



GLOBAL HINDU – BUDDHIST INITIATIVE FOR CONFLICT AVOIDANCE AND ENVIRONMENT CONSCIOUSNESS

Dialogue for Peaceful co-existence, Inter-religious understanding and Interdependent sustainability

Organizers:

Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), India and

Gandan Tegchenling Monastery and Institute of Strategic Studies of the National Security Council of Mongolia

In association with:

Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace (ABCP), International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) & The Japan Foundation

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Background: SAMVAD was born out of a dialogue between the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to apply the spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism to address modern-day issues threatening human civilisation. It was felt that spiritual masters and experts should engage in a frank, honest and all-encompassing dialogue to generate an alternative narrative and vision based on the spirit of understanding, accommodation, ethical behaviour, universal responsibility in order to shift the global discourse on the two critical issues facing humankind e.g. **Conflict Avoidance and Environmental Degradation**. Hindu, Buddhist and most of the cultures rooted in Asian and Indic philosophies have tolerant civilizational approach. They accept other thoughts and belief systems as valid for their respective followers. They regard dialogue even on what are regarded as unalterable fundamentals as the normal and the best way to avoid conflicts. Further, the Asian and Indic civilizations regard nature as sacred.

They recognise the interdependence between nature and all species including humankind and they are ecocentric and not anthropocentric. They stress on the need for people-participatory approach by going back to fundamentals of their spiritual discourse on environment consciousness. They emphasise the need for a shift from exploitation of nature to respect and harmony with nature.

The Buddhist concept of **interdependent origination** applies to everything in the world and Hindu philosophical perspective of *Isavasyam Idam Sarvam* [meaning everything down to the tiniest atom is manifestation of the Divine] that reveres nature and Mother Earth enshrine authentic environmental consciousness. This needs to be inculcated by recognising the deep interdependence between humans, plants, and animals. Far more than environmental regulation, environmental consciousness is critical to the future of our planet as the effects of climate change, extinction of species and natural imbalance, the natural disasters and ecological problems do not choose people of one religion or one nation but impacts entire planet.

Appropriately titled “Samvad”, with origins in the Sanskrit word “*Samvadam*” [meaning “Dialogue”], the initiative seeks to build a grassroots movement based on open and truthful global dialogue seeking three 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.

Samvad initiative is aimed to create a conducive and compelling eco-system with the objective of emphasizing the importance of dialogue and understanding for avoiding conflicts and bring environment consciousness in global discourse and restructuring of present economic system that is inherently unsustainable and in conflict with nature. As the world faces the grim consequences of environmental degradation inflicted through wanton destruction of nature and species for human consumption and greed that produced wastefulness and uncompassionate society it is very critical to inculcate environmental consciousness amongst current and future generation for the survival of the world and the only planet, we live in.

Samvad, thus calls for instituting sustainable institutional model for frank and open dialogues between non-conflicting philosophies, ideologies and evolving a long-term perspective for promoting institutions to carry forward ideas generated through these dialogues for lasting peace, harmony and security. It endeavours for establishing a global network of leaders in a wide range of social, political, environmental and intellectual arena committed to the promotion of democratic values, conflict avoidance, environmental consciousness, universal responsibility and ethical behaviour.

The Initiative: Driven by the above thought, a landmark and path breaking conference titled “**Samvad: A Global Hindu –Buddhist Initiative for Conflict Avoidance & Environment Consciousness**” was organized on 3-4 September 2015 in New Delhi jointly by Vivekananda International Foundation, Delhi and The Tokyo Foundation, Tokyo, along with International Buddhist Confederation [IBC]. It was inaugurated by Prime Minister of India in New Delhi in the

august company of former President of Sri Lanka Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, the ministers from Japan, Mongolia, Nepal and Bhutan. The Japanese Prime Minister also delivered a video message on the occasion. The then External Affairs Minister of India, Mrs. Sushma Swaraj delivered the Valedictory Address. On the Closing Day, on 5th September 2015, the Prime Minister Modi led the participants and dignitaries in prayers and meditation under the Holy Bodhi Tree at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya on the very sacred grounds of Enlightened Awakening of Buddha. A **Bodhgaya Declaration** was also adopted.

A series of Conferences and Symposiums followed, including two in Tokyo in 2016 and 2018 on the theme 'Shared Values & Democracies in Asia' and Samvad -II in Yangon, Myanmar. The Japanese Prime Minister delivered the special addresses on both the occasions and Prime Minister of India addressed the audience via video messages.

