

**A Report on the 6th REGIONAL INTERFAITH DIALOGUE**  
**“Strengthening Collaborative Communities to Promote Regional Peace and Security:  
Interfaith in Action”**  
**Semarang, Indonesia, 11-15 March 2012**  
**Rev. Samuel Green**

**Introduction**

The Regional Interfaith Dialogue (RID) was started by the Australian and Indonesian governments because these governments felt that the different religions within the ASEAN nations needed a forum for dialogue. This was based on the understanding that the contribution of the different religions is an important element in the wider dialogue of these nations. The goal of the conference is to provide opportunities for connecting and cooperating for peace and harmony and also for the issuing of the Plan of Action paper which governments and other institutions can use for policy and interfaith activities.

**Previous Conferences**

Yogyakarta Dialogue - “Interfaith Cooperation” (December 2004)

Cebu Dialogue - “Regional Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity” (March 2006)

Waitangi Dialogue - “Building Bridges” (May 2007)

Phnom Penh Dialogue - “Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony” (April 2008)

Perth Dialogue - "Future Faith Leaders: Regional Challenges and Cooperation". (October 2009)

**Websites**

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/asean/>

<http://www.regionalinterfaith.org.au/>

**Delegation Team**

Mr Tim Fischer AC, Delegation Leader.

Miss Maryum Chaudhry, Executive Member, Islamic Council of Victoria.

Priest Dilip Chirmuley AM, Hindu Society of South Australia.

Reverend Samuel Green, Interfaith Chaplain Anglican Church of Australia.

Reverend Professor James Haire AM DD, Executive Director, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Charles Sturt University.

Ms Maysa Hassan, Executive Member, Affinity Intercultural Foundation.

Mr Jeremy Jones AM, Anti-Racism Advocacy and Interfaith Chair Australian Jewish Community.

Dr Patricia Madigan OP, Chair, Commission for Interfaith Relation Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay.

Professor Abd Malak AM, Chair, Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations.

Most Reverend Bishop Christopher Prowse DD, Catholic Bishop of Sale Roman Catholic Church.

Most Venerable Thich, Quang Ba , Deputy Chair for External Affairs, Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation of Australia and New Zealand Executive Member, Australian Sangha Association Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils.

Mr Colin Milner, Director: Pacific Program, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Ms Stephanie Aeuckens, Director: ASEAN and EAS Section, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Mr Steve Barnes, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Ms Connie Lo, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

### Anglican Delegate

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade requested a representative from the Anglican church. Samuel Green's name was put forward and he was contacted by Martin Drevikovsky, the General Secretary of the Anglican Church. Samuel's name was then submitted to DFAT and he was accepted by DFAT for the delegate position.

Rev. Samuel Green is an Interfaith chaplain with the Tasmanian Diocese. He has worked with the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES) as a campus evangelist and Islamic specialist since 1999. He regularly travels around the universities of Australia helping the Christian groups to engage with their Muslim friends. He provides a theological and practical engagement with Islam at many levels.

<http://www.engagingwithislam.org/>  
<http://www.reading-the-quran.blogspot.com/>  
<http://answering-islam.org/Green/>

<http://www.anglicantas.org.au/people/?item=1060>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/engagingwithislam>

### **On Overview of the Conference**

The conference was held in Semarang which is a very multicultural part of Indonesia. Most religions are represented in this area. There were around 150 religious representatives from the ASEAN countries at the conference.

The first two days of the conference involved various meetings of the delegates. We were first addressed by Indonesian government representatives who explained the Indonesian policy of “Pancasila”. This government policy aims to have peace between the government and religion and between the religions and it is integral to Indonesian policy making. We were told that the Indonesian motto is, “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” - Unity in Diversity.

The next series of meetings were lectures presented by various delegates explaining and illustrating various examples of interfaith dialogue within their communities. After each lecture there was time for questions and comments from the audience.

