

DIALOGUE DAYS 2014: FINAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION TO DIALOGUE DAYS

Dialogue Days is a KAICIID annual campaign to promote awareness of interreligious and intercultural dialogue around the world. Dialogue Days aims to celebrate interreligious dialogue as a tool for harmony, social cohesion, peace and reconciliation. Dialogue Days is an annual event during which KAICIID and other organizations can conduct interreligious dialogues at all levels, conduct training and raise public awareness through other events and activities.

The field of interreligious dialogue is growing. More and more people are convinced that the open encounter offered through dialogue is critical to creating understanding and productive cooperation between religious communities.

Our era sees multiple conflicts along lines of religious identity. In many places, the relationships between religious communities—if not between individual members of those communities—are marked by mutual suspicion, fear and distrust. Misinformation about the motivations, beliefs and desires of the Other (people of different cultural and religious backgrounds) persist. Thus dialogue—including dialogue between secular and religious communities—is an essential part of ending conflict, and preparing for a lasting peace and reconciliation.

Interreligious dialogue is valuable even in areas where religious groups coexist in peace. Dialogue offers an opportunity for religious communities to identify shared concerns and work together in any field, from the environment to health to education.



Panellists meet at the Serena Hotel in Nairobi to discuss the Impact of Media on Interreligious Relations

DIALOGUE DAYS 2014

KAICIID Dialogue Days were launched in November 2014 in Nairobi, Kenya, and New Delhi, India, to raise awareness of interreligious dialogue as a tool for peace, broaden KAICIID'S service to religious and interreligious dialogue leaders, and pilot new KAICIID training material in the field.

In 2014, as a reflection of KAICIID'S programmatic focus on the Image of the Other in the Media, Dialogue Days activities centered around the theme of how the media impacts interreligious relations.

Dialogue Days in Nairobi was held from 15-18 November in cooperation **with Arigatou International—Nairobi** (Global Network of Religions for Children), and with the support of KAICIID'S Expert for Africa Programmes, Ambassador Mussie Hailu. Dialogue Days in New Delhi was held in cooperation with **Sarva Dharma Samvaad**. In each city, events began with two parallel training courses for religious leaders and dialogue practitioners, **Media Wise** and **Speak Up**. These were followed by high-level panel discussions on the impact of the media on interreligious relations, which brought together national figures from the realms of religion, policy, and media.

Nairobi and New Delhi were selected as the locations in which KAICIID would premier Dialogue Days because they are located in regions with complex and dynamic interreligious relations, and because of the presence of trusted local partners in each city.

The initiatives brought together religious leaders, dialogue practitioners, policy makers and media experts for training and discussion on these groups' roles in shaping perceptions of the religious Other in East Africa.

In Kenya, one senior participant, who had changed his plans last-minute to fly in for the trainings from Tanzania, said in an address to participants that he had definitely found the effort worthwhile: "If I had missed this, I would have missed a lot."



"The Course and training was very good. We would like to arrange a course at my own organization." New Delhi Media Wise participant

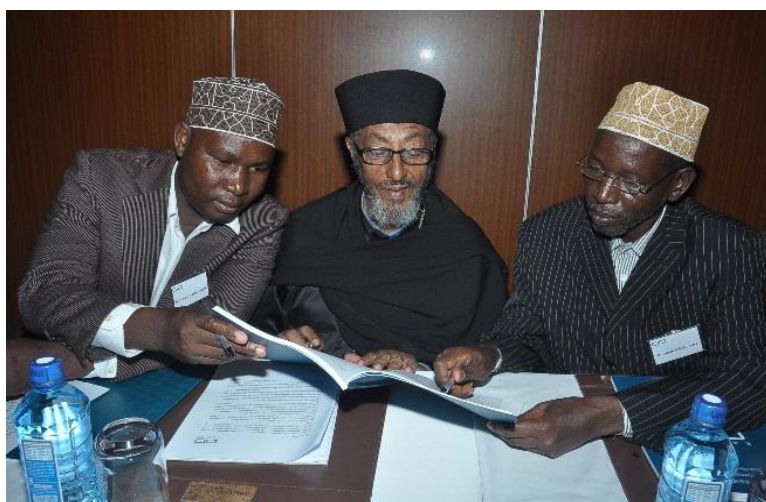
MEDIA WISE: EMPOWERING RESPONSIBLE RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Religious leaders are community leaders that transmit and endorse information. The Media Wise course, is the first adaption for religious leaders of the **UNESCO** curriculum Media and Information Literacy for Teachers. It empowers religious leaders to critically and responsibly find and assess news and information from the media and online information providers by building media and information skills. In cooperation with UNESCO, this curriculum was piloted to a total of 50 religious leaders in Nairobi and New Delhi during Dialogue Days.

