

# **PROGRESS REPORT**

## **Youth for Human Unity Explorations for New Values through Inter-cultural and Inter-religious Dialogue**

**UNESCO International Youth Conference  
SAARC Region  
February 21 - 28, 2005  
Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India**

*Youth for human unity*



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1. UNESCO- Paris, New Delhi
2. ICCR - (Indian Council of Cultural Research), New Delhi
3. De Zaaier Stichting - The Hague
4. KHF - (Kengal Hanumanthaiya Foundation) Bangalore
5. The Ministry of HRD - Government of India, New Delhi
6. Friends of Auroville





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## Preface

"Children don't quarrel about religion, caste, creed, nationality or race.  
What changes when they grow up?"

- A poser by a group of youth who deliberated on human unity.

"People want peace but policy makers on both sides of the border do not seem  
sincere enough to work for peace."

- Zahid Sahab Ahmed (Pakistan) on relations between India and Pakistan.

"It's not just about pulling down the barriers but working towards one cause."

- Meenakshi Arora (India)

"The journey has begun... Start with the soul, look within."

- Viral Doshi (India)

"Profoundly loved, profoundly transformed."

- Steve Dedrick (USA)

They came together, as strangers.

They deliberated for seven days on human unity.

They discussed religion, spirituality, education and social issues.

They searched their souls.

They felt the need, as it were, to "be the change you wish to see."

They lived together for seven days.

They laughed and danced, and cried as they parted company.

They resolved to live - and share - the glimpse of human unity they had seen and felt.

Some felt within themselves, in their deep core, a tug.

A tug from "something higher than ourselves".

Some felt a "transformation" within.

What happened? How did this come about?

This is an attempt to capture in words the shades of experiences of bonding and unity lived by over 60 youth from South Asia and other parts of the world at a seven day conference held at Auroville - an emerging township in Southern India that sees itself as an experiment in, and hopes to evolve into, a living embodiment of an actual human unity.





## Overview: Explorations in Human Unity

The International Youth Conference - conducted by the Centre of International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU), Auroville, and supported by, among others, UNESCO (Paris) - sought to engage 60 odd young people from different religious persuasions and nationalities in an 'Inter-cultural and Inter-religious Dialogue' for seven days.

The theme - a challenge even for the mature and wise - seemed, on the face of it, far removed from the concerns of youth. For, the youth today inhabit a highly competitive, fast paced and materialistic world marked by conflict and tension. The dominant ideology of modern times — 'scientific rationality' — hardly offers any legitimacy to religion, meditation or spirituality.

Against this backdrop many may believe that the youth, in pursuit of jobs and careers and living in a consumerist environment, may be indifferent, or perhaps only mildly curious about spirituality and human unity. The conference belied such notions.

The initial, perhaps cursory, interest of the youth in exploring a seemingly nebulous theme of 'human unity' was sustained and built upon through a lively format that included speeches from scholars and experts, and, more importantly, deliberations among small groups that gave a voice to youth. The small group sessions (eight to ten participants to a group), thanks to competent facilitation, enabled the participants to open up in a relaxed and friendly environment. Almost every participating youth got an opportunity to address the conference in the course of the seven-day sojourn.

During these seven days - perceived by most participants as one of the most moving experiences of their lives - human unity wasn't just a cerebral exercise confined to speeches and discussions. It was an exercise in reaching out, and, reaching within through a range of group activities. These activities included free flowing expression of thoughts and feelings at a participative group session that involved breathing exercises, music and dance, creative expression through plays, meditation and lending a helping hand in post-tsunami rehabilitation work underway in nearby rural coastal communities. These activities and a relaxed interaction with friendly hosts in Auroville's scenic setting - where you feel nature breathing alongside you all the time - helped youth appreciate the sense of human unity in an experiential way.

What did the conference mean for the participating youth?

"This is an experience too difficult to describe" said a visibly moved Meenakshi Arora as she narrated the sense of bonding she felt with the healing touch of universal humanity while doing physical work at a tsunami affected site.

"It's been a great experience, but too unreal," said Priyanka Chhabra (India). Happy and energized, she was eager to get back to her life in Delhi.

Steve Dedrick (USA), eyes moist, and lost in contemplation, said, "It looks like the beginning of a fascinating journey." He said he planned to stay on in Auroville for another month.

Zahid Sahab Ahmed (Pakistan), brimming with emotions and declaring his intent to re-visit India in a few months time, said he was carrying with him a feeling of brotherhood back to Pakistan. "I wonder how I can spread this spirit back in Pakistan", he said, adding, "I'll write about my experiences in newspapers there."

Ram from Nepal, Ramanathan (Sri Lanka), Tshering (Bhutan) and Shan (Maldives), as also many participants from India and other countries, sensed this bonding and a feeling of oneness with others - in the SAARC region and beyond.

The 60 odd delegates pledged themselves to an ever more open attitude towards understanding different religions and socio-cultural perspectives in their individual lives. They were echoing, as it were, what Mahatma Gandhi had said: "Be the change you wish to see".

"Auroville has been a 'transforming' experience" was a common refrain as the participants summed up their feelings on the conclusion of the conference. They were seen hugging each other with moist eyes as they wrote messages of friendship in each other's notebooks and exchanged e-mail id's and phone numbers.

And, as they concluded their sojourn at Auroville, they hoped that this interaction would continue. In the resolution adopted towards the end of the conference they agreed to create a "network, share information and make opportunities like these accessible to all by using media and technology for positive work". UNESCO, on its part, would like to give continuity and enable the community to interact regularly. As Mr. Enzo Fazzino (UNESCO, Paris) - "touched" and "impressed" by what he saw at the conference-put it: "It is the beginning of something that can be done."

That the conference engaged the youth in, as they put it, a "profound" manner, was a revelation to them about their own aspirations. That the youth themselves displayed a profound understanding of issues about human unity came as a pleasant surprise to many speakers and experts.

Interestingly, the organizers of the conference had sensed the pulse of the youth in the run up to the conference itself. "We had twice the number of applicants!" remarked CIRHU's Mr. Luigi Zanzi with a glint in his eye. For his colleague Ms. Kosha Shah, who screened the applications on the basis of the response of the applicants to open ended questions, the keen interest of the delegates in spirituality did not come as a surprise.

UNESCO hoped that the conference would help youth as 'agents of change' in exploring "a greater understanding and therefore a path towards a progressive and harmonious co-existence." For Mr. Zanzi, the conference would have served its purpose if the participating youth got a "glimpse of spirituality in action". They surely got that glimpse; perhaps even felt it.

## Inauguration: Theme for the Session: Dialogue of Religions

### The Opening Ceremony

A young Aurovilian walked to the centre of the stage and lit a candle, symbolic of the light of human unity.

As the proceedings — beginning with, and punctuated by soft musical notes live from a range of musical instruments — unfolded, the young Aurovilian began to unwind a golden thread. She gently walked from the stage all the way round the participating youth in the auditorium and back to the stage symbolically uniting everybody present.

The key speakers were seated in an arc-shaped arrangement on one side of the big stage facing a huge projector screen slowly revealing a collage of images of human diversity, unity and life at Auroville.

The symbolism - the light, the golden thread of unity being laid out, and the ever so soft and varied musical notes that wafted across - seemed imbued with a special meaning for those present as Meenakshi, an Aurovilian, in her invocation drew attention to the “angel” walking among the participants and “binding us together”. “Don’t you feel we are one body, one soul?” she asked.

The symbolism seemed to have stayed with the participants all through the inaugural ceremony - perhaps even later - as scholars and dignitaries shared their thoughts with the assembled youth.

### From the Panel

**Ms. Aster Patel**, Member, Auroville Governing Board, referred to the symbolism inherent in the sight of the little girl “binding us in unity, irrespective of colour and creed” and invited them to explore the theme of human unity in the days ahead. “We’ve been dreaming of receiving youth from Asia here,” she said while warmly welcoming the youth delegates.

**Lt. Gen. (retd.) M.M.Lakhera**, Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, called upon the youth to take note of the limitations of scientific rationalism and seek to understand the deeper meaning of spirituality. Making an oblique distinction between religion and spirituality, he said that religion, while playing an important role in social life, had, many a time, also played an “aggressive” role.

Quoting extensively from Sri Aurobindo, Indian philosopher and Yogi, whose work inspired his spiritual collaborator ‘The Mother’ to envision setting up Auroville, Lt. Gen. Lakhera said: “In the past, spirituality was confined to helping in the growth of individuals. It’s time now to deploy spirituality for mankind”.

**Dr. Karan Singh**, Chairman of Auroville Foundation, Member of Parliament and a scholar, drew the attention of the participants to the auspicious confluence that marked the inauguration of the conference. It was also the Mother’s Birthday. “It was Mother who saw in her vision the concept of a world city”, he said. The concept of South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), Dr Karan Singh said, embodied Sri Aurobindo’s vision. Sri Aurobindo wanted the partition of India to be undone. “The only way it (the partition) can go is through co-operation between member countries - like the European Union”.