After these meetings we then had a period of visiting various temples, mosques and churches. This was an amazing time for seeing the countryside and appreciating the architecture and theology of these buildings. At most of these locations we were fed and warmly greeted.

We then had our working groups which were smaller group discussions. There were three topics of discussion:

- Conflict Resolution
- Future Leaders
- Education

I was in the education discussion group. These went for 3 hours and we heard the experience of every delegate and discussed and debated points. The goal of these groups was to formulate recommendations upon which governments and other organisations can base policy making decisions. These recommendations were collected into one statement called the Plan of Action, which I have attached.

### **My Reflections**

I thought that the conference was very worthwhile and am thankful for the opportunity to attend. It was great to be able to meet and spend time with representatives from other religions. I made genuine friendships which still continue. This experience has forced me to work through how to be a good Christian citizen in a multi-religious society.

It was also a great blessing to meet many Christian representatives from the ASEAN countries. When we were visiting the temples, mosques and churches it was only the

Christians who sang for joy about God's love for us; it was quite a contrast. We have continued contact with each other and many are keen for information on how to engage with their Muslim neighbours. It was also a great pleasure to be able to speak with Tim Fisher and learn from his diplomatic wisdom.

Meeting the government officials was also of great value. The government officials did not contribute to the public discussions but were very keen to talk policy at the many informal times. Many of the religious delegates were of the view that religion is about being good and that peace and unity comes from not discussing our differences. This was not what I was saying. I was saying that we must maintain the integrity of our traditions and work for peace while maintaining these differences. I had several long talks with DFAT staff who found my approach helpful. They said that normally at these events the delegates say all religions are the same and that this actually gives the DFAT staff little to work with in terms of policy. I was invited by DFAT staff to provide more theological direction to them later in the year.

I was in the education Working Group and was able to contribute to discussion that became part of the Plan of Action. Many of the other suggestions were about how religions can work together with a common interest to promote harmony and these are worthwhile and can be seen in the Plan of Action. My contribution though was about the role of education regarding our differences. I made the point that it is not possible to have no conflict. As was pointed out by other delegates conflict is in all relationships. What matters is how we deal with conflict. I suggested that there was unacceptable conflict, killing each other, and acceptable conflict, the debates and arguments we see in our free media and have in our democratic parliaments. My suggestion was that we need an educational dialogue process that allows for the integrity of our religions to be maintained. Without this we will also never engage with the radicals of any religion. Therefore I suggested that universities should be places of dialogue and debate between religions.

My other suggestion was that we should acknowledge how people feel in this area and let them say how they feel. We heard an impassioned cry for help from the Buddhist community about the religious cleansing that is happening in southern Thailand. However, this was the only occasion. Many of the other groups who were suffering said nothing and it seemed that they did not feel safe to say what was happening to them. My suggestion was that we must let people say how they feel without dismissing them, and we must face our history.

This discussion above contributed to the following statements under Education in the Plan of Action.

- c. that our governments promote safe educational environments for interfaith learning and activity;
- e. that religious communities develop a core group of interfaith exponents who have expertise and experience in both their own religious traditions and interfaith dialogue;
- f. that religious communities take responsibility for acknowledging and overcoming historic and contemporary grievances;

The Australian and Indonesian governments take this dialogue seriously. They were not in any way trying to control proceedings but genuinely seemed to want to listen to the

suggestions from the combined wisdom of the different religious communities. The statement produced by this conference, the Plan of Action, can be a very useful tool if we choose to be involved with it. It can be presented to governments and educational facilities for consideration in their policy making. It is sort of like the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. It is not binding, but if a government has agreed to it then it is to play a role in their decision making. The Australian government has agreed in principle to this Plan of Action and I feel that it is important for us to be involved and be part of the process and to use the Plan of Action in our engagement with government and other institutions.

Again I would like to give my thanks for the opportunity to be involved in this conference.

Your brother in Christ  
Samuel Green  
13 April, 2012