NAIROBI

The Duma Room of the Sarova Panafric Hotel in Nairobi was alive with the sound of debate and discussion between two expert media and information literacy trainers and the class of **26 Christian, Muslim and Sikh religious leaders** from **Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia**.

Many participants from across East Africa expressed skepticism about the media, but became increasingly knowledgeable and constructive in their comments. Trainers Victor Bwire and Ogova Ondego localized the training, provided concrete examples from Kenyan and East African media and current events, and explained the environment in which regional journalists operate. Of the many topics covered, discussions were most lively when analyzing journalistic ethics, local media culture, the definitions of news and newsworthiness, the construction of stereotypes, and issues of online privacy and security—especially with respect to youth.



Media Wise participants in Nairobi look through the course handbook

The last day of the Nairobi training course featured a review of the previous day's panel discussion and a wrap-up of the course material. In the very final session, Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) led a workshop and discussion about the basic principles of interreligious dialogue and understanding, and how religious leaders' statements about the Other can be magnified or selectively distorted in the media.

NEW DELHI

In New Delhi, the sessions were tightly run by trainer Neelima Mathur, a veteran journalist and media and information literacy expert. The group included **25 Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Bahai leaders**. From the outset it was clear that religious leaders often felt misunderstandings and biases regarding their communities were in large part driven by the media. The course trainer kept the class on topic and pushed participants to clarify ambiguous thinking on important matters. During the first day of training, a conference table format was chosen with faith leaders placed closely together to support conversations. On the second and third day of training participants were seated in small-groups at roundtables. All sessions were highly interactive, divided between lecture time and activities.

Neelima used numerous concrete examples of religious and cultural stereotyping in the media, many pulled directly from the headlines of the Indian press. Religious leaders analysed daily news articles and engaged in lively discussions of current events. There was much focus on the depiction of religion in images and how such images can support or foster stereotypes among the general public. The group addressed several issues related to unique media landscape of India, such as the economic, political and ideological interests media houses and the challenges of covering the unique and diverse religious and cultural landscape of India.



Media Wise participants in New Delhi analyze newspaper articles

Some of the most provocative topics covered during sessions in New Delhi were about media law and ethics, young people and the media, what makes the news, and the construction and reinforcement of stereotypes in the media. An area of surprising importance was how existing intellectual property law and online anti-defamation laws affect the communication practices of religious leaders. Other topics touched upon were media and social media trends and the challenge they present to local cultural and religious customs and practices. Participants also discussed the “tribalization” of information, and how online become echo chambers.

In both New Delhi and Nairobi, participants were keen to learn more about social media, how it is used by youth, and how religious leaders can more effectively engage on social media. There was also strong interest in deeper contact between religious leaders and members of the media.

SPEAK UP: SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Interreligious dialogue practitioners lead the field in promoting dialogue, peace and reconciliation between members of religious communities. The goal of the Speak Up course is to build the capacity of interreligious dialogue practitioners to promote their messages and activities on social media and in the news media so they can actively, responsibly and effectively promote peace and dialogue, and challenge the narrative that religion is a source of conflict.



