



**The February Dialogues
2010**



An annual event of the Meeting Rivers programme of Pipal Tree, Bangalore and Dialogues en Humanité, Lyon

What is the good life?

- Values and spiritualities to face the challenges of social justice and climate change

17-20 February 2010, Fireflies Inter-religious Ashram, Bangalore, India

Never before has human civilization been faced with a challenge of such enormous magnitude. Climate change is already beginning to have devastating effects on the lives of millions. In India, the Himalayan glaciers are predicted to melt in the next 30 years or so. The great rivers, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, are predicted to either run dry or have little water. There will be millions of farmers and landless labourers who will become climate change refugees. Much of Bangladesh will go under water in the few decades. Where will the over 100 million people go? Many parts of the world will be in a similar situation.

It is time to act.

It is time to find the psychological and spiritual motivation that can galvanise us into action.

If we begin to act today we will still be able to avert a major catastrophe. If we begin to put into practice the mitigation and adaptation strategies needed we can prevent famines and save the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

It is with these objectives in mind that Fireflies Inter-religious Ashram and Dialogues en Humanité are launching its February Dialogues: 'What is the good life?' The February Dialogues will begin at 4pm on 17th February and end by 3pm on 20th afternoon. The all-night music festival will begin at 7pm on 20th February. The venue will be Fireflies Inter-religious Ashram, in a beautiful village, outside Bangalore, in the south of India. Participants will have no difficulty in arriving at Bangalore, which has direct flight connections from all over the world. Participants from India will also have no problem to arrive by train, bus or air. We will pick-up all participants from the airport/railway station/bus stops, as Fireflies is located 60kms away from the airport and 30kms away from the railway station.

The participants to this event will come from backgrounds of social and environmental movements, NGOs working for social justice and environmental action, and activist intellectuals and religious/spiritual leaders.

The programme will have the following sections:

1. What is the science of climate change, how will it impact us, and what are the mitigation and adaptation strategies we can pursue, particularly in relation to poor and marginalized people?

This part of the programme will include lectures, discussions and film shows on

- The science of climate change: How carbon dioxide emissions and other green house gases are dramatically contributing to climate change. How to see that the decisions arrived at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (COP-15) are implemented and the carbon emissions further reduced in the interests of equitable and sustainable development, particularly for the poorer countries.
- How climate change is going to impact, in India and other third world countries, the poor peasants, dalits and indigenous peoples in dry rural areas, or areas that are likely to be flooded through erratic rainfall patterns or storms. How NGOs and social movements can create the awareness and understand better the implications on the poor and the exploited sections of society.

2. What does inclusive and equitable sustainable development mean in practice, in the context of climate change?

- What are the alternative agricultural practices that will need less water? Since millets require less water, and are more nutritious than rice, communities must explore the possibility of shifting to such possibilities. In addition methods like the SRI method of cultivation require less water.
- Indigenous peoples know about varieties of rice, and millets that grow with less water, or grow when there is flooding. They also know varieties of rice that grow in saline water. Modern agriculture research is also working to produce varieties of rice that can grow in saline water, and varieties of crops that can grow when temperatures begin to rise. (How do we critically look at these modern possibilities?)
- Energy is going to be the key challenge. Can we get away from fossil fuels and use more solar, wind, mini-hydel possibilities?
- Actually the rich countries and the wealthy in the emerging countries are responsible for most of the emissions. What are the possibilities of creating political awareness to reduce the energy consumption of the richer countries and the wealthy in the emerging economies.

Can the suffering of poor countries like Bangladesh, for example, who are not responsible for climate change, be compensated by richer countries who have created climate change?

- Climate justice means that the poor must be protected for all the years that the rich have indulged themselves with high energy consumption and consumerism in general.
 - How can the planet be greened on an urgent basis through growing more trees and protection of forests like the Amazon? Trees, after all, are carbon sinks.
 - Apart from the personal changes and changes in life-styles, what are the political and systemic changes needed so that we can have national and international regulatory bodies that can help with equitable and sustainable development in the context of climate change.
3. How can we develop an alternative conception of the good life, where we may embrace voluntary simplicity and still lead happy and fulfilled lives? What can the various religions teach us to face the challenge of climate change?
- What does Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions and spiritualities teach us about stewardship of the planet? What can we learn from the spirituality of indigenous peoples?
 - What are the changes in values and attitudes that are needed to embrace voluntary simplicity, where we can use less energy, consume less and share more with those who are needy? What is the kind of education that can lead to the new values and attitudes?

Note: Although the focus of February Dialogues 2010 will be on the values and spiritualities needed to deal with the challenge of climate change, we also wish to give time to the problems related to religious fundamentalism and religious conflict, and finding solutions to them. These are not only major concerns in South Asia but in several parts of the planet.

The speakers:

In a few weeks time we will have the programme ready with the list of speakers.

Who are the participants?

Participants will come from all over the world. They will be from NGOs, social movements, farmers unions, government, religious leaders, women's organizations, indigenous people's organizations, dalit organizations, international organizations.

Music Festival:

There will be an all-night music festival on 20th February night. Two thousand people will attend. During the festival there will be short interventions to present the results of the discussions of “What is the good life”?

Travel costs and food and lodging

We will be able to take care of your food and lodging costs while you are with us for the February Dialogues 2010. We will also give you a free ticket for the all-night music festival on February 20th evening. Unfortunately we cannot pay your travel to Bangalore and return.

About the organizers

Meeting Rivers is a programme of inter-religious and secular initiatives for social transformation and ecological renewal (jointly run by Pipal Tree, Bangalore www.pipaltree.org.in and FPH, Paris www.fph.ch/en/presentation.html).

Dialogues en Humanité is an annual international programme of civil society related events concerned with the social and ecological challenges of the future, held each summer in a park in the French city of Lyon. www.dialoguesenhumanite.free.fr/

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