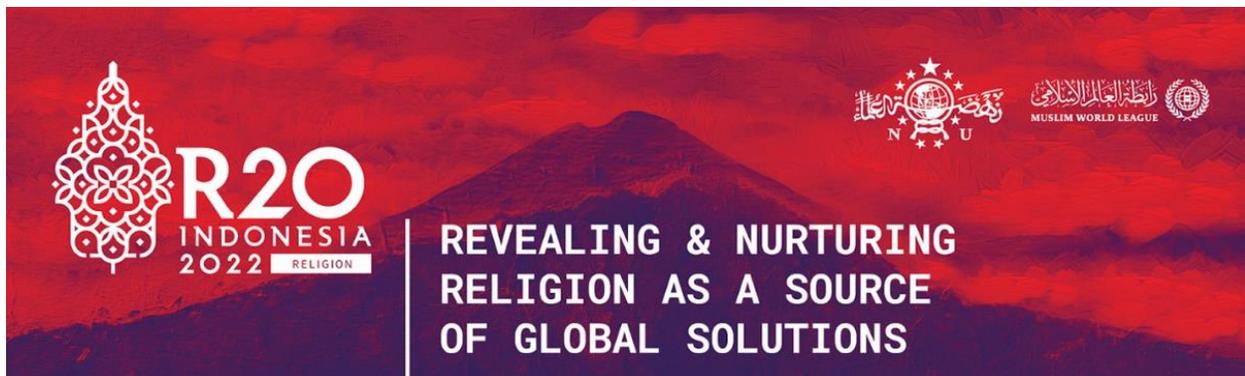




BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

Hindu Representation at G20 Religion Forum, Bali, Indonesia

31 Oct 2022



Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami was invited to represent BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha as a traditional scholar of Hinduism at the inaugural G20 Religion Forum – or ‘R20’ – hosted in Bali, Indonesia, on Tuesday 2 November and Wednesday 3 November 2022.

The event came during the centennial anniversary year of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and served to celebrate his lifelong advocacy of global religious harmony.

The invitation was testament to and reaffirmed BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha’s worldwide commitment to fostering genuine dialogue, mutual understanding and wider collaboration amongst diverse faith communities.

R20 Summit

Background and Significance

R20 is a ground-breaking new global initiative that brings together religious leaders from G20 member states – a strategic multilateral platform

connecting the world's 20 major developed and emerging economies to help secure future global economic growth and prosperity – to discuss and respond to wider global challenges of the 21st century.

Founding co-chairs of R20, Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf (General Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia) and His Excellency Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa (Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Saudi Arabia), explained that the objective of R20 is to mobilise global leadership to help ensure that religion functions as an open and dynamic source of solutions. “Through the R20, we hope to facilitate the emergence of a global movement, in which people of good will of every faith and nation will help bring the world's geopolitical and economic power structures into alignment with the highest moral and spiritual values, for the sake of all humanity.”

His Excellency Joko Widodo, President of Indonesia, addressed the opening session of the R20 summit by welcoming the world's faith leaders and religious scholars.

Bhadreshdas Swami's Address

Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami had been invited by the organisers as one of the key speakers to address the audience of over 400 esteemed delegates from around the world.

Bhadreshdas Swami, one of leading Indian philosophers in the world today, began by paying tribute to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj on his centennial birth anniversary by invoking his message of religious harmony from the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit in New York City in 2000.

Bhadreshdas Swami then cited the motto of Indonesia, “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika,” reiterating, “Yes, we are different. Yet, we are one. ONE human race. ONE family of ONE home. Just as the ancient Rig Veda proclaims: Yatra viśvam bhavati eka nīḍam.”

In drawing upon the universal timeless wisdom of the Vedas, Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the great schools of Indian thought, Bhadreshdas Swami encouraged a more universal definition of ‘dharma’ and unpacked several universal dharmic values – such as peace, love, friendship, respect and compassion – that can help facilitate peaceful conflict resolution and foster global religious harmony. He especially encouraged ‘active dialogue’ – not

just intellectual discourse, but heart to heart understanding, learning and collaboration – through love, courage and humility.

“Because then,” he said, “we are able to accept the existence of other faiths – accept them as they are, without needing to discriminate or disparage. Then, there can be mutual respect among faiths – respect of human dignity and spiritual integrity, without inciting hate or hurt. Then, we can learn from one another – learn all that is good and noble, without ourselves feeling inadequate or insecure.

“Interfaith harmony does not require that one relinquish or relax one’s faith, but rather, that we grow stronger within it.”

In conclusion, Bhadreshdas Swami emphasised the driving message of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj: “In the spirit of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ – ‘The whole world is one family’ – let us reach out to extend the circle of global harmony.”

Other Speakers

Two other speakers from India also spoke eloquently about religious harmony by drawing upon the principles of Sanatan Hindu Dharma – Swami Govinda Dev Giri Maharaj, Treasurer of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Trust, and Swami Mitranand Saraswati, Director of the All India Chinmaya Yuva Kendra.

