action to counter religious intolerance** in both countries.

Key initiatives that emerged from the conference will serve to:

- (1) reduce negative perceptions and distrust between Americans and Pakistanis, by supporting more constructive engagement between religious, interfaith, and civil society leaders and their constituencies;
- (2) provide a counter-narrative to violent extremism from historical and contemporary Islamic perspectives;
- (3) develop effective counter-narratives to Islamophobia in the United States and to anti-Americanism/anti-Westernism in Pakistan;
- (4) create a committee of American Muslims to monitor and help improve the lot of religious minorities in Pakistan; and
- (5) inspire the American Evangelical community to assume a leadership role in reducing Islamophobia in the United State.

As reflected in the comments below, the conference succeeded in building the kinds of relationships that can support implementation of the activities listed above. Further, the ILN will provide an enduring network for sharing best practices and lessons learned in all of these areas.



American Delegates:



- "I believe as faith leaders, we have a greater responsibility than anyone in promoting peace and harmony - I'm committed to doing all I can."
 - ILN "opened horizons of possibility for action that could affect the lives of many...(and) opened my heart to the Pakistani people."
- "This was truly a transformational experience for me, and I am very grateful I was invited to be a part of it...the gathering greatly enhanced my understanding of contemporary Pakistani society, especially as it relates to its religious and cultural diversity and the complex relations among and within these groups."

Pakistani Delegates:



- "I assure you that I will utilize all my abilities, resources, and contacts to accomplish the mission of ILN. I clearly foresee that this team will not only achieve its goal but will also become a tower of light for coming generations."
- The discussions were rich, informative, and thought-provoking...I don't know if it would be possible to come close to the breadth and depth of this conference and the intellectual excitement that it generated."
- Usually, when I go to these international conferences, I give a speech and then leave. This is the first such program where I stayed more than one hour...I stayed the entire three days because it was such a good experience, and I learned an enormous amount."

With Best Wishes,

Doug Johnston
President, ICRD



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