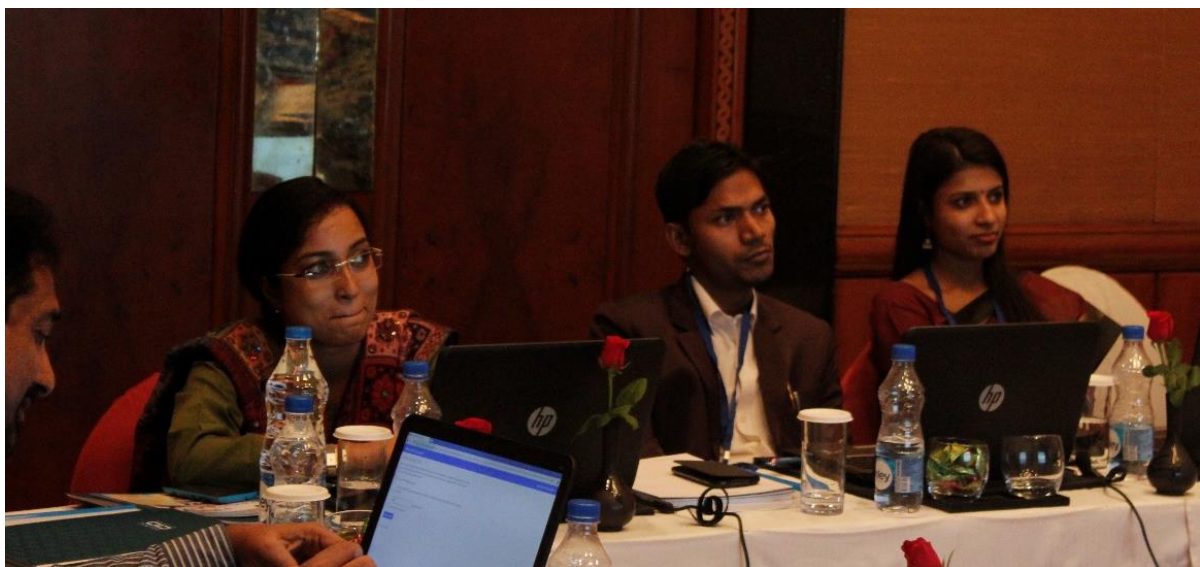
NAIROBI

Upstairs at the Sarova Panafric, in a room bright with terminals and bristling with extension cords, our experienced social media experts taught the Speak Up social media and communications course to a group of **16 dialogue practitioners** from **Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Mauritius**. On day one, trainer Alan Rosenblatt guided participants through the technical details of the tools

and methods available online to extend outreach, optimize communication and enable tracking and quantitative evaluation of social media activity. His team followed up with a session on how to engage the traditional media: what makes journalists tick, how to sharpen messaging and timing, and how to reach out to journalists and media outlets.

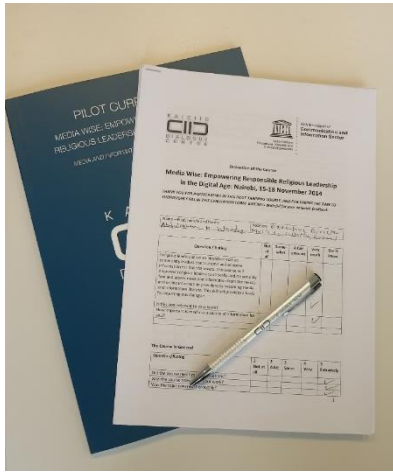
Over three days, the participants contributed with increasing enthusiasm to share their insights. Many highly skilled and diverse activists were present and the discussions were shrewd and thoughtful, particularly when the group touched upon sensitive topics.

Commissioned as they were to live-tweet the 17 November panel discussion to practice their new-found skills, the trainees established a Twitter list and peppered the platform with photographs and quotes from the event. The course wrapped up on 18 November with a demanding interactive marathon of simulations. Participants practiced selling a story to a reluctant news room, giving interviews to reporters and speaking live on camera, using the real-time story of a raid on a mosque in Mombasa to catalyse reflections and media engagement. Guest lecturer Isaac Gabantu concluded with a lecture that framed what the participants had learned in a local context.