Lauding the prompt response of Aurovilians in helping the families hit by the tsunami disaster, Dr Karan Singh said that Auroville was not an island by itself. Auroville, he said, symbolized the ancient Indian concept of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam' (the world is one family).

"We need to walk towards a society that is harmonious, passionate and human", Dr Karan Singh concluded amidst applause.

### Interaction with Delegates

**Mr. Alan Herbert**, in the chair as moderator, seeking direct participation from the audience, remarked: "I wonder what's going on in your mind as you listen to us?" His query to the audience - Is the world moving towards a spiritual unity? - evoked a fairly strong response, as a large number of people stood up in the affirmative. The response to his follow-up query - Do the youth have a greater opportunity to affect change? - seemed somewhat lukewarm.

**Mr. Prithviraj Perera** (UNESCO-Delhi), while underscoring the need to respect human diversity, suggested the need for widening the ambit of developmental debate itself. The world today needs "development with a human soul, not just a human face".

**Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne** had a word of caution for youth, who, in their intense idealism, wish to set out to "change the world". "Don't try to help others; first try to help yourself", he said. One of the things to strive for was ability to love others. The most important reason to serve others was that the one doing the service gets immense joy by giving.

Active with the 'Sarvodaya Movement' (Voluntary donation of land for the poor and landless), Dr. Ariyaratne advocated the concept of 'Gram Swarajya' (village as a unit of self governance) at a global level. Life in such village republics, he said, should be built around three pillars - spirituality, morality and culture.

### More Interaction with Delegates

Mr. Herbert's posers:

- Is human unity sharing the same cultural heritage?
- Is human unity able to buy the same goods?
- Is human unity singing its own notes but contributing to a global concert?
- Is human unity a reality we often forget?

The most resounding yes - in the form of most of the audience up on their feet - came for human unity, singing its own notes and contributing to a global concert. While the response to other questions was mixed, it certainly kept the audience involved in the proceedings.

**Dr. Ashok Gangadean** sought to impress upon the youth that while dialogue was critical for sustainable development, most often people are engaged in 'series of monologues' that are erroneously termed 'dialogue'.

His core argument: Every human being was conditioned by his upbringing and that conditioning was akin to a 'lens' that each individual carried with him/her. "We need to be aware that we are looking through our lens; we are interpreting others through our lens". And this itself, Dr. Gangadean elaborated, could be doing 'profound violence' against them.

The challenge of dialogue, Dr. Gangadean said, was to “understand that we are viewing through a lens, and, to try to understand others from their perspective”.

Anyone wishing to engage in a serious dialogue needed to “step back” from his culture, his lens, and try to understand others. “If we only see through our lens, we don’t do dialogue; we do monologue. We do a series of monologues.”

To quote Dr. Gangadean, “if dialogue is spirituality, then deep dialogue is global spirituality”.

Infinite force was infinitely one, and since it was infinite it also had infinite diversity. “We are all situated in that infinite net. We are not just entities; we are in a state of relationship, deep dialogue”.

Drawing upon the teachings of Lord Buddha, Dr Gangadean appealed to the youth to move beyond ego: “Let the ego die so that something more powerful can be born”.

**Dr Helga Breuninger** saw human unity as a process in which everyone, everything, is under construction — perhaps all the time. Referring to life in Auroville, she said that people had freedom, and living together was a loving experience. People were very open for new impulses. It was a family, and yet, it was a family “under construction”, aspiring towards perfection, which may be achieved after a long, long time. Or perhaps never.

**Dr. Marc Luyckx** looked at two sets of dialogues — dialogue between religions and dialogue between religion and rationality. The dialogue of religions, he felt, was possible - even easy - if everyone was on the same level of consciousness. However, it was more of a problem when it came to dialogue between religion and modernity/rationality. For, as he saw it, rationality - a higher level of consciousness - was still intolerant. Dr Luyckx looked at three paradigms - pre-modern, modern and trans-modern. The worst conflicts, he said, were not between religions but moderns (broadly referring to those believing in supremacy of technology and rationality and largely comprising the white, western world) and pre-moderns (believing in the sacred that included even nature and religion). Both pre-moderns and moderns, he said, were intolerant of beliefs outside their fold.

**Mr. Luigi Zanzi** exhorted the youth to launch themselves on a “journey within the soul”. “Inside me, inside you, there’s a ‘new force’ trying to live”, he said, adding that this aspiration within humans should be addressed. The questions that needed close attention included: Is man evolving into a being with a consciousness higher than is known or experienced thus far? What are the factors impeding or accelerating this evolution?

There was no single formula that could answer such questions, he remarked. “We all aspire for universal spiritual qualities”.



**Professor Tawfik, Director, UNESCO Representative, Delhi**

Your Excellencies,  
Respected participants,

As the famous saying goes, "one may win a battle but never a war". All actions of the human persons are controlled by the mind and it is therefore important to build defenses of peace in the minds, as the catch phrase embedded in UNESCO's constitution implies.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization has been working towards achieving this objective, since its very inception in 1946, during the aftermath of the last two World Wars. But 60 years have not been enough to achieve perfection, despite much progress having been made in human development through the promotion of international cooperation in the fields of Education, Sciences, Culture and Communication, which are UNESCO's fields of competence.

There is now a global agenda, adopted by the UN General Assembly in November 2001, which affirmed, among others, that "Dialogue constitutes a fundamental challenge, based on the unity of humankind and commonly shared values, the recognition of cultural diversity and the equal dignity of each civilization".

While the world, as also the Asian region, is beset with strife and ethnic conflict, it is very important for us to work towards the greater common good of humankind, by exploring ways in which communities could assist in healing divisions, overcoming violence and strengthening democratic governance, to respond to development issues such as poverty, respect for human dignity and right, and respect for the environment. These issues, if not addressed in many ways, provide the breeding ground for fostering social division and terrorism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issues and obstacles are many. But, dialogue is the only way in which problems can be solved. History has shown us that warring parties have had to ultimately come to the negotiating table, to achieve sustainable peace. The present is affirming that it is only continuous dialogue that can bring solutions to the many problems that beset us. Dialogue between communities, policy makers in government, civil society organizations, youth, religious leaders, provide a good platform for broadening the scope for peace, making it more relevant to contemporary challenges. Dialogue is therefore a powerful tool for achieving peace and sustainable development.

But what should dialogue be on? When UNESCO was formed, its founding forefathers proposed that international intellectual and moral solidarity be the foundation for promoting world peace. This means that the international communities must get together with each other to address issues that confront the World.

An international ministerial conference on "Dialogue among Civilizations - quest for new perspectives" held on 9-10 July 2003 in New Delhi, and a Regional Forum on " Dialogue among Civilizations" held in Ohrid, Macedonia, on 29-30 August 2003, re-affirmed this view. Based on the outcomes of these two events, the General Conference of UNESCO's 190 member states adopted and endorsed the New Delhi Declaration and provided a general framework for future actions.

**Firstly**, quality education for all, especially education that could internalize and imbibe peace values in the future generations to come. UNESCO, to that end, has brought out a “Teachers Guide to Peace Education” which promotes a holistic and integrated approach to peace education, cutting across all subjects of the schools curriculum, without addition of a separate subject. This approach needs to be implemented to promote respect for human dignity and right, and respect for the environment.

**Secondly**, networking for sharing and spreading scientific and technological advances with a view to self reliance are vital for economic and social development and reduction of poverty.

**Thirdly**, the new communication technologies should be made available for larger sections of society, thus enhancing access to knowledge and bridging the gap between the haves and the have nots!

**Fourthly**, the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity in all its forms must be encouraged, since cultural diversity is as important to humankind as is biodiversity to nature.

**And last but not least**, ladies and gentlemen, all the factors I have just mentioned will not bear fruit, unless the activities to be carried out by the governments to promote such programmes, as also other tangible development efforts for public services like building roads, playgrounds, shopping malls, schools, hospitals and housing, are done through a process of stakeholdings and partnerships with the communities, and in a manner showing transparency and accountability in carrying out such programmes by the governing authorities.

Therefore, in concluding, I wish to reiterate that consultation and dialogue between those who govern and are governed in carrying out the various programmes for the communities are very necessary to bring about development with a human soul and ensure equitable delivery of services and resources required by the people.

Respected participants, ladies and gentlemen; I hope that the next few days will enable you to give your thoughts to the development paradigms required to reduce poverty, heal divisions, strengthen democratic governance and respect for human dignity and right, all of which could be achieved only through partnerships between communities and governments.

I wish to conclude with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi;

“ Democracy must in essence....mean the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people, in the service of the common good of all.”



**Rosa Guerriero, UNESCO Paris**

Excellencies,  
Dearest friends,

It is with great sorrow that I address you this message to express first of all my deep regret at not being able to be among you during this week long full of activities, and for not having the opportunity to explain to the young people from all the SAARC region what is UNESCO and the richness of its programmes.

