

Celebration of International Day of Peace, 2020

At Peace Center in Lahore, Pakistan

The United Nations announced the theme of “Shaping Peace Together” for the celebration of International Day of Peace in 2020.



Peace Center, Lahore, and United Religions Initiative (URI) Pakistan organized the celebration of International Day of Peace on 20th September, 2020 at Peace Center. They invited around 70 religious leaders, promoters of interfaith harmony, and peace ambassadors who are playing their positive role to bring peace and interfaith harmony in Pakistan and elsewhere.

Fr. James Channan OP, Director of Peace Center and URI Regional Coordinator for Asia-Pakistan, hosted the program along with staff members; Sr. Sabina Rifat, Neelam Nisari, Asher Nazir, and Faisal Ilyas.

Fr. Younas Shahzad OP, Prior Vice Provincial, Ibn-e-Mariam Vice Province, Pakistan, presided over. Maulana Abdual Khabir Azad, Grand Imam and Khateeb, Badshahi Mosque, Lahore, was the Chief Guest.

Mr. Asher Nazir, Executive Secretary of URI Pakistan, greeted the guests and invited Br. Perakash OP, Dr. Munawar Chand and Maulana Arif Chishti for interfaith prayers from Christian, Muslim and Hindu faiths.



Pir Shafat Rasool Noori, Founder Bilal Markaz, Prof. Mehmood Ghaznavi, Mufti Ashiq Hussain, Dr. Munawar Chand, Chairman Krishna Mandir, Fr Patrick Peter OP, Allama Asghar Chishti, Advocate Shabnam Nagi, Maulana Arif Chishti, Mufti Asim Makhdum, Saeedul Rehman Siddiqui from Azad Kashmir, Ahamd Hussain from Islamabad, Akhtar Murad, Allama SA Jeffery were the Guests of Honor who attended the program.

Fr. James Channan OP formally welcomed all the guests and furthermore shared the importance



of the program. He said, "We have been confronting the COVID-19 pandemic, a health emergency which has damaged a lot at various levels and aspects. We have suffered with many deaths, economy backlash, frustration, unemployment, starvation and disappointment since the COVID-19 breakout. We are heading towards a new era and normal life, and today we have arranged the very first program to gather people in such a large number to

celebrate the International Day of Peace. The theme of the IDP is very inspiring and it invites each one of us to play our imperative role in Shaping Peace Together. We cannot achieve lasting peace without contributing our utmost best for peace in the world. It is really wonderful that so many prominent personalities have come here under one roof to celebrate IDP and express their dedication and make pledges to devote their lives for mutual respect, peace and tolerance and thus build the bridges of harmony, acceptance, love and tolerance and thus break the walls of hatred, violence and disunity. We have to shape the peace together and never neglect our responsibilities in this noble cause. Here I would like to mention with sincere gratitude and pay rich tribute to the organizations which Mrs. Masami Saionji has established in Japan, such as: God Peace Foundation, Symphony of Peace Prayers International, Byakko Shinko Kai and Soul of WoMen, which are playing tremendous role in promoting culture of peace and harmony in the world and these are making a tremendous positive difference in the world. I acknowledge with thanks the presence of all, showing the passion and dedication towards peace and interfaith harmony."

In his presidential remarks, Fr. Younis Shahzad OP said, “I congratulate and wish a very happy



International Day of Peace to all of you, especially Fr. James Channan OP and his team, who have arranged such a beautiful event.” He said that Fr Channan is the pride of the Dominicans and a great asset of Pakistan’s Christians and Muslims. It is because he has always showed great courage in playing a very positive role towards harmonious and peaceful co-existence in Pakistan. “It is really wonderful to see that so many prominent personalities have gathered at Peace Center to observe this

all. I am sure with your efforts and vision there will be positive change in Pakistan and we will bear much fruit of lasting peace and harmony in our country and elsewhere. All of us need to devoted our lives for this noble cause. As Christians and followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to proclaim and devoted ourselves for peace at all levels of life. And this day is the best example as we are celebrating IDP.” He thanked all participants who came for this peace event.

Maulana Abdual Khabir Azad said, “I wish a very happy International Day of Peace, 2020 to all



who are sitting in this hall and those who will see and hear us on digital and print media. Fr. James Channan OP is the best example of a peace ambassador, and I remember we always encourage the people who wished to serve for interfaith harmony; our hearts are always open for interfaith encounter and peace. It was also the vision of my father, Maulana Dr Abdul Qadir Azad, Grand Imam of the Badshahi Mosque, and I used to see Fr James Channan along my father, and both them very nicely and boldly raised their

voices for peaceful coexistence and against those people who always create the atmosphere of violence and extremism in Pakistan. We are devoted to spreading the message of love, hope, brotherhood, care and peace around the globe. Following the footsteps of my father, Dr. Azad, I have devoted my life for promoting dialogue among religions and cultures and I have opened the doors of Badshahi Mosque for this noble mission.”