"The training programme on social media and communication for the interreligious dialogue practitioners was a great initiative taken by KAICIID." -Aprajetta Raji, Speak Up participant, India

NEW DELHI



Pilot courses were thoroughly evaluated so that KAICIID can revise and improve its training curricula

In India, a group of **15 dialogue practitioners from around the country** had the opportunity to develop their skills in utilizing social media and communicating to the news media. The training took place during the course of two days, **23-24 November**. The trainers began the first day with a session on how to engage the traditional media: what makes journalists tick, how to sharpen messaging and timing, and how to reach out to journalists and media outlets in real time. Participants practiced delivering and staying on message and practiced giving interviews and speaking live on camera.

MEDIA TRAINING: EVALUATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

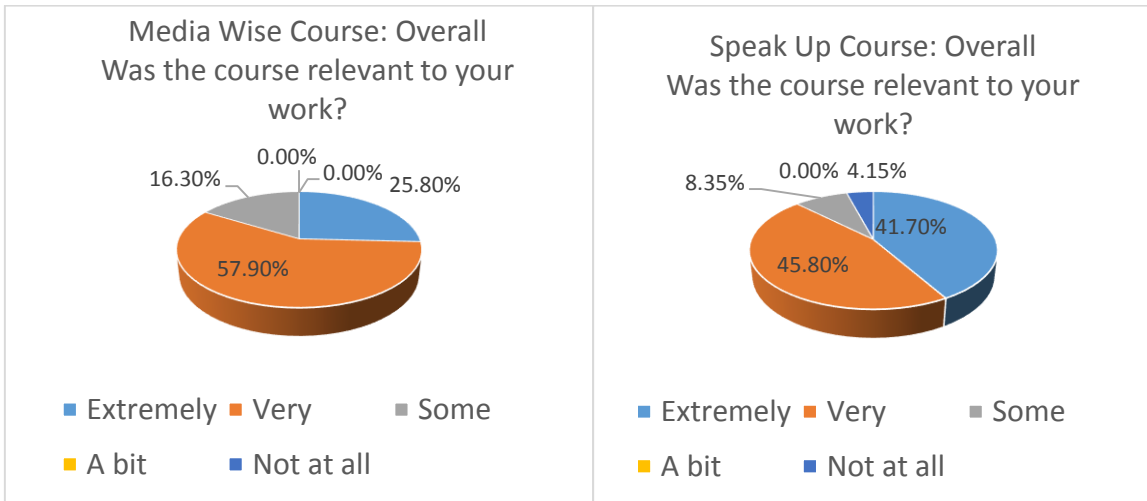
Dialogue Days 2014 provided an excellent forum for the KAICIID Image of the Other in the Media Programme to pilot its two training curricula. Results from the four pilot courses held during Dialogue Days 2014 will shape the revision of the Media Wise and Speak Up curricula. Pre-course appraisals and post-course evaluations of the course content, materials, trainer performance, training format/structure, accommodation and organization and interest in future courses were all assessed. This information, together with trainee comments and full evaluations from course trainers, will all be used to refine the curricula and further target these to the specific needs of religious leaders and dialogue practitioners.

EVALUATIONS

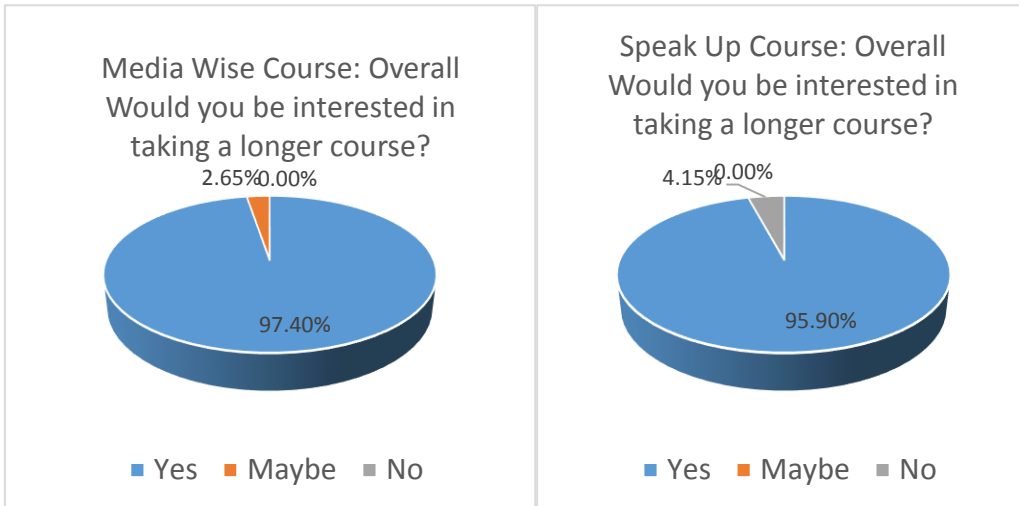
Both the Media Wise and the Speak Up curricula appeared to be on the right track according to an initial review of evaluations, and according to post-course video interviews conducted with trainees.