I know, nevertheless, that some of my colleagues from the Field Office in New Delhi and from Headquarters will be there, and a UNESCO stand with a sample of some of our main publication will enable the youngsters and all those interested to get acquainted with UNESCO's programmes and activities. Since the long months that we have been planning, preparing and organizing this major event, bringing together religious leaders and young people belonging to different spiritual backgrounds, together with our Aurovillian friends, I must say that not being here, it is for me a great disappointment. If I am not among you it is for reasons out of my reach and understanding but I want to let you know that I am with you with my heart and soul.

I therefore have the pleasure to greet you all and point out how close the ideals of Auroville and UNESCO are. You will understand this during these fruitful and friendly days. As you might know - maybe the young ones are not cognizant of this fact – UNESCO was born from the rubble of the second world war which shed so much of the blood from young people just like you, for the sake of a barbarian ideology which preached that some people were superior to others, these “others” being so-called inferior, because of their confession, their lifestyle, their fragile health condition, their age, should not live. Sixty years ago today, the dreadful and nightmarish concentration camps were delivered. Many wounds remain. The memory is still alive under the layers of silence and pain. How much did we learn from this bloody page of our history?

Yes, Europe now forms a same space built on the foundations of common values. Much has been achieved in the economic and institutional arenas. Ideologies – the politicians and the people understood – are not to divide physically people by tall walls, and psychologically through ignorance and despise of the other. How many years it took to build trust and recognition towards this “other”, to fight on a daily basis and through the appropriate institutions – national or transnational – against discrimination of all kinds?

Still much, very much, has to be done. We often also think, may this happen again, here or in other places around the world? How can we react, how can we act in a proactive way? At this point, I believe we can think about UNESCO and Auroville, as a laboratory of ideas, as a catalyser of pinpointed actions to bring awareness to the youth of this immense region, the SAARC. That peace and understanding among different communities and individuals can only be made possible through a true dialogue – acknowledging the historical fact that this region is a strong civilization, the result of a multisecular trend of interactions and cross-cultural borrowings since times immemorial.

All dialogue is grounded on the recognition of this inter-fertilization of cultures and beliefs which entails ways of lives of thinking – music, how we act, how we dress, how we dance... That is why young people are indeed very sensitive to these different aspects of the daily life – we exchange, we interact, we long for common aspirations – personal fulfilment, education for all our children.

The question that overwhelms me, and, of course, all those that have experienced it by losing their goods, homes and dear ones – is the tsunami. Your region paid a high toll - Auroville sought ways, successfully, in helping the needy, those who suffered the most in their jobs, and therefore, in the ways of sustaining their families. At this point, Auroville, our main partner in this endeavour, is not just an utopia. It aims at helping people on a local basis. Auroville has done a great job of solidarity: regardless of beliefs, of social or economic belongings.

The men are to be treated in a holistic manner. Months before the tsunami, when we worked on the title and themes to be reflected on, we thought that those topics were relevant to all of us: dialogue is a peaceful weapon for sustainable development, for poverty alleviation, for equality among genders, to the right for proper education, and most of all, towards a holistic way of conceiving the human being.

India, for instance, host to this meeting, is a very strong country on new technologies of communication. But, still, their beliefs and ways of life cannot be jeopardized by these material preoccupations. While they are precious for a country's development, they should not kill ancient civilizations, cultures and beliefs and increase the gap between those who can access these new communication technologies and those who are left behind.

All the countries that make part of the SAARC region should be aware of this: we share a common planet on a more regional or local basis, and therefore, we should be aware of our common destiny. Do we share common values? Can we acknowledge our differences of the views we have on the world? Maybe we should, it is a first step towards an authentic dialogue. Dialogue can also mean to agree or to disagree. But our personal fulfilment is the same everywhere and for all of us. In this endeavour, religious leaders have a strong task to undertake - especially from the SAARC region, where many conflicts are the main concern of the region itself and the world. You have all a very heavy responsibility: convey to all your communities, and in special your youngsters, girls and boys alike, that your spiritual messages are messages of peace, their sacral texts should be taught as messages of peace and solidarity, and should not be hijacked or manipulated to political or any other purposes.

If that would be possible, all young people from those regions should state that themselves they do not want to be manipulated. Their religious leaders should stand on their side. This magnificent event should, as much possible, gather the religious leaders and the youth, to fight against fundamentalism, inter-cultural and inter-religious conflicts. They should all together fight for common goals: sustainable development, safeguarding the cultural and bio-diversity areas, which are endangered, democracy, good governance and dialogue. Humankind must be seen in a holistic way – not only material achievements but also take into account the mind and the soul.

The various workshops will demonstrate you these holistic issues, which inspired the spirit of this event. I am with you, I share your preoccupations. Let the young people express their opinions and concerns and deliver to UNESCO their concrete proposals and views for a better world. It will not be utopia. It will become reality. With my thanks and best wishes for a very fruitful gathering.

From a far, I will be expecting the ideas and reflections of this extraordinary weeklong event.

**Yours,  
Rosa Guerreiro**





## Orientation: Feeling the Ground and Sensing Human Unity

For the youth delegates, it was a day of getting to know each other and feel the ground as it were - literally and figuratively.

A team of professional motivators and facilitators — led by Katharine Roske of Global Family, USA — helped the delegates, through a series of exercises to feel one with fellow delegates and their immediate environs. The quest for sensing that larger universal human unity had, naturally, to begin with sensing the sense of unity among those assembled for the deeper quest for unity.

The delegates, responding to instructions from the facilitators, walked - sometimes in circles, sometimes in rows, and sometimes in an arbitrary chaotic fashion. Jonathan, who orchestrated this walk, asked the delegates to look at fellow delegates — “great pioneering human souls” who had come together to “assist the birth of a new world”. If sometimes they were asked to stop and take a good look at the delegate to their right, or left, at other times they were asked to find a partner, and walk, hand in hand. And, after a while, the delegates had to find new partners to walk alongside each other. As the exercise progressed, one could sense a sense of relaxation descending on the delegates, who, until then, had barely met each other.

The sense of harmony for the delegates was sought to be further developed by letting them discover Auroville in a relaxed, interactive and yet fast paced series of encounters. Mr. Lalit Kishor Bhati, an Aurovilian and an architect, took the delegates through the development of Auroville as an inter-cultural, international township and the perspective — laced with a quest for spirituality and human unity — that had inspired the setting up of Auroville. Youth from Auroville, who had returned from an international environmental summit in Mexico, presented an abridged version of their presentation on the environment and ecology of Auroville.

The delegates for the Youth Conference — having thus known each other and Auroville, their home for a week of deliberations on human unity — also had a glimpse of the projects being executed by Aurovilians in the spirit of volunteerism and social entrepreneurship.

Human unity — imbued with a sense of joy — found a relaxed expression later in the evening. Aurelio, an Aurovilian, accompanied by Jonathan and other visiting artists, led the delegates in a participatory group performance that began with simple breathing exercises and took them through a most relaxing, almost therapeutic, group experience. The experiential human unity, or rather its expression, was both universal and oriental. Some of the notes created that evening had the resonance of ‘Om’ — the universal impulse of human and divine consciousness in the Hindu tradition. The movements of the participants as they danced together were free flowing, and more western than oriental. The music that energised the youth on the dance floor seemed to be a synthesis of sorts.

The feel of human unity was very much there in the air!

## Spirituality and Religion

### Description of the theme from Organisers

*Religion at its origin was meant to be an expression of humanity's evolutionary quest for a deeper, broader and higher consciousness. Somewhere along the way, religion was separated from its source and focused more on the exterior aspects of rituals and dogmas. This bred ignorance, intolerance and fundamentalism, which has led to a strong secular anti-religious stand amongst many.*

*But if we realize that all religions are merely an outward form of a deeper essence of spirituality, and that this essence is more or less common to all religions, then our understanding of true spirituality would be clearer. Is it possible to try not only to understand each other's position from different religious standpoints, and also to delve deep into our own to find its essence? Is it possible according to this inner journey, to find common spiritual values with other religions and spiritual paths?*

*Youth as "transforming agents" can play a decisive role in the evolution of religions towards a universal spirituality for humanity, particularly on the sub-continent of South Asia, where a maximum number of world religions are to be found.*

From the Panel

Mr. Shraddhalu Ranade (session facilitator), Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

Swami Sarvagana, Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta.

Dr. D.C. Jain - Head of Neurology, Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi.

Dr. Chok Tenzin Molam, Buddhist Scholar.

Dr. M.D. Golam Mohiuddin, Vivekananda Mission, Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal.

Dr. Ananda Reddy - Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry.

Dr Bernard D'Sami - Head of History Department, Loyola College, Chennai.