Pir Shafat Rasool said, “Today I admit and announce that I have learned a lot from the very dear personality of Fr. James Channan OP, who has the great influence to the people not only for the



Christian community rather Muslim, Hindu and Sikh Communities. He has always been very supportive and I have observed him in Pakistan and even abroad. He shows a very positive and peaceful face of Pakistan. We are thankful and also acknowledge his tremendous role for building peace and promoting interfaith harmony in Pakistan and elsewhere in world. He said there is grave need to study other religions and their values. Christianity and Islam are very close to each other and both of these religions have many beliefs and religious practices which

are common. He said, being a Muslim my faith is not complete without believing in Jesus Christ and the Gospels which are revealed upon him. Interfaith marriages are also permitted between Christians and Muslims. We need to change our mindsets to accept each other as brothers and sisters and make this world very peaceful and tolerant.”

After the formal welcome, Mr. Faisal Ilyas Executive Secretary Peace Center Lahore played a



video message of Antonio Guterres, Secretary General United Nations, who said, “The International Day of Peace is devoted to urging warring parties everywhere to lay down their weapons and work for harmony. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage the world, this call is more important than ever. That is why I appealed for a global ceasefire in March. Our world faces a common enemy: a deadly virus that is causing immense suffering, destroying livelihood, contributing to international tensions and exacerbating already formidable peace and

security challenges.”

“The focus of this year’s International Day of Peace is ‘Shaping Peace Together.’”

In that spirit, and to mark our 75th anniversary, the United Nations is bringing people together for global conversation about shaping our future and forging peace in trying times. In these days of physical distancing, we may not be able to stand next to one another. But we must still stand together for peace. And, together, I know we can, and will, build a more just, sustainable and equitable world.”

The message of Ms. Maria Crespo de Mafia, from the URI Global Staff, was also played on multimedia, in which she congratulated the participants and urged all to keep on working for peace and harmony.

Fr. Patrick Peter OP and Dominican Brothers sang a beautiful peace song to contribute for the celebration of Peace Day.

Mufti Ashiq Hussain, Chairman of New Century Quran Institute, expressed his great admiration for this national event. He admired untiring efforts of Fr James Channan OP for this field of interfaith dialogue and peace. He also paid rich tribute to Mrs. Khursheed Channan, the mother of Fr James Channan OP for giving the jewel of peace to the world in the form of Fr Channan. She set a great model of peace and nourished him to be a bearer of peace around the globe. May her soul rest in peace! Mufti Ashiq also said, “My madrassa is always open for the programs on interfaith dialogue and peace, and in the near future, I will organize a very befitting dialogue conference in my madrassa.”

Maulana Asim Makhdam, *Kul Masalik Ulama Board*, said, “It is our prime duty to groom young people with the education of peace and prepare their minds to build bridges among the people of different faiths. Young generations have great role to play for lasting peace and we have an obligation to prepare them for peace and interfaith harmony.”

Dr. Munawar Chand, a Hindu leader said, “We are one under one flag of Pakistan and it shows the unity and togetherness, and the theme of this day invites us to join hands for the progress towards new beginning in Covid-19 Pandemic. And together we can achieve the goal of harmony.”

Muslim, Christian, and Hindu leaders also lit a peace candle to celebrate the International Day of Peace. They gave an example of togetherness and that, jointly, we can reshape the world as a just and peaceful society.



Advocate Shabnam Nagi said; “We are happy and thankful for the reunion after the COVID-19 pandemic, we are together and this days is blessed, International Day of Peace, when we are celebrating and greeting one another.”



Mamoon Cheema student of Government College University and Youth Coordinator Peace Hope Pakistan shared her thoughts that “Being youth we are confronting with challenges due to COVID-19 pandemic, school, colleges and universities were closed since 14th March, 2020. In this social distancing time, we need to stay together for the common good i.e. Peace and Interfaith Harmony. Being religious leaders and community representatives, we need to play a good community builder role for the sake of future stability.”



Sr. Sabina Rifat, URI Women Coordinator Pakistan shared her wonderful poetry in the light of Peace Day and invited all men and women to contribute for the betterment of the world at large. Being the Women Wing URI Pakistan's representative, I wish that all women must play a very supportive and prominent role to bring peace in the world. She also mentioned Soul of WoMen, World Peace Prayers Society and Byakko Shinko Kai organizations which are working under the leadership of Mrs. Masami Saionji as their Chairperson. We fully support and feel great joy in being partners of these organizations in Pakistan.



Towards the end of the program Fr. James Channan OP extended thanks to all the participants and honorable guests to show unity and commitment for peace. He said "I am happy and I wish a very happy and prosperous life ahead in this testing phase, please take care and have a healthy life. Once again I wish you all a very Happy International Day of Peace, 2020; we are shaping peace together! Thank you very much and God bless you all!"

Reported by:

Fr James Channan OP
URI Regional Coordinator Asia-Pakistan

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