

FEZANA *bulletin*

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Economic Empowerment of Women

Reflections from the 62CSW Conference at the U.N.

By Monaz Mistry

[FEZANA sent a team of four young Zoroastrian women, **Diana Mistry**, from Texas, **Tanya Bharda** from the Greater Toronto Area, Canada, **Sabrina Bilimoria** from Michigan, and **Monaz Mistry** from Boston, to the 62 Commission on the Status of Women, held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City in March, 2018.

After the meeting was over, participants shared their thoughts and what they took away from the experience. Here, we have Monaz Mistry writing about what she felt is important in realizing the Sustainable Development Goal Number 5, on Gender Equality.]



Monaz Mistry is a nurse, veteran and lead BLS instructor. She's currently a pre-med student at Harvard University. Monaz participated in the 62nd CSW at the United Nations for the first time this year. In her spare time, she enjoys volunteering, teaching and playing the cello.

As a young Zoroastrian woman, I grew up with the words “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds” embedded deeply in my life. While attending the United Nations for the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women Conference, I was deeply affected by the strength of these words and their relevance in today's conflicted world. One of the sessions that made the strongest impact on me was “Widowhood: You will get Nothing” and the Poverty Guarantee. Organizations such as the Global Fund for Widows Human Rights Watch and the Guild For Service from India were the main contributors to this event. I learned while listening to the personal story of a young widow and domestic violence survivor how devastating the societal stigma was for widows. In addition to these social and cultural barriers, poverty contributed to under privileged women being without resources to take care of themselves and their families.



WITH NEW FRIENDS Ljun Ahn (1st from left), Monaz Mistry (3rd from left), Meera Khanna (3rd from right) at the United Nations

One of women I met on my first day at the United Nations was Meera Khanna from the Guild of Service Organization from India. At this session, I learned from her how a small organization in India has worked towards reducing this stigma around widowhood with the weapon of economic empowerment. The economic empowerment of women in the conflict

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UPCOMING DATES

June 30, 2018

Sacramento Zoroastrian Association Opening of New Center. rsvp@sacza.org

July 3-8, 2018

16th Zoroastrian Games. California State University, Carson, CA. <http://zathletics.com/>

July 14, 2018

4th Annual Kamran Seminar. ZAMWI. “Official Religion in the Achaemenid Heartland: A View from Persepolis” and a tribute to honor Prof Farhang Mehr.

July 27-29, 2018

ZAH Z-Camp for Kids. Houston. <http://zah.org/?event=zah-z-camp-2018>

July 27-29, 2018

2018 United Religions Initiative North America Regional Assembly Reisterstown,, MD.

(Dates continued on page 5)



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Zoroastrian
Associations of
North America
(FEZANA)**

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NGO in consultative status
(Roster) with the Economic
and Social Council of the
United Nations

torn state of Jammu and Kashmir had helped reduce the social and economic stigma that the widows in these fragile regions faced. The Guild of Service helped women by utilizing and improving their traditional skills of embroidery.

In empowering women to get artisan licenses and demand fair price from designers, these women were able to take care of their children and families. A woman who is financially stable has a seat at the table to make decisions. They develop their own voice and once they have that, they cannot be suppressed. The United Nations Global Fund for Widows helps rural women globally learn about the rights and gain confidence to take the next steps towards a brighter future. □

Call for Participants at the United Nations

The FEZANA UN-NGO Committee is looking for participants to attend the 67th DPI NGO Conference at the UN Headquarters in New York from August 22-23, 2018.

For more information, visit <https://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/67th-dpingo-conference>

Individuals interested in attending the conference, are requested to send their resume and letter of intent by June 29, 2018, to both individuals below:

Behram Pastakia

Afreed Mistry

While FEZANA, as an NGO in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council [ECOSOC] and the Department of Public Information (DPI), will facilitate registration to the Conference, the selected participants are expected to make their own financial arrangements regarding visas, tickets, accommodation, food, and transportation in the city. Details about the vision, mission and activities of the United Nations can be accessed at www.un.org.

Regards,

Afreed Mistry & Behram Pastakia

Co-Chairs, FEZANA UN-NGO Committee

Reminder: Opening of the New Zoroastrian Center in Sacramento



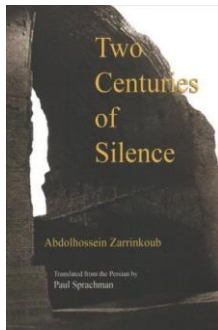
The Sacramento Zoroastrian Association is pleased to announce the opening of its newly renovated Zoroastrian Center located at 10528 Armstrong Avenue, Mather, CA 95655 on Saturday, June 30, 2018 at 6.30 p.m. All

Zoroastrian Associations in North America are welcome to send representative(s). The entertainment program will be followed by a dinner.

Those who are able to attend may please respond to us by email: rsvp@sacza.org or by phone (916) 837-2997



BOOK AWARENESS



Two Centuries of Silence: by Zarrinkoub & Sprachman, Mazda Publishers, 2017.

Authored by Dr. Zarrinkoub and translated by Paul Sprachman, this book is a history of Iran that puzzles many. How was a world civilization with all of its achievements in art and architecture, religion and law, agriculture and engineering, and civil and military organization, overthrown by a nomadic people with limited literacy and few accomplishments? The book peers into the “savage darkness” of nearly two hundred years and detects glimmers of Persian resurgence in various parts of Iran and Central Asia. An interesting read.

Visit our website at <http://www.fires-fezana.org/>

FEZANA at the Consulate of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles

By Dr. Niaz Kasravi



Nasimi Aghayev, the Los Angeles Consul General for Azerbaijan (left), with Dr Niaz Kasravi and Homi Gandhi.

In the last several months, FEZANA President Homi Gandhi and other guests representing FEZANA have attended events at the Consulate General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, California. The partnership between the Zoroastrian community here in California is the result of years of relationship building by the leadership in both communities. But the relationship of Azerbaijan and Zoroastrianism is thousands of years old.

Azerbaijan was once a part of the Persian Empire, and in fact Azerbaijan is a Persian term,

meaning ‘protector of fire/protected by fire/land of eternal fire’ -- commonly believed to be directly linked to Zoroastrianism and the faith’s reverence for fire as a purifying and holy element. In the 1800’s as a result of the Russo-Persian Wars, Azerbaijan became a part of Russian Empire. The country ultimately gained its independence from Russia in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Azerbaijan remained a largely Zoroastrian state until the 7th century Arab conquest of the Persian Empire, at which point much of the Zoroastrian texts, libraries, and temples were destroyed. Later in the late 1800’s Parsi Zoroastrians from British India made their way to Azerbaijan to fill a need for expert labor after the discovery of oil in the country. Today, the Zoroastrian population of Azerbaijan remains an active and vibrant part of Azerbaijani society, with a main temple, the Fire Temple of Baku, established there in 1975. And despite the fact that Islam is the main religion of Azerbaijan, Zoroastrianism remains a much respected religion in the country and Zoroastrian tradition has left a lasting mark on the country’s culture and custom. Norooz, the Iranian new year with deep roots in the Zoroastrianism, is still celebrated as a major holiday in the country today.

Hence, it is only natural that our communities in the diaspora also establish and strengthen our partnership to support and help improve our communities across the globe.

On February 5, 2018, Zoroastrian community was invited to an event marking the official launch of the U.S. branch of the Baku International Multicultural Center (BIMC). Dr. Niaz Kasravi, a community leader and past President/current advisory board member for the Zoroastrian Sports Committee (ZSC) accompanied FEZANA President Homi Gandhi to the event, which featured Dr. Jannah Scott, the founding Executive Director of BIMC and formerly with the White House Office of Faith-Based & Neighborhood Partnerships. Representatives of the Zoroastrian community received a warm welcome by all, including Nasimi Aghayev, the Los Angeles Consul General for Azerbaijan and a friend to the Zoroastrian community.

Zoroastrian leaders will continue to remain engaged with our Azerbaijani partners. We look forward to continuing to build partnership with the Consul General, BIMC, and to building bridges with Zoroastrians who call Azerbaijan home. □



FILM

ANIMA: Animals. Faith. Compassion

A presentation by the Guibord Center to kick off its Initiative on Animals and Compassion.



This film brings the voice of many faith traditions (including Zoroastrianism) into the serious conversation of how we humans view our relationship with animals. The Guibord Center's hope is that this film will help to change the way people interact with animals through understanding them as living, feeling, sentient and sacred beings.

