

Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha highlights important role of religion in Sri Lanka's reconciliation process

Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva and Chairman of the Personal Representatives of the Heads of State and Government of the G-15 addressed the "Dialogue on Faith, Peace building & Development," on 9 February 2017 in Geneva which discussed how to leverage faith as an instrument of international harmony. The event was a unique dialogue that comprised two panels with six ambassadors and several scholars and faith leaders. Held at the Emirates Room of the *Palais des Nations*, it was attended by United Nations staff and diplomats, as well as by media, observers, students and activists from civil society organizations.

The 2nd Dialogue on Faith, Peace building and Development was organised by the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). Amb. Aryasinha was joined by the ambassadors of Jordan, Bahamas, the Holy See, the Order of Malta, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) who shared remarks with one commonality: to reaffirm the truth that no religion promotes violence, and that no religion ignores the value of peace. Each panellist demonstrated -- from the unique perspective of his or her own national, institutional, and religious context -- that if we want to see a better world for future generations, we as the international community have a collective imperative: to launch a crusade, together, against religious strife.

The Chairman of the G-15 recounted the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka after three decades of conflict. "This on-going work of peace building encompasses the four major religions of the country -- Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity -- and has harnessed the best qualities of each to build concrete mechanisms to promote interfaith understanding throughout the country, particularly in schools." He noted that religion plays a significant aspect in the daily lives of the people of Sri Lanka and is given pride of place in many of our social interactions. "The significance that religion plays is recognized by the public as well as the Government. Since becoming an independent country in 1948, many of our national events, with the blessings of the successive Governments, have integrated multi-religious observances, such as commemoration of the Independence Day, commencement of the first working day of the New Year, etc."

Amb. Aryasinha also noted that "in the noble teachings and doctrines of major religions, faiths and beliefs practiced today, you will find each of them advocating for ways and means of achieving self-discipline - mental and physical. Peace & Security, Fundamental Rights and Sustainable Development are the corner stones of any stable and prosperous society. It is the basis of the United Nations that we all belong to."

The Dialogue went on to discuss broad-ranging aspects of peace-building and development work currently going on in the name of faith. Panellists from academia also spoke of the issue of religion as a source of peace building values. The Second Annual Interfaith Dialogue in Geneva was a testament to that fact, not just through the discussion it fostered, but also in its very origins; for the conference came into existence first and foremost through a type in-house interfaith dialogue within the Palais des Nations.

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