The Yangon, Myanmar, edition of Samvad was another successful step forward in carrying the initiative to a region experiencing conflict and an endeavour to build a platform for frank and open dialogue among interfaith religious leadership on the roots of conflict. The extensive deliberations by religious and political leaders, leading scholars and environmental experts firmly established the need for a paradigm shift from ideological and consummative approach towards a philosophical and accommodative approach to address global challenges. It called for creating a more tolerant, liberal and accommodative world based on mutual respect and acceptability of diversity of views and living in harmony with nature rather than seeing it as a resource to exploit.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in his video speech referred to critical questions about global challenges the world is facing today like conflicts and climate change. He stressed that "it is only through deep and prolonged dialogue - *Samvad*- that we may discover hidden synergies, resolving contradictions and only way to cut through deep rooted religious stereotypes, prejudices that divide communities across the world and sow seeds of conflicts". He referred to Hindu Buddhist philosophical approach of living in harmony with nature and the need for revering nature and not just see it as a resource to exploit. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his video message invoked Buddhist principles of tolerance and compassion that encompasses coexistence of all lives. He warned that the spirit of tolerance is facing challenges today and terrorism and violent extremism are threatening to deny the existence of 'others' and trying to paint our world in a single colour". He stressed that in Asia "we must let flowers of all different colours bloom in harmony." Noble laureate and State Counsellor of Myanmar, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in her speech (which was read out by her NSA) termed Conflict Avoidance as a building block for establishing "community peace", "regional peace" and "global peace". Towards this she called on religious leaders to spread the intrinsic noble teachings, virtues of tolerance and non-violence as embedded in every world religion to their followers and at the grassroots levels and get them to practice these teachings in true essence.

A **Round Table Summit of Spiritual Masters** was introduced for the first time in Yangon edition of Samvad. This was attended by most eminent spiritual leaders of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and Jainism. Speakers at both the Round Table and the Academic session: *Evolving A Non-Conflicting Philosophical Paradigm for Conflict Avoidance, Peace & Harmony*

stressed on the principle of freedom of practicing their own religion without any interference from others. All agreed that trying to force beliefs and ideologies on others has been a major reason for strife and destruction of many a civilisation throughout history and continues to be so. Importance of an honest and open dialogue and the capacity to listen to the alternate viewpoints through platforms such as Samvad offers an opportunity to analyse the threats and challenges to world peace and suggesting sustainable approaches such as the need for adopting non-conflicting ideologies. Any dialogue would certainly be counterproductive if anyone alleged that other religions are false or label the adherents of other religions as sinners, lesser or non-believers. It was also pointed out that there will always be people trying to hijack religion to suit their vested interests and hidden agendas. These elements would twist and turn the truths and translate them in line with their sinister plans and they should not be looked upon as role models for any religion. Deliberations at the Round Table Summit indicated the openness and deep desire among religious leaders for a dialogue beyond the cliché and tokenism that most interfaith and peace initiatives have been reduced to. Despite different perspectives all converged on finding a common platform and common ground for sustainable peace and secure Mother Earth.

The deliberations focussed on evolving a consensus on Action Plan and create institutional means to take the Samvad initiative to grassroots and sustainable eco system for dialogue among non-conflicting philosophical traditions and with conflict prone ideologies. Based on these the **Yangon Declaration** was unanimously adopted.

The Way Forward: The Samvad initiative so far have indicated an overwhelming consensus to find an alternate narrative to issues and crises confronting human civilization and the urgent need to open “*people-participatory paradigm*” on Conflict Avoidance and Environmental Consciousness at both “*macro and micro level*” in addition to actions by governments, multilateral and global bodies. It has given us the lead to pursue that path by

- Making SAMVAD process to grow on a more formalised basis.
- that the non-conflicting philosophies may be able to lead the world in promoting a sustainable model of conflict avoidance based on respect for all religions, philosophies, coexistence and understanding and Environment Consciousness for humans and nature living in interdependent harmony.

The Samvad III at Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, is another step in the direction to shift the paradigm of global discourse and build a global architecture 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 will seek to carry forward the initiative for people-participatory paradigm on both conflict avoidance and environmental consciousness.

(Bodhgaya Declaration & Yangon Declaration will be added with the concept note)