**Swami Sarvagana** initiated the discussion with the observation that religion had two components — the essential and the non-essential. Spirituality, he said, was the core of religion, the essential component. The non-essential, which was more like the protective shell of the egg, comprised stories, myths, deity worship and rituals. In the context of Hinduism, the Puranas, while imbued with strong moral message, could be seen as 'non-essential'. The swami, while identifying some elements of religion as non-essential, was at pains to emphasise that these non-essential elements could not be easily dispensed away with. For, the non-essential protected the essential. Quoting Vivekananda, the swami said that religion basically meant realisation. The tsunami disaster, for instance, evoked among people across the world a feeling for the victims. This feeling, this realisation, he said, was religion. Spirituality, he said, was transformation of inner self and then going beyond senses.

**Dr. Bernard D'Sami**, talking of Christianity, said that what Jesus started was a "movement". The core of Christian spirituality, he said, was contained in the 'Sermon on the Mount'. Christ, he said, had turned the concept of 'First come, first served' upside down through 'good Samaritans'. Gospels sum up the work as "teaching, preaching and healing". He said that what Jesus had started as a 'movement' later became a structured, organised religion that brought in its wake a lot of evils too. The essence of Christianity, he said, was "love of God, love of neighbour".



**Dr. D.C. Jain** said that science, religion and spirituality could co-exist. The centre of consciousness, he said, lay not in the brain, but somewhat below the brain, in the stem of the brain. The well being of humans, he said, could be looked at on three levels — physical, social and mental. All these aspects of human life needed to be addressed through a life style based on disciplining the senses and living in harmony with nature through, among other things, adherence to vegetarianism — a key tenet of many an oriental faith, including Jainism.

**Dr. Chok Tenzin**, looking at life through a Buddhist perspective, said that everything was interdependent and a recognition of this “interdependence” called for “selflessness” in individual and social behaviour. As he put it, Buddhism was “neither a religion nor a philosophy” and yet had in it both religion and spirituality. Buddhism is a rational, deeply sophisticated approach to life. The word Buddhism embodies in itself, a sense of mental being. For the Buddhists, Buddhism is a “science of mind”.

**Dr. Golam Mohiuddin** began with the meaning of Islam – i.e. to enter peace. Islam, he said, enjoined upon its adherents to accept that there was only one God, Allah, and those who accepted Islam completely submitted to the teachings of the Prophet. He dwelt upon the key elements of Islam – prayers, five times a day for purification of body and soul; the mandatory ‘Jataka’ or charity; ‘Ramzan’ or fasting and pilgrimage. These key elements of Islam, he said, had an inter-connection as adherence to each of these elements also reinforced the other elements. For example, a person who prayed regularly felt his resolve to do charity strengthened. The spirituality of Islam, Dr. Mohiuddin said, aimed at purifying the heart.

**Dr. Ananda Reddy** sought to make a distinction between what he called “true religion” and “religionism” a distinction somewhat akin to an earlier reference to the “essential” and “non-essential” elements of religion. However, there was also a third level – spiritual thought. Dr Reddy said that those with fuller mental development can adapt to this level of spirituality. The various facets of religion were like tiers of evolution with, say, religion followed by occultism, which in turn was followed by spiritual thought. Science and technology, Dr. Reddy observed, was helping bring about a spread of religious thought through new means. He said: “Spirituality must be expressed through life and living. It is a practical experience”.

**Mr. Sraddhalu Ranade** said that every religion began with someone who had profound inner experiences. The disciples, in their aspiration to have similar experience, adopted the external forms or activities of the founder and clung to them. Differences among religions surface when people talk of forms. “We forget we are all interested in God, not the founder.”

Since religions were unable to give the followers the experiences the founder had, “almost every religion offered salvation after life”. This, Mr. Ranade said, was a “practical compromise” all religions have had to make.

Maintaining that religions often ended up emphasizing one or the other aspect of God’s realization, man should seek to realize all aspects of God’s realization. Spirituality, Dr Ranade said, was

everywhere if only one chooses to see it. "Try to experience it in all its forms. Everything in the universe expresses that reality, Divine Reality".

### Comments from Youth:

Religion and spirituality are inter-related. It's like you have to have a house for a family to do things together. As we step into human unity, religion can be a "pathway". There's no religion that does not have spirituality.

All religions, as they are practiced, have their own weaknesses too.

Christianity: It resorts to "conversions". Sometimes, when a child is baptized, the priest declares, s/he is "now" a child of God. Wasn't the child, a child of God before being baptized?

Hinduism: Caste Discrimination

Islam: Violence / Fundamentalism

### Questions and Answers:

Can the religions have a common language? Can there be a common religion?

Response (Mr. Sraddhalu Ranade): No. Because different individuals are at different levels of consciousness.

What is spirituality? Is it implementable at all? How can we apply it in daily life?

Response (Mr. Sraddhalu Ranade): Yes, You can have it every day, every hour. Keep the sense of divine with you.

If life is evolutionary, man is evolutionary, then why has religion not evolved?

Response (Mr. Sraddhalu Ranade): Religion, like the shell of the egg, does not change. The yolk, contained within it, keeps undergoing a change. After 21 days, the chicken has to peck its way out. Humanity may be ready to break out of the shell.

Can spirituality be realized without God or religious teaching?

Response (Mr. Sraddhalu Ranade): You could replace God by a higher level of consciousness.

Response (Dr. Ananda Reddy): If God is to be seen as the one in temples or churches; you can realize spirituality without God. In that sense, spirituality may liberate God, more than man.

On Violence in Islam

Dr. M.D. Golam Mohiuddin Khan: Islam does not advocate violence as such. Though, it advocates 'Jehad', which is a struggle against negative values and non-believers.



## Explorations in Education, Art and Culture

### Description of the theme from Organisers

*Today the human being is the centre of education, and the development of his faculties the aim of education. Yet there are deeper aspects of the individual, which are not given sufficient space for growth. Can quality education for all be based on the integral development of the personality? What is the contribution of trans-disciplinary concepts applied to education?*

*Similarly in the field of art, if art is more than just an expression of the finite and the known, more of a search for the infinite through the finite, then something of the essence could be captured which would express unity of cultures in diversity.*

*South Asia, bound by the Himalayas in the north and the oceans in the south, has over the millennia developed a special culture. Can the countries which compose this sub-continent go further in understanding what approach to life is common to them? What are the values, which make the peoples of this region similar? What has South Asia contributed to world culture?*

*A special focus should be given to the future of cultural heritage, including its spiritual intangible dimension. As quoted from the Malta declaration: behind the stones, there is a soul. Can youth as "creative agents" dream and manifest the beauty of this heritage by preserving it and transmitting it to the next generation?*

### From the Panel

Dr. Ananda Reddy (session facilitator), Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry.  
Mme Sonia Ramzi, UNESCO, Paris.

Dr. Aster Patel, Centre for Indian Culture, Auroville.

Mr. Prithviraj Perera, UNESCO, Delhi.

Ms. Ameeta Mulla Wattal, Springdale School, Delhi.

**Mr. Prithviraj Perera** said that against the backdrop of strife and tension in parts of the world, it was important to develop and spread the concept of "peace education". UNESCO, he said, would like peace education promoted by "every teacher, in every subject". The core elements of peace education, he said, could be built into just about every subject. Some of the simplest behavioural norms — standing in queue, keeping to time as mark of respect to others, resolution of differences in a non-violent manner — if advocated at an early age in a child's growth could go a long way in promoting peace. He informed the conference that UNESCO had come out with a 240-page book, with 20 chapters, spelling out elements of peace education that could be integrated in the teaching modules for students of different age groups.

**Dr. Aster Patel** said that life on earth was going through upheavals, and a realization of these changes was now beginning to manifest in frontier areas of research in, amongst other disciplines, physics and biology. It was now increasingly being realized that the consciousness of man is changing. While technology and technological advances were important, it was not enough to concentrate only on things that come about as a result of technology. "Can human beings grow into something with a difference — a different quality of being?" she asked, and advised the youth to try to keep this thought with them when they left Auroville.

**Ms Sonia Ramzi** said that in modern times war had taken new forms while invoking most ancient mindsets. Peace, she said, was more than mere absence of war. It had to be rooted deeply in education and culture.

The concept of common heritage of humanity – a strong notion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – was being increasingly reinforced in the response of humanity the world over. If Buddhist statues in Bamian in Afghanistan were destroyed, people across the world – regardless of their religious persuasion – were one in their disapproval of this onslaught on humanity's common heritage.

**Ms. Ameeta Mulla Wattal**, recounting her experience as a principal, said that pure religious education was just not working any more. Even "moral science" as a subject does not evoke enthusiasm among parents. At the same time, prevailing trends of violence, crime and corruption need to be countered. It was important that some sense of values was imparted to children. What then is the language of religion or morality for today's youth? Talking of the examples set before humanity by the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, she quoted pop music icon Bob Dylan's lines – "The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind..." – amidst sustained applause from the audience.

"Art, music and so many other languages bind us together", Ms Wattal said, and added: "We all can't do great things, but we all can do small things with great love".

Lamenting the excessive emphasis in education on skills that equip youth for the job market, Ms. Wattal said that the education system needed to offer much more than just skills. She would like to see educational institutions transformed into laboratories of pre-emptive justice, compassion and love.