Below are the results from three questions posed to all trainees after their classes were completed, in order to assess whether the training course matched participant needs. An average of results from Nairobi and New Delhi were taken to present an overall result for each course.

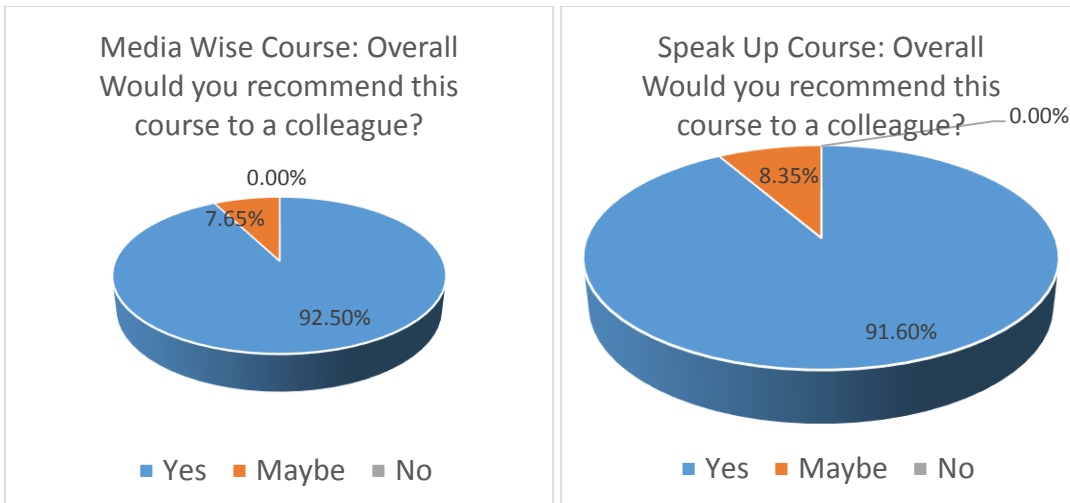
Was the course relevant to your work?



Would you be interested in taking a longer course that covers the material in more detail?



Would you recommend this course to a colleague?



INTERVIEWS

In interviews conducted after the course, participants from both courses said that the material had been relevant, the training well-executed, and that the time with other participants had been valuable.

On the Media Wise course:

Ibrahim Lethome Asmani, Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims: “For many people [media] is the only avenue through which we can learn about the Other, when you talk about religious communities. So for me it was very important to know how to interact with each other *through* the media, how to interact *with* the media, how *to* respond to the media, how to even interpret what we see in the media. For me this is wonderful, wonderful, wonderful.”

George Shiramba, Pastor: “The course was very good on three fronts. One, interacting with people of different faiths. Secondly, the knowledge about media and especially what happens in the background of the media gave me a lot of encouragement to know how I can work with the media. And media literacy was also very important—just knowing how I can influence what happens around and in the world through media.”

On the Speak Up Course:

Jim Olang, Association of Evangelicals in Africa: “For me it is mind blowing. People can actually follow what you’re saying. For me it has opened a new avenue to reach the media, and especially in my context, because I’m not looking at the Kenyan media alone, I’m looking at the African perspective. So I want someone from Egypt to see what I’m saying about what they’re going through, and someone from CAR to see what I’m saying, and link in to the conversation. So for me the morning session has been mind blowing.”