Other speakers included an impressive line-up of esteemed faith leaders and representatives as well as eminent scholars of religion from around the world.

Some of these who presented in the seven sessions of the R20 summit over the two days included the following: Rabbi Silvina Chemen, Professor of Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano (Argentina); Professor Alexandre Brasil Fonseca, Vice Rector of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil); Shaykh Dr Shawki Ibrahim Abdel-Karim Alam, Grand Mufti of Egypt; Archbishop Anba Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London (Egypt); Archbishop Thomas Schirmacher, Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance (Germany); Professor Tariq Mansoor, Vice Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University (India); Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda, Chaldean Catholic Church (Iraq); Rev. Dr Paolo Benanti TOR, Professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University (Italy); Imam Yahya Pallavicini, Chairman of the European Council of Ulema (Italy); Professor Alberto Melloni, UNESCO Chair on Religious Pluralism and Peace, University of Bologna (Italy); Dr Jacqueline C. Rivers, Executive Director of the Seymour Institute for Black Church and Policy Studies (Jamaica); Dr Marcela Szymanski, Aid to the Church in Need International (Mexico); Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, Catholic

Bishop of Sokoto (Nigeria); Most Venerable Kotapitiye Rahula Thera, University of Peradeniya (Sri Lanka); Dr Hamdan Musallam Al-Mazrouei, Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Mohamed Bin Zayed University for the Humanities (UAE); Canon Dr Christopher Sugden, Church of England and Oxford Centre for Religion & Public Life (UK); Professor Mary Ann Glendon, Harvard Law School (USA); Dr Peter Berkowitz, Hoover Institution, Stanford University (USA); and Rabbi Arthur Green, Hebrew College (USA).

Further Dialogue and Appreciation

Bhadreshdas Swami met many of the delegates during the summit and outside of it to further engage in constructive dialogue about celebrating religious diversity and fostering interfaith harmony.

In a personal interview, Dr Timothy Samuel Shah, one of the lead organisers of the summit and Distinguished Research Scholar in Politics at the University of Dallas (USA), thanked Bhadreshdas Swami for “bringing the knowledge of a great great ancient philosophical and theological tradition into the heart of the first annual G20 Religion Forum in your beautiful address.” He also requested Bhadreshdas Swami to convey the prayers and affection of the summit committee to His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

C. Holland Taylor, another leading advisor of the organising committee as well as Deputy Chairman and CEO of the Center for Shared Civilizational Values (USA/Indonesia), also commended Bhadreshdas Swami “for embodying so well the wisdom, beauty and purity of the Hindu tradition and inspiring all the participants of R20 to serve God and serve humanity.”

Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, chairman of the world’s largest Muslim organisation, expressed his personal gratitude to Bhadreshdas Swami and other Hindu leaders of India for constructively joining in the proceedings of the summit. “It shows you are prepared to struggle with us for solutions. You came with a pure and sincere heart to contribute something positive, something noble for all of humanity and the future of our global civilization.”

Launch of ‘Spiritual Ecology’

On Monday 31 October 2022, ahead of the main R20 summit, a special tree-planting ceremony took place in Bali at the Puja Mandala, a religious complex consisting of five houses of worship built side-by-side, including a Hindu temple, a mosque, Protestant and Catholic churches, and a Buddhist vihara.

Global religious leaders converged to launch 'Spiritual Ecology', a movement aimed at fostering balance within nature and society.

The launch began with a ritual purification ceremony and offerings made by Balinese Hindu priests prior to the planting of 20 trees considered sacred within Hindu cosmology.

Bhadreshdas Swami spoke on the auspicious occasion about the sacred role of trees in Hinduism and Vedic culture. He added: "The sustainability of life on earth is possible when we accept the sanctity of nature and its interconnectedness with humanity. Similarly, when we accept the sanctity and beauty of all religions, we can help that humanity blossom and bloom."

Following the Hindu ceremony, R20 co-chair His Excellency Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Mecca-based Muslim World League, walked hand-in-hand with Bhadreshdas Swami in a historic moment of religious fraternity. He then led the gathering in Arabic prayers before personally planting one of the 20 sacred trees.

Noting the significance of the occasion, Dr Timothy Shah said to Bhadreshdas Swami, "You helped to plant the seeds of a spiritual family – to create a world that is truly full of the knowledge of God's love, compassion and truth."

R20 Summit 2023 in India

In a joyous ceremony on Thursday 3 November 2022, Indonesia formally handed over the presidency of the R20 summit to India. The R20 summit in 2023 will be hosted in New Delhi.

Bhadreshdas Swami has been invited to help guide the planning for the upcoming R20 summit in India. He joined several meetings in Jakarta over the weekend of 5-6 November 2022 to discuss the proceedings and potential outcomes of next year's event.

<https://www.baps.org/News/2022/Hindu-Representation-at-G20-Religion-Forum-22598.aspx>