**Dr. Ananda Reddy** explored the connection between art, culture and education and sought to position it in a spiritual context. Culture, he said, could be seen as a mental life for its own sake that included sense and sensibility, ethical righteousness and worship of beauty. If Rome was a great example of society's self-discipline paving the way for mastery over the surroundings, South Asia's contribution was the concept of "Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram" (confluence of Truth, Godliness and Beauty). Truth – and it does not mean only material truth – comes first; ethics and aesthetics have been subservient to truth, Dr Reddy said, and felt there was need for a transition from religion to spiritual. Education, he opined, should concentrate on the image of the new man.

Talking of art as a form of expression, he said: "A new consciousness needs new form (of expression). Spirituality needs, as a platform, human unity". Exhorting the youth to "come out boldly", Dr Reddy said that while "religion could survive on small numbers, spirituality needs more".

### Comments from Youth:

- Parents need to allow students to follow their own inner voice/path. In South Asia, students have far less choice as compared to students in some other countries.
- Our external environment (as in a violent / strife-ridden area) often does not allow us to achieve inner peace.
- Mark Twain rightly said: "I never let my schooling interfere with my education".
- Education system is like a conveyor belt that produces doctors, engineers, etc, to serve the society.
- Children don't seem to quarrel about caste/creed/race. What happens when they grow up? Is it because of the education system?
- Of the seven youth who were asked what kind of a school they would like to send their child to, only one said she would send him/her to the kind of school she went to. Three said they would like to send their child to a school run at Auroville or the Sri Aurobindo Ashram School, one opted for 'Gurukul' (school designed on the pattern of open air schools in ancient India), one opted for "a school where he can learn about environment", and one opted for an institution that emphasized the importance of "advocacy".

### Response from the Panel

- Dr. Ananda Reddy: "Your responses show how much you are suffering under the present education system".
- Ms Sonia Ramzi: "If resources being allocated for arms can be reduced, we can provide more for education."
- Ms Ameeta Mulla Wattal: "Be the change you wish to see, be flexible. 8 to 18 is a great age. Destinies of nations are written in class rooms. Accidental, incidental, informal is the greatest way of education. Schools, however difficult they may be, at least some of them are doing a good job. They are changing, adapting. Newer elements like 'Disaster Management' are being made part of the school curriculum. Concepts like 'Green Schools', "Peace Education" are being introduced."

## Explorations in Spirituality and Society

### Description of the theme from Organisers

*Young people who are in quest of a more informal way of living spirituality have often regarded religion as a retarding force within society. Generally speaking, they tend to think that globalization means uniformity in the way of life and thinking; it conveys the idea of material values, whereas universality has a more positive significance. They view the latter as a possibility of discovering shared values although coming from different cultures and social backgrounds.*

*Once we step out of the rigid concept of an exclusive religion towards a more comprehensive idea of spirituality, we may find that this quest for self-discovery both within the individual and society could lead to a progressive growth of consciousness. A new relationship between the individual and society could be created. A new way of looking at the past and a new way of directing the future could be envisaged.*

*How can we find ways to look afresh at governance, economy, business, and social issues? How can we look at the larger portrait of humankind's collective progress? The split between the haves and the have-nots may begin to converge if social interaction is based on values of universal brotherhood rather than on simply material values.*

*Youth as "agents of change" can explore a greater understanding and therefore a path towards a progressive and harmonious co-existence.*

### From the Panel

Dr. Soumitra Basu (session facilitator), Psychiatrist, Calcutta.

Mr. Mukesh Vatsa, Judge, Sessions Court, Delhi.

Dr. Kittu Reddy, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

Ms. Kosha Shah, Centre for International Research in Human Unity, Auroville.

**Prof Kittu Reddy** said that at the root of most problems of society – be it at the level of family or nation – were (i) egoism, which was often motivated by (ii) desire and possession. World War I as also World War II, fought between "self-styled, most civilized" nations, had their roots in egoism and instinct for domination and possession. Likewise, most of the problems at other levels too – community or family – can be traced to egoism and desire. If in any conflict, a person/nation were to take a position that was calmer, detached, it was a "step towards spirituality". "Go to your core and you will find ego, covered by a thick layer. Every step towards clearing this layer is a step towards spirituality. As you move along this, you come in contact with your being, your soul."

Affirming that ego was both a helper and a bar, Prof Kittu Reddy said, "Intellectual religion can only take you up to a point; we need to touch some deeper source". Reason, according to Prof. Reddy, was not the highest instrument. One needs to surpass that.

**Mr. Mukesh Vatsa** said that spirituality was beyond space and time. It was something that could be felt only by those who have the ability to feel it, almost the same way as beauty could be seen only by those who have eyes. If life, with all its tribulations, ego and desire, brings in anger and frustration, an attitude, touched by spirituality, brings calmness.

**Ms. Kosha Shah** began with the individual. Idealism in youth slowly gets compromised in the process of individuals addressing material needs as they strive for their secure havens in their “own little world” and, over time, discover they have moved far away from their idealism. If the youth wish to avoid this, they will have to be alert to the processes at work, both at the level of society and at the individual level.

Spirituality, she said, meant the spirit, the essence, the root. If time was a linear movement – past, present and future – one needs to develop the insight to observe the unfolding pattern. It’s as if there was a master plan, not just for the individual, but society too. Life had much to offer — beyond materialism, ego and desire. There was something more to be discovered through questioning, turning deeper. Even though there may be no clear answers to many a question, one thing was becoming clear: for a lot of individuals, spirituality is emerging to the fore. Just as every individual had a soul, so did collectives of individuals, organizations, communities and nations have souls. Once the soul of a society had been discovered, the need to transform it too is felt, she said. Urging the youth to retain their fiery idealism for change for better, she advised them to nurture their optimism and not feel pressured by the forces of pragmatism.

**Dr. Soumitra Basu** said that though there was human unity – in the sense that uniformity of matter was reflected in uniformity in body structure – life and mind were marked by variation. If in Papua New Guinea conversations with the dead, the spirit of the dead, were considered normal, people in others parts of the world found it unbelievable. There is anger. There is also love and joy.

When a great idea or an ideal comes forth, it takes a long time to flower. The concept of ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ is still to flower fully. Likewise, human unity too was a great idea and may take quite a while before it flowers fully.

### Comments / Questions from Youth:

- Spirituality or unity would become meaningful only when poverty is addressed.
- A drop of action is better than an ocean of theories.
- 'Ego is the helper, ego is the bar'. In the context of South Asia, ego (of individual countries) has led to antagonism. What is needed is a collective ego through economic union, cultural union and political union.
- In the EU, common currency is coming up as a binding force; South Asia's strength is the spiritual tradition.
- Everyone has spirituality in the soul, the issue is: how do we see it clearly?
- A war of commerce - neo-imperialism, globalization - is already on. Why is there no transfer of technology from Multinational Companies to developing countries? Why is there no free movement of labour even when there's talk of free trade?
- The USSR collapsed because they addressed issues relating to economic equality only without touching on fraternity and liberty.
- The system is crumbling in the United States too. In the name of individual freedom, you can be "as demented as you want". It's crumbling from within and without.
- On the issue of Kashmir, both India and Pakistan should show flexibility. Once this issue is solved, South Asia can move towards being a union on the lines of the EU.

### Response from the Panel

- Dr. Soumitra Basu: While it was true that spirituality could not be preached to people on an empty stomach, it would also be a mistake to conclude that poor people are not spiritual. "Rather than preaching to the poor, you may well learn something about spirituality from them", he observed. As for closer co-operation / unity among South Asian countries, South Asia cannot, for long, remain isolated from the global trend. In the near future, South Asia might move in the same direction as EU. However, South Asian unity, for the moment, seems a bit distant. It might be achieved gradually.









## Explorations in Science and Integral Development

### Description of the theme from Organisers

*In essence, science and spirituality are complementary. They both seek the fundamental truth of existence, the hidden laws governing the physical world. Science deals mainly with matter and energy while spirituality focuses more on consciousness. They also share common methodologies of observation, analysis, synthesis and proven experience, but their fields of investigation are different: the material aspects for science and the inner ones for spirituality. Their research tools differ substantially, yet they both belong to the ageless quest of mankind for knowledge, freedom, unity and immortality.*

*In many civilizations and cultures the two were interrelated or at least did not interfere with one another, however in the past centuries they have been separated by materialistic or religious prejudices and dogmas. Today, new frontiers of science and knowledge are explored, subtler fields discovered and new theories formulated where dialogue and eventually synthesis have become possible.*

*The media and communication technologies can play a crucial role in this search.*

*Youth as “free spirit agents” can venture into this new land where unimaginable unifying fields of life-consciousness are waiting to be discovered.*

*For centuries, humanity has changed the world by external means. Mental and physical developments have moulded - for good or for bad - life and its perceptions. Can the world be changed from the inside without being crushed? Can the inner core of humanity and its great wisdom guide the directions of growth towards a new paradigm of wholeness, mutuality and human ecology? Should sustainable and durable development be based on a growing universal fraternity?*

*A continuous quest must be undertaken to achieve progressive harmony between humanity, nature and the spirit, a dynamic balance must be achieved between urban and rural development. The water issue as a world-challenge to sustain life-energy must be addressed. The importance of a proper balance between tangible and intangible development needs to be explored.*

*Youth as “unifying agents” can help bring about a dynamic change where mutual ground of understanding can be found.*

### From the Panel

Dr. Sauro Mezzetti (session facilitator), Centre of Urban Research, Auroville.