Religious leaders chat during a coffee break in Nairobi

Zeinab Abdullah Ahmed, Nairobi University,

Muslims Student’s Association: “It was very beneficial. He helped us a lot to engage on social media as well as how to properly utilize it--more than just [with] local people [...], but how to reach far more. Mainly how to engage diplomatically without jeopardizing your stand, and to respond, and [...] deal with hate speech without falling prey to trolls and those people who want to create mayhem.”

On spending time with participants of other faiths:

Fred Nyabera, Director of End Child Poverty, Arigatou Int’l: “I think it was very interactive. Initially it was very slow, but it picked up as confidence levels were rising. Also facilitators to a great extent provided enough space for people to ask relevant questions and also to reflect on their own practices in light of what was being taught.”

Abdulrahman Wandati, Executive Director, Muslim Consultative Council in Kenya: “You know, sometimes I wish that the clips or pictures of how we interacted with the other participants from various and different religious backgrounds would have been live throughout the world because we

were all friendly with each other. And sincere friendship. Some of them we had met for the first time here, and we developed a liking for one another just for the few days we stayed here.”

Michael Taban Toro, Chairperson, South Sudan Council of Churches: “The interaction was really very interesting given the fact that leaders have come from diverse religious backgrounds. So it gives us [a way to] move together in spite of our divide in different religious backgrounds so we can really coexist. We can be able to solve the issues of society. “

AGENDA-SETTING: IMAGE OF THE OTHER IN THE MEDIA

In cooperation with Arigatou International in Nairobi and SDS in New Delhi, KAICIID held panel discussions featuring high-level national representatives from the fields of religion, policy and media. These leaders spoke to the impact of the media on interreligious relations in Kenya and Nairobi, countries that have each recently experienced painful tensions and violence between members of religious communities. In each city, the audience was comprised of diplomats, policy makers, representatives from key national religious organizations, other civil society organizations, as well as media representatives and members of the press.

NAIROBI: “IMPACT OF MEDIA ON CURRENT INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS: FROM DISCORD TO DIALOGUE”

On **17 November**, under a spacious marquee on the grounds of the Serena Hotel, around 120 attendees, including press, gathered at round tables.

The panel comprised nationally renowned speakers representing the Kenyan government, Islamic and Christian religious representative bodies, and the media. The panelists were **Farah Maalim Mohammed**, former Deputy Speaker of the Kenya National Assembly; **Dr. Agnes Abuom**, President of the World Council of Churches; **Mwenda Njoka**, spokesman in the Office of the President, Interior and Coordination Ministry; **Ibrahim Lethome**, who represented Muslims in Kenya as a Commissioner in the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC) that drew up the new constitution for the country; **David Makali**, leading journalist and former managing editor of *The Standard*; and **Mike Waltner**, Head of Initiatives at KAICIID. The panel was moderated by **Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali**, GNRC Secretary General and conflict resolution expert.



KAICIID Head of Initiatives Mike Waltner opened the discussion with an introduction of KAICIID work, and a discussion of the importance of media for interreligious



Panelists (L-R): Dr. Agnes Abuom, David Makali, Hon. Farah Maalim, Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali, Mwenda Njoka, Mike Walter and Sheikh Ibrahim Lethome

Diplomatic representatives from Canada, Austria, Spain and Saudi Arabia attended. Organizations such as the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), Union of Muslim Councils in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa, the Islamic Foundation, Sikh Supreme Council of Kenya, the Sikh Supreme Council of Kenya, Finn Church Aid and Jamia Mosque Association were also present.

Mike Waltner, KAICIID’s Head of Initiatives, opened the discussion with an introduction to the Dialogue Centre. The wide-ranging, earnest and self-

critical debate tackled the roles of journalists and religious leaders when it comes to news coverage of recent crises and controversies in Kenya. Panelists and audience members, including those with a media background, praised KAICIID’s training initiatives and the panel discussion, called for an expansion of training and dialogue activities in East Africa, and asked KAICIID to provide regional journalists with training about religion.



“The communication media can help us greatly in this mission of promoting unbiased respect of different religious beliefs and cultural heritage in the multicultural set up of our human society”
Rev. Dr. John Kochuthundil, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India

NