



Vivekananda International Foundation
India



Samvad II: Dialogue for Peace, Harmony and Security –

A Global Initiative for Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness

Organizers: Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), India and
Sitagu International Buddhist Academy (SIBA), Myanmar

In association with: Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies
(MISIS), Myanmar &

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1. A conference titled “**Samvad**” held on 3-4 September 2015 in New Delhi was a profound, path breaking and landmark event which was perceived as having the potential to change the global discourse on the themes of “Conflict Avoidance” and “Environmental Consciousness”.
2. Organised by Vivekananda International Foundation, Delhi and The Tokyo Foundation, Tokyo, supported by International Buddhist Confederation [IBC], the premier world Buddhist body, it was the joint enterprise of two of the oldest, living, tolerant, non-conflicting civilisations and philosophies.
3. Hindu and Buddhist philosophies accept other thought and belief systems as valid for their respective followers which makes them doctrinally tolerant. These two philosophies which have common origin and retained their mutual and symbiotic relations, also believe, within and outside, in dialogue as the normal way to create and sustain human consciousness and avoid conflicts. Doctrinally tolerant and with propensity for dialogue both philosophies inhere their potential for conflict avoidance. Again both these civilizations regard nature as sacred, which makes them exceptionally environment conscious. Therefore, their nature-friendly tenets have the potentiality to preserve environment and ecology.
4. With their conflict-avoiding propensities and environment-compatible nature, these two civilisations have the philosophic potential to build a global conflict avoidance architecture and also ingrain and implant environment

consciousness in people by recalling their spiritual world view that the divine is immanent as much in nature as in humans.

5. The Conference, which was a joint endeavour of these two civilisations was conceived as an ambitious, yet not an unachievable, goal to shift the paradigm of global discourse on the two critical issues — of *conflicts* from **Conflict Resolution to Conflict Avoidance** and of *Environment* from **Environmental Regulations to Environmental Consciousness**. In a world which seems to be running short of ideas other than government action to defend and preserve environment, the conference seeks to open people-participatory paradigm on both conflict avoidance and environmental consciousness.

6. Appropriately titled “Samvad”, a derivative of the Sanskrit word “*Samvadam*” [meaning “Dialogue”], the speakers at the conference urged open and truthful global dialogue on conflicts and environment.

7. The heart of the Conference was captured in the Key Note Paper presented at the meet which informed the discussions during the two days of the conference. The Key Note Paper was centred on seeking three fundamental changes or paradigm-shifts:

- One, from curative conflict resolution to preventive conflict avoidance.
- Two, from state environmental regulations to mass ecological consciousness.
- Three, from the dialogue-evasive ideology to dialogue-friendly philosophy.

The themes of the conference are not mutually exclusive. They are inter-related through the underlying value of dialogue which the third limb emphasises. The Key Note Paper could be the basis for all future conferences involving the aspects of conflict avoidance and environmental consciousness.

8. All religions primarily promote peace and harmony yet conflict resolution ideas and structure are becoming weak and inadequate, needing an alternative approach. Conflict avoidance paradigm promoted in the Delhi meet rests on the view that Hans Kungs, a religious theologian of the Roman Catholic Church formulated which postulated, *that peace among nations is not possible without peace among religions, peace among religions is not possible without dialogue among religions and dialogue among religions is impossible without investigating the fundamentals of different religions*. Thus open and transparent philosophic dialogue, which is inherent in **Asiatic traditions**, forms the core of conflict

avoidance paradigm suggested by Hans Kungs.

9. Again, the current paradigm of resolving conflict between humans and development on the one side and environment on the other is government regulation which does not treat the cause of the environmental degradation rooted in the anthropocentric belief, thought and development systems which again have as their source from the theological systems which deny sacredness to nature and therefore refuse to accept reverence for nature. The alternative paradigm of human reverence for sacred nature for resolving the conflict between humans and environment is deeper than even deep environmental consciousness which is now being discussed in intellectual circles in the West. The alternative paradigm of environmental consciousness based on these civilization's reverence for sacredness of nature is rooted in the cultural and religious principles of environmentally conscious belief systems which has the potential to transform the present ruling paradigm of anthropocentric development model into eco centric one.

10. The environmental issues also call for dialogue among religions and belief systems to promote the consciousness that nature is sacred and as sacred as humans. All dialogues on the fundamentals of any ideology — including religions — will help transform dialogue evasive ideologies into dialogue promoting philosophies which govern the paradigm of conflict avoidance.

11. The Delhi Samvad Conference was thus an endeavour to transform the meet into a new movement — a global intellectual and civilisational movement to create deep awareness about, spread and advocate the three themes in global discourse. This conference was intended as the beginning of the process with a series of conferences first in Asian nations to carry and deepen the agenda and later in other places.

12. The Prime Minister of India inaugurated the Delhi conference in the august presence of world leaders, most eminent spiritual masters of Buddhist, Hindu and other faiths Venerable Buddhist monks and nuns from India, Japan, Srilanka, Bhutan, Cambodia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Thailand, Bangladesh, Nepal, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Vietnam and eminent Buddhist scholars from Australia, UK, USA, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and Russia participated in the two-day conference. The Hindu delegates who participated were largely from India and Nepal. The Prime Minister also joined the delegates at the Sacred Mahabodhi temple in the Holy city of Bodhgaya on September 5, 2015 where the Bodhgaya Declaration was adopted. Copy of the declaration is enclosed.

13. Our partners The Tokyo Foundation & Japan Foundation followed the initiative by hosting a symposium on 'Shared Values and Democracy in Asia' in

Tokyo on 19 January 2016. The Prime Minister of Japan Mr. Shinzo Abe delivered the key note speech.

14. The Conference at Yangon on August 5-6, 2017 is proposed to be a follow up of the Samvad Initiative to expound, articulate and deepen the philosophic understanding on the two issues of critical importance to the world to shift the paradigm from conflict resolution to conflict avoidance and environmental regulation to environmental consciousness.

15. There have been positive developments subsequent to the Delhi meet. For the first time, the environmental philosophic perspectives of these two civilisations found expression in the Paris Climate Summit in November 2015. The religious leaders belonging to the two oldest philosophies of the world presented separately the perspectives of their philosophies as to how to handle the climate challenge. The two presentations had many common points as a result of the Delhi meet.

16. The environmental theme of the Delhi meet was taken to the Paris Climate meet by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India in two ways: one, he penned a book which contained the philosophic dimensions of the meet on environmental consciousness; two, he and the French President released a musical album produced by the VIF with the help of Grammy Award winner Ricky Kej [in which 300 artistes from across the world participated] which contained the civilizational hymns from environment-compatible religious literature which formed the basis of the Samvad meet in Delhi.

17. The UN General Assembly has now passed a resolution on 'Culture and Sustainable Development'. The UN resolution in substance endorses the environmental theme of the HBC regarding environmental consciousness and the Samvad concept paper which had linked culture to sustainable development. This shows that the world is prepared to explore the civilisational and philosophical roots to seek solutions to the crises endangering the world's very existence. It is suggested that the Key Note Paper of the Delhi meet and UN resolution could be the foundation for the deliberations at the Yangon leg of the meeting.

18. The resolution of the United Nations and the Key Note Paper of the SAMVAD meet accompanies this draft concept note.