Dr. Marc Luyckx, International Advisory Council, Auroville.

Mr. Toine Van Megen, Auroville.

Mr. Raman Nanda, Media Consultant, New Delhi.

Mr. Enzo Fazzino, UNESCO, Paris.

**Dr. Marc Luyckx**, who has been looking closely at the evolution of economic structures and attitudes in ‘pre-modern’, ‘modern’ and ‘transmodern’ society, said there had been a manifold increase in production and consumption.

In the process of development – human consciousness, working on matter – it’s matter that is shaping consciousness.

**Dr. Sauro Mezzetti** said that the process of development – driven by advance in science and technology and, so very often, geared to meet the needs of consumerism - sharply accelerated the demand on nature and natural resources.

The demands made by human society on nature, if quantified, reveal a slow rise till about the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one finds an extremely sharp upswing in the net consumption of human beings.

The process of development has, by and large, focused on the external – mankind extracting, producing and consuming ever more.

“Is there another way of growing, growing without consuming?” Dr Mezzetti wondered.

In his vision of integral development, science and technology should be married with “something else” – social / psychological awareness and inner growth.

**Mr. Toine Van Megen** maintained that if development was to be sustainable, it needed to recognize that “harmony” was a core principle for integrated development. An old Chinese saying, “A great tailor cuts little” offered a lesson in developmental approach too.

**Mr. Raman Nanda** said correct observation and detection of a pattern in observable phenomena constituted the basis of science. However, widely observed patterns that tended to have any psychic element ended up being ignored or not followed by science and media.

Thanks to the ‘information revolution’ and Internet, youth can have their own virtual communities, and exchange experiences, through among other things, Internet broadcasting.

**Mr. Enzo Fazzino** said that scientists were working on spirituality – consciousness, as a real phenomenon. UNESCO, he said, would like the youth to build further on the conference and continue their dialogue on human unity.

### Comments / Questions from Youth:

- Material development alone is not enough. If it were so, suicide rates in some of the most developed countries would not be higher than in South Asia.
- Integral development is about being – being a human being. It’s about giving and receiving.
- To focus on the external, the material, is to be selfish.
- Can science help spirituality? Science and spirituality should be combined.
- What could be the follow-up to this conference? A network conference in which young achievers should be able to speak?

## Youth Conference Resolution

### We agree to:

- Take responsibility for our thoughts and accountability for our actions;
- Start with a positive attitude, project on to the world what we want it to be, and commit to change;
- Reach out to others and share responsibility for the challenges facing the world today;
- Share and dialogue with others, and love across borders;
- Stop blaming the society, take responsibility and become the leaders and let youth become the ambassadors;
- Educate oneself in consciousness, peace and spirituality;
- Create a common language or grammar of love to communicate across the world;
- Create a network, share information, and make opportunities like these accessible to all by using media and technology for positive work.

The seven small groups were asked to deliberate on three issues – challenges for human unity, the vision of youth and the commitments they were prepared to make for human unity. The deliberations over, each group selected one person for what was described as “The Wisdom Council.”

The Wisdom Council, comprising the “famous elders”, held an assembly with Erin Barton, playing Socrates, presiding over the meeting. The seven representatives spoke on behalf of their groups – each with a name intended to impart the spirit of unity, harmony and free flowing exchange of views.

The consensus at the meeting paved the way for the resolution.  
The delegates later read it out aloud as a pledge.

## Closing Ceremony

The final day of the conference saw the participants once again gather in a circle near the conference venue – almost the same way as they had begun. There was however a difference. If, when they first came together, they were somewhat circumspect and edgy, this time around they felt a team spirit, a sense of bonding, as they clasped each others hands and stood in a ring.

It was time for the facilitators, led by Mrs. Katharine Roske, to take feedback from the participants. As questions – almost an oral questionnaire – rolled out, the delegates stepped forward if their response to the question was in the affirmative.

Was this one of the most memorable weeks of your life?  
Everyone stepped forward – a 100 per cent response!

Step in if you would like the conference to be for two weeks?  
Again, almost all stepped forward.

Are you now more open to others?  
Of course. All took a step forward.

Want to come again to Auroville?  
A resounding “Yes”. 100 per cent.

Each delegate – having earlier written down the actionable points from the resolution that they proposed to follow up on after the conference – moved in neat rows, dropped their slips in an urn placed in the centre of the circle, and filed past each other – pausing, shaking hands, hugging, tearful as the conference was drawing to a close.

## The Closing Ceremony

Amidst musical notes from cymbals - generally used during auspicious ceremonies or in temple prayers – a candle symbolizing human unity was lit. Delegates made their way to the stage, each lighting a candle and affirming in his/her mother tongue that the light of human unity had been lit. A multiplicity of languages – Hindi, Urdu, Bhutanese, Tibetan, Singhalese, French, Russian, German, Spanish and English resonated in the auditorium echoing one message: human unity. Another group of youth – each of them reading out different paragraphs of the resolution – took the stage.

“Everybody has been moved and encouraged; ripples are going out – energizing us and reminding us why we came here”, remarked Alan Herbert, echoing the feelings of many an Aurovilian. Dr Ananda Reddy found himself going back down memory lane – to 1968 – when Aurovilians lit a lamp of human unity to mark the commencement of their dream project: Auroville. Mr. Enzo Fazzino was “touched, impressed”.

“You all will always remain in our hearts”, Ms Kosha Shah of CIRHU, the organizers of the conference, told the youth as they moved down the stage – some of them swaying and dancing – to “Let us keep flaming in our heart the fire of progress”.













# ANNEXURES

## Participants - IYC Auroville February 2005

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## List of Speakers

	Name	Organisation	Topic
<b>23rd February 2005</b>			
<b>Facilitator</b>	Sraddhalu Ranade	Sri Aurobindo Ashram	Religion & Spirituality
	Dr. M.D. Golam Mohiuddin	Vivekananda Mission Mahavidyalaya	Religion & Spirituality
	Dr. Bernard D' Sami	Loyola College, Chennai	Religion & Spirituality
	Swami Sarvagananda	Sri Ramakrishna Mission	Religion & Spirituality
	Dr. D.C. Jain	Safdarjung Hospital	Religion & Spirituality
	Dr. Ananda Reddy	Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advance Research	Religion & Spirituality
	Dr. Chok Tenzin Molam	(Dharamsala)	Religion & Spirituality
<b>24th February 2005</b>			
<b>Facilitator</b>	Dr. Ananda Reddy	Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advance Research	Education, Art & Culture
	Mme Sonia Ramzi	UNESCO, Paris	Education, Art & Culture
	Dr. Aster Patel	Centre for Indian Culture	Education, Art & Culture
	Mr. Prithviraj Perera	UNESCO, Delhi	Education, Art & Culture
	Mrs. Ameeta Mulla Wattal	Springdales School, Delhi	Education, Art & Culture
<b>25th February 2005</b>			
<b>Facilitator</b>	Dr. Soumitra Basu	Sri Aurobindo Society	Spirituality & Society
	Mr. Mukesh Vatsa	Sessions Court Delhi	Spirituality & Society
	Dr. Kittu Reddy	Sri Aurobindo Ashram	Spirituality & Society
	Ms. Kosha Shah	Centre for International Research on Human Unity	Spirituality & Society
<b>26th February 2005</b>			
<b>Facilitator</b>	Dr. Sauro Mezzetti	Centre for Urban Research	Science & Integral Development
	Mr. Sraddhalu Ranade	Sri Aurobindo Ashram	Science & Integral Development
	Mr. Enzo Fazzino	UNESCO, Paris	Science & Integral Development
	Mr. Toine Van Megen	Auroville	Science & Integral Development
	Dr. Marc Luyckx	International Advisory Council Auroville	Science & Integral Development
	Mr. Raman Nanda	Media Consultant, New Delhi	Science & Integral Development

