

## **SAMVAD-I: Global Conclave on ‘Hindu-Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness’**

The Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) jointly organised a three-day global conclave ‘Samvad:Hindu-Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness’, in collaboration with the International Buddhist Federation and the Tokyo Foundation, from 3 to 5 September 2015. Proceedings of the conclave were conducted in the first two days at VIF in New Delhi, while the venue shifted to Bodh Gaya in Bihar on the third day. The conclave was inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of highlighting India’s civilizational links with world. Not only did the Prime Minister inaugurate the conclave in Delhi but he also went to Bodh Gaya along with the delegates to offer a special prayer for global peace and harmony at Mahabodhi temple, Buddhism’s holiest shrine. A pre-recorded message from Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was also played during the inaugural session of the conference.

While Hon’ble Shinzo Abe in an offline message said Japan owed it’s ‘rule of law’ to Buddhism, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized that teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism can provide answers to many of problems the world faces, especially the ones related to conflicts and environmental degradation. Hon’ble Modi’s resounding speech underlined the emerging dangers, both to the world and the environment. He stressed the quintessence of resolving conflicts lies in dialogue. Expressing his deep anguish over the rising level of conflicts across societies, the Prime Minister stressed that the theme of dialogue on conflicts needs to shift from an ideological approach to a philosophical one. It was evident from his speech that the world needs a fresh approach to deal with the twin threats of rising conflicts and environmental degradation.



Delegates from over 15 countries, including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Japan, Taiwan, and a few European countries, among others, participated in the conference. Union Minister of State for Home Affairs hon'ble Kran Rijju and Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Culture, Tourism and MoS for Ministry of Civil Aviation hon'ble Mahesh Sharma, were among other distinguished invitees to the conference.

The conclave on the first day focused squarely on the issue of conflict avoidance. From the discussions held amongst the scholars, it came out loud and clear that the teachings of Gautama Buddha, Swami Vivekananda and other spiritual leaders of Hinduism and Buddhism, especially on inter-religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence, are more relevant today than ever before. Speaker after speaker agreed that this conclave offered a great opportunity to analyse threats and challenges to the maintenance of world peace and tranquility. There was total consensus that there is need to break away from ideological shackles and start a philosophical debate to develop a global understanding as a means of avoiding conflicts.



Sri Lanka's former President Mrs Chandrika Kumartunga, Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Minoru Kiuchi, Founder of the Art of Living Foundation Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Secretary General of the International Buddhist Confederation Ven. Lama Lobzang, Ven. Thich Nhat Tu from Vietnam, Founder of Dharmashree Gita Parivar & Mahirshi Ved Vyas Pratishthan Swami Govind Dev Giri and Shri Swaminathan Gurumurthy, among others, discussed ways and means of avoiding conflicts in a world torn apart by religious fanaticism and ideological bigotry.

The second day witnessed a spirited and composite dialogue among the participants on environmental consciousness being the prime paradigm of socio-cultural cooperation and creative global action. The philosophical underpinnings of Buddhist dharma were touched upon in a reference to the protection of natural heritage and the pursuit of sustainable growth. The environmental protection could be possible only with such awareness based on our ancient beliefs with respect to the Mother Earth.

With Param Puja Swami Paramatmananda, Secretary General & Coordinator of Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, India, and Ven. Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Shadjin Lama of the Republic of Kalmyk (Russian Federation) Co-Chairing the session on the second day, Ven. Geshe Jangchup Choeden, Abbot, Ganden Shartse Monastery, Karnataka, India, H. E Lyonpo Namgay Dorji, Minister for Finance, Kingdom of Bhutan, H.E Chuch Phoeurn, Secretary of State, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, Cambodia, among other distinguished speakers, discussed extensively on how to protect the environment and the Mother Earth from further onslaught.



In her valedictory address, Hon'ble Sushma Swaraj, Minister for External Affairs, Government of India, underlined the linkages between conflict and environment. She also pointed out that while, on one hand, a totalitarian approach where man is at the center was propagated by a large number of western philosophers, the Hindu and the Buddhist philosophers, on the other hand, remained deeply conscious of the need to preserve nature. The environmental degradation has reached an alarming stage today and if corrective steps are not taken urgently, the future generations will not forgive us, hon'ble Sushma Swaraj cautioned the audience.

In his concluding remarks, General NC Vij, Director, VIF, stated that the conclave not only met all the objectives it had set out to achieve but even went beyond that. Scholars, heads of religious bodies, and other delegates who participated in the conference were aligned to the same thought process. The process initiated by the VIF would be taken further, General Vij assured the audience, while Mr. Masahiro Akiyama, President, the Tokyo Foundation declared that Japan would host the next Hindu Buddhist Samvad (Dialogue) in January 2016. The Vote of Thanks was proposed by Most Ven. Lama Lobzang, Secretary General, IBC