Approx 11:30 mins

https://theguibordcenter.org/initiatives/animals-and-compassion/anima-movie/?utm_source=email&utm_campaign=anima&utm_content=film6-8

[Shared by Mobedyar Maneck Bhujwala, California Zoroastrian Center, who also serves as a co-chair, FEZANA Interfaith Activities Committee]

Helping Families Recover From Disaster



Imagine losing everything you've ever owned — not once, but twice. The Bellihomji's have been unfortunate victims of just that. The first time they had to uproot their lives to escape Iran during the revolution. The second time, they lost their home, belongings and personal memorabilia to no other than Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

The Bellihomji's were thousands of miles away from home visiting their nephew when the storm hit. They watched the news with horror, as their neighbors informed them that the lower level of their house was flooded with about five feet of water. After several canceled flights, they were finally able to return home after eleven days. They found the lower level (which consisted of bedroom, living room, bathroom, kitchen and

two car garage) completely flooded. Furniture, exercise equipment, kitchen appliances, washer & dryer were completely destroyed and the floor was uninhabitable. The furnace and the electrical wiring in the lower-level were all damaged with no heat, light or gas. A part of the roof had been blown off by the severe wind. Both cars were submerged in water and were a write-off. Their precious photo albums of their children's' Navjotes and weddings, family treasures like their parents' letters from before they passed away, were all lost to the flood.

Over the next few weeks and months, the Bellihomji's received financial and emotional support from FEMA insurance, Catholic Charity and friends around them. While nothing can bring back their precious personal effects, they are grateful to be able to slowly build back their home and lives, thanks also to the kindness and financial contributions of their many generous Parsi friends, as well as ZAGNY and FEZANA.

The check from FEZANA arrived "as a Godsend!" says the Bellihomji family. "We were devastated. This tangible help came in at a very critical time, and helped us to rebuild our home and our lives. It took a long time to get back to normal. We remember FEZANA's help and kindness in coming to our aid. We called FEZANA and they immediately offered us help (financially) even before we reached our totally devastated house. This act of kindness and help when needed shall never be forgotten by us as long as we live. My wife and I are thankful to FEZANA and all others who helped us in time of need."

Over the years, in times of natural disaster, FEZANA has been fortunate to be in a position to assist those in need. In these times, FEZANA is proud to have partnered with the local community associations to identify and help people who are at their most vulnerable. Visit www.fezana.org read more about FEZANA's initiatives. □



UPCOMING DATES

(continued from page 1)

July 29, 2018

WZCC NY Chapter Gahambar. Arbab Rustum Guiv Darbe Mehr, Suffern, NY. ZAGNY, IZA, and all who can attend are invited. Contact Yighad [at] gmail.com

July 29 - August 1, 2018

[Reimagining Interfaith Conference](#). Washington DC

July 31-August 3, 2018

[NAIN Connect 2018](#). Edmonton, Alberta Canada

November 1-7, 2018

[Parliament of the World's Religions](#). Toronto.

July 1-6, 2019

[7th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress](#). Los Angeles, CA.

December 29-31, 2020

North American Zoroastrian Congress hosted by ZAH (Houston)

FEZANA Congratulates Burzin P. Balsara, member of Zoroastrian Association of North Texas (ZANT)

Burzin P. Balsara and his science fair partner Malav H. Shah from Plano Senior High School in north Texas received several awards for their project at the 2018 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) in Pittsburgh, PA. On May 18, 2018, Burzin and Malav earned the Grand Award of first in the world in Embedded Systems for their project in enabling paralyzed individuals to control a full-scale electric wheelchair with their eyes. They also received distinction as the Best in Category among the Grand Award recipients. During the Special Award Ceremony, they were awarded the Mawhiba Scholarship for innovative technology in solving real-world problems given by King Abdul-Aziz and his Royal Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity.



Burzin is a member of Zoroastrian Association of North Texas (ZANT) and serves the community as a Mobed. [Read more in the upcoming issue of the *FEZANA Journal*]

Interfaith Connections in Southern California



On May 24, 2018, continuing interfaith connections in its local community, the Zoroastrian Association of California (represented by Erv Zarrir Bhandara) participated in the largest Interfaith *Iftar* (evening meal with which Muslims end their daily fast during Ramadan) in Southern California. The event was a collaboration by American Muslim Multifaith Women's Empowerment Council (AMWEC) and Temple Bat Yahm in Newport Beach, California.

It was indeed a coming together of peoples of all faiths. The capacity crowd was welcomed at the Temple Bayt Yahm, which included peoples and clergy from multiple faiths, community leaders, and law enforcement partners. Cultural displays and music were also enjoyed by all. □