## Conference programme

Date / Time	Activity	Venue
<b>Monday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2005</b> 10.30am- 12.30am, 1.30pm - 3.30pm 4.00pm - 6.00pm 6.30pm - 7.30pm 8.00pm	Registration  <b>Inauguration Ceremony</b> Dinner <b>Film: BARAKA</b> (Humanity, Nature, Spirit)	Bharat Nivas Bharat Nivas, Auditorium Visitors Centre Visitors Centre
<b>Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2005</b> 9.30am -11.30 am  11.30am- 1.00pm 1.00pm-2.00pm 2.00pm - 5.00pm  5.00pm-6.30pm 6.30pm -7.30 pm 8.00 pm	Welcome and introduction session for the delegates Voices of Auroville Lunch General orientation to Auroville <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• View Exhibition</li> <li>• Presentation on Auroville</li> <li>• Visit to Matrimandir</li> </ul> Optional activities Dinner Creative jam explorations and group interaction	Town Hall  Town Hall  Town Hall  Matrimandir Visitors Centre Visitors Centre SAWCHU
<b>Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2005</b> 9.00am 9.30am-10.15am  10.15am-10.45am 10.45am-11.45am 11.50am-12.45am  1.00pm-2.00pm 2.00pm-6.00pm 6.30pm-7.30pm 8.00pm	Large group attunement Plenary session <b>"Spirituality and Religion"</b> <i>(open to observers)</i> Morning Tea Small group dialogue session Plenary session: Large group synthesis of theme of morning Lunch Field trip to Pondicherry Dinner <b>Concert - Voices of youth</b>	Town Hall Town Hall  Town Hall Town Hall Town Hall  Town Hall  Visitors Centre Kalabhumi Theatre

Dearly beloved Sisters/Brothers,

Having enjoyed your youthful and innovative ideas and company during the last few days, I felt it only right, to leave behind a message for you all, on behalf of UNESCO New Delhi, who had the privilege and honour of co hosting this International Conference on “Youth For Human Unity: Explorations for New values through intercultural and interreligious dialogue”.

Although I had planned to take a more active role during much of the proceedings, perhaps it was “divine providence” that gave me the opportunity to “talk less and listen more that has left me none-the-less wiser” having listened to many words of wisdom, spoken by the youthful participants, comprising all ages.

Friends;

It is only dialogue and continuous dialogue, which could help build peace and sustainable development, for the future generations to come. We have learnt from lessons in the past, that tangible development, mostly comprising bricks and mortar, is not enough to address the needs of a mass of humanity. As pointed out during the conference, we need three planets, the size of the greatest monument of human kind, “The Mother Earth”, to provide equal consumption levels for all humankind”. We need a paradigm shift in the consciousness of human beings, to be able to practice give and take, to share and share alike. As Mahatma Gandhi had pointed out; “There is enough for everyone’s need; but; there is not enough for everyone’s greed”.

This conference addressed many issues;

1. Spirituality and Religion
2. Exploration in Education; Art and Culture
3. Explorations in Spirituality and Society
4. Explorations in Integral Development

and what we learnt from here, now needs to be taken further.

My dear friends, we look to you, the youth who would become the leaders in whatever fields you may involve yourselves in the times to come, to build capacities of the future generations, through like minded thinking.

You all have got together here in “Auroville 2005” now you all have to keep together, in the times to come. Today new technologies and “websites” make this an inexpensive possibility.

UNESCO shall also assist in this process by exploring seed funds for the possibility of creating a chair on “ Dialogue among civilizations” as per an appropriate choice of a committed person, to be selected by CIRHU (Centre for International Research in Human Unity) Auroville, with work to commence in January 2006. This would help catalyze all your efforts, in the respective countries, to enhance the networking and in influencing the relevant seats of governance.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Whilst some countries may wish to keep spending trillions of dollars on increasing their stock piles of weapons of mass destruction, based on their built up ideology of clashes of civilizations,

Let us, together, spend our modest dollars and untiring efforts, in building up the biggest stockpile of mass construction of defenses of peace and sustainable development, in the mind of the future generations to come. Remember cultures do not clash; cultures only spark each other. Friends; I was greatly touched by you. So, please let us stay in touch and energize our ideals.

May the Divine Spirit, bless you all!!

Prithviraj Perera  
UNESCO New Delhi

<b>Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2005</b> 9.00am 9.30am-10.15am  10.15am-10.45am 10.45am – 11.45am 11.50am – 12.45pm  1.00pm -2.00pm 2.00pm – 5.00pm 5.00pm - 6.30 pm 6.30pm -7.30pm 8.00pm	Morning Attunement Plenary session <b>“Explorations in Education, Art and Culture”</b> (open to observers) Morning Tea Small group dialogue session ( <i>delegates only</i> ) Plenary session: Large group synthesis of theme of morning Lunch Field trip around Auroville Optional activities Dinner <b>Story Telling</b>	Town Hall Town Hall  Town Hall Town Hall Town Hall  Town Hall Visitors Centre Visitors Centre Visitors Centre Visitors Centre
<b>Friday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2005</b> 9.00am 9.30am-10.15am  10.15am-10.45am 10.45am – 11.45am 11.50am – 12.45am  1.00pm -2.00pm 2.00pm – 5.00pm 5.00pm - 6.30pm 6.30pm -7.30pm 8.00pm	Morning attunement Plenary session <b>“Explorations in Spirituality and Society”</b> Morning Tea Small group dialogue session ( <i>delegates only</i> ) Plenary session: Large group synthesis of theme of morning Lunch Field trip bioregional Optional activities Dinner <b>Films: Anima Mundi and Winged Migration</b>	Town Hall Town Hall  Town Hall Town Hall Town Hall  Town Hall  Visitors Centre Visitors Centre Visitors Centre
<b>Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2005</b> 9.00am 9.30am-10.15am  10.15am –10.45am 10.45am – 11.45am 11.50am – 12.45pm  1.00pm -2.00pm 2.00pm – 5.00pm 5.00pm - 6.30pm 6.30pm -7.30pm 8.00pm	Morning attunement Plenary session <b>“Explorations in Integral Development”</b> Morning Tea Small group dialogue session ( <i>delegates only</i> ) Plenary session: Large group synthesis of theme of morning Lunch Field trip around Auroville Optional activities Dinner <b>Open podium and celebrations</b>	Town Hall Town Hall  Town Hall Town Hall Town Hall  Town Hall  Visitors Centre Visitors Centre Kalabhumi
<b>Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2005</b>  10.00am-1.00pm 4.00pm-6.00pm  7.00pm	Evaluation session with seminar reporters <b>Closing Ceremony</b>  Festive Dinner	Town Hall Sri Aurobindo Auditorium Bharat Nivas  Visitors Centre
<b>Monday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2005</b> 5.00am 7.30am 8.00am	<b>Auroville Birthday bonfire</b> <b>CIRHU Invocation</b> Breakfast Departure after breakfast from Auroville.	Matrimandir CIRHU Site



Concept paper

## YOUTH FOR HUMAN UNITY

### EXPLORATION FOR NEW VALUES THROUGH INTER-CULTURAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Meeting of selected youth and religious personalities from the SAARC region, to be held from 21 – 28 February 2005 in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India.

#### 1. Background :

As part of the UNESCO Interreligious Dialogue Program, originally launched as the “Routes of Faith” some years ago in Morocco, a regional gathering of religious leaders, policy-makers, academics, and specialists in intercultural and interreligious dialogue is to be held in Australia in late November 2004. This Meeting has been preceded by several other major interreligious encounters in Malta (1997), in Bishkek (1999), in Tashkent (2000), Almaty (2002), and lastly, in Abuja (2003). While focusing on regional issues, mainly in the Mediterranean basin, Central Asia and West Africa, and on specific themes such as grassroots experiences for reconciliation (Malta), Science and Spirituality (Almaty) and Conflict Resolution (Abuja), they provided an important opportunity to strengthen religious ties in the region and develop interaction between communities from different confessional backgrounds, including the autochthonous ones, as well as governments. Another objective was to reinforce stable and tolerant societies, with a view to understanding and responding to global challenges. With these goals in mind, the Interreligious Dialogue Program, which is an essential component of the Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures, shall focus on the SAARC region and target youth.

By the time the meeting is held in Auroville (21– 28 February 2005) information will also be available concerning the outcome of the Bishkek and Sydney conferences, concerning concrete activities proposed to promote dialogue between the countries of the region. These proposals and recommendations will no doubt contribute to fruitful discussions and stimulate renewed action in the South Asian region. The presence of youth and religious personalities will broaden the scope of dialogue thereby orientating the discussions towards contemporary challenges.

The United Nations proclaimed the year 2000 International Year for Dialogue among Civilizations. As a follow-up on 21 November 2001, the global agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations was adopted by the UN General Assembly by resolution 56/5. UNESCO, on the eve of the Millennium Summit in New York in 2001, provided new impetus to the agenda by the adoption of Resolution 31C/39 concerning the fight against terrorism. This affirmed, *inter alia* that dialogue “constitutes a fundamental challenge based on the unity of human kind and commonly shared values, the recognition of cultural diversity and the equal dignity of each civilization and each culture”.

The adoption of such resolutions gave renewed vigor and stimulated movements in favor of dialogue: The International Ministerial Conference on “Dialogue among Civilizations – Quest for New Perspectives” held in New Delhi on 9-10 July 2003 and “The Regional Forum on the Dialogue among Civilizations” held in Ohrid, Macedonia, on 29-30 August 2003.



## 2. Partnership:

### The Context of Auroville:

The seminar seeks to have a fresh look at the important questions that currently face our planet and to seek answers to the question: where are we heading? A question that concerns every member of our global family. We are planting the seeds for global thinking, an evolutionary skill and necessity to face the challenges ahead. This skill is not always acquired through formal education, and we wish to introduce and deepen participants' abilities to engage in integrative and global thought. Auroville is naturally predisposed to this.

Auroville is not proposing solutions but identifying and aligning principles (values and ethics) that exceed borders and are acceptable to all – a finer synthesis. Auroville, a laboratory that hosts a very diverse population, is experimenting in ways of engaging people who represent different perspectives in a meaningful dialogue. It proposes to offer an approach to dialogue that not only gives attention to content but also to process. The workshops were structured in such a way as to offer a platform for appreciative enquiry that will invite exploration of possibilities and is conducive to introspection by the participants.

Auroville offers a well-established field of experimentation where ideas are being expressed and a unique environment for viable alternatives exists in many fields, including education, urban planning, environment, regional development, culture, etc. The basic message is, don't give up on dreams and don't be afraid to have them – there may be many reasons to feel disillusioned but yesterday's dreams are today's reality.

Auroville, as a utopia under development, has still a long way to go. Yet, like humanity, it carries a flame, a hope, a call to the future.

The majority of the participants were from India, 17 from other SAARC countries about 10 from Auroville and the world at large. Religious leaders from the SAARC region, representing the major faiths will deliver a short message and take part in the debates.

### 3. Objectives of the Conference:

The objectives of the youth conference are first and foremost, to share views on the issues to be addressed, sensitize the general public to such issues, and to the importance of dialogue as a means to prevent and resolve conflicts, which hinder sustainable development. Lastly, produce recommendations for implementation by policy makers in the SAARC region, that share common values, as well as having problems in common, by working together for the well-being and reconciliation of their populations.

In this perspective, the following objectives should, to some extent, be achieved, through an effective partnership with UNESCO and its partners (Auroville Foundation, Templeton Foundation eventually, etc.)

### 4. Issues to be addressed:

The conference in Auroville “Youth for Human Unity” will take into account the recommendations and resolutions from the aforementioned conferences, and will focus on the social, cultural and religious contexts of the SAARC region – **explorations for new values in:**

#### a. Spirituality and Religion

Religion at its origin was meant to be an expression of humanity’s evolutionary quest for a deeper, broader and higher consciousness. Somewhere along the way, religion was separated from its source and focused more on the exterior aspects of rituals and dogmas. This bred ignorance, intolerance and fundamentalism, which have led to a strong secular anti-religious stand amongst many.

But if we realize that all religions are merely an outward form of a deeper essence of spirituality, and that this essence is more or less common to all religions, then our understanding of true spirituality would be clearer. Is it possible to try not only to understand each other’s position from different religious standpoints and also to delve deep into our own to find its essence? Is it possible by way of this inner journey, to find common spiritual values with other religions and spiritual paths?

Youth as “transforming agents” can play a decisive role in the evolution of religions towards a universal spirituality for humanity, particularly on the sub-continent of South Asia, where a maximum number of world religions are to be found.

#### b. Youth and Society: from Globalization to Universality (Explorations in Spirituality and Society)

Young people who are in quest of a more informal way of living spirituality have often regarded religion as a retarding force within society. Generally speaking, they tend to think that globalization means uniformity in the way of life and thinking, it conveys the idea of material values, whereas universality has a more positive significance: they view the latter as a possibility of discovering shared values although coming from different cultures and social backgrounds.

Once we step out of the rigid concept of an exclusive religion towards a more comprehensive idea of spirituality, we may find that this quest for self-discovery both within the individual and society could lead to a progressive growth of consciousness. A new relationship between the individual

and society could be created. A new way of looking at the past and a new way of directing the future could be envisaged.

How can we find ways to look afresh at governance, economy, business, and social issues? How can we look at the larger portrait of humankind's collective progress? The split between the haves and the have-nots may begin to converge if social interaction is based on values of universal brotherhood rather than on simply material values.

Youth as "agents of change" can explore a greater understanding and therefore a path towards a progressive and harmonious co-existence.

### **c. Education, Art and Culture**

Today the human being is the centre of education, and the development of his /her faculties the aim of education. Yet there are deeper aspects of the individual, which are not given sufficient space for growth. Can quality education for all be based on the integral development of the personality? What is the contribution of trans-disciplinary concepts applied to education?

Similarly in the field of art, if art is more than just an expression of the finite and the known, more of a search for the infinite through the finite, then something of the essence could be captured which would express unity of cultures in diversity.

South Asia, bound by the Himalayas in the north and the oceans in the south, has over the millennia developed a special culture. Can the countries which compose this sub-continent go further in understanding what approach to life is common to them? What are the values which make the peoples of this region similar? What has South Asia contributed to world culture?

A special focus should be given to the future of cultural heritage, including its spiritual intangible dimension. As quoted from the Malta Declaration: behind the stones, there is a soul.

Can youth as "creative agents" dream and manifest the beauty of this heritage by preserving it and transmitting it to the next generation?

### **d. Science and Integral Development**

In essence, science and spirituality are complementary. They both seek the fundamental truth of existence, the hidden laws governing the physical world. Science deals mainly with matter and energy, while spirituality focuses more on consciousness. They also share common methodologies of observation, analysis, synthesis and proven experience, but their fields of investigation are different: the material aspects for science and the inner ones for spirituality. Their research tools differ substantially, yet they both belong to the ageless quest of mankind for knowledge, freedom, unity and immortality.

In many civilizations and cultures the two were interrelated or at least did not interfere with one another, however in the past centuries they have been separated by materialistic or religious prejudices and dogmas. Today, new frontiers of science and knowledge are explored, subtler fields discovered and new theories formulated where dialogue and eventually synthesis have become possible.

The media and communication technologies can play a crucial role in this search. Youth as “free spirit agents” can venture into this new land where unimaginable unifying fields of life-consciousness are waiting to be discovered.

For centuries, humanity has changed the world by external means. Mental and physical developments have moulded - for good or for bad - life and its perceptions. Can the world be changed from the inside without being crushed? Can the inner core of humanity and its great wisdom guide the directions of growth towards a new paradigm of wholeness, mutuality and human ecology? Should sustainable and durable development be based on a growing universal fraternity?

A continuous quest must be undertaken to achieve progressive harmony between humanity, nature and the spirit, a dynamic balance must be achieved between urban and rural development. The water issue as a world-challenge to sustain life-energy must be addressed. The importance of a proper balance between tangible and intangible development needs to be explored.

Youth as “unifying agents” can help bring about dynamic change where mutual ground of understanding can be found.

#### 5. Methodology for Implementation of Recommendations:

The Forum will address the topics described above from different points of view

- i. A religious leader
- ii. A specialized scholar
- iii. A young person from the SAARC region
- iv. A partner (Auroville or other)
- v. UNESCO (either from Headquarters or from the field)

Debates will follow, and the young people will be requested to prepare questions beforehand, which will be addressed to the panelists. During the week of the Forum, some days will be devoted to the conference itself, the others to practical workshops on sustainable development, on how to address water issues, encounters with religious leaders and UNESCO specialists. UNESCO will set up a stand with material and informative documentation that will be available to the young people and the public at large.

A website is being designed as an innovative way to encourage young people to exchange their views.

A day of “inter-religious” discovery could consist of a visit to sacred buildings belonging to the various faiths of the region around Pondicherry, in order to show the youth the shared value of heritage. This will enable them to better understand the cultures that shaped the buildings themselves and the cross-borrowings that occurred between them throughout the centuries. In this respect, India is a living example, a showcase with a varied range of sacred monuments and sacred landscapes representing nearly all the planet’s faiths, and the multiple exchanges that have taken place among people.

#### 6. Results and Indicators of Success:

Feedback should be given over a four-year period, since the enhancement of dialogue is a continuous and on-going process. Feedback should include:

- Improvement in the application of intangible development concepts in the SAARC countries;
- Progress on the use of spiritual approaches to problem-solving in the region;
- Progress on education for all goals and, as an example, on the use of the “Teacher’s Guide to Peace” and “The World Heritage in Young Hands Kit”;
- Networking improvement to share scientific technological advancements, communication technologies and water management techniques;
- Establishment of a UNESCO Chair for Dialogue among Civilizations, Cultures and Religions in the SAARC region;
- Design and production of pedagogical materials on civilizations, cultures and religions of the SAARC region that could be collected by the young people involved in the meeting itself, and afterwards spread to other countries of the region and used in schools;
- Publication and dissemination of the proceedings that will include best practices and “success stories” of dialogue.
- A second phase should involve a review of the application of the recommendations.

Appropriate guidelines to address the aforementioned issues discussed at the proposed meeting in Auroville, through discussions and consensus, shall be made available to development planners in the SAARC region, as also to the UNESCO Secretariat to promote similar actions in the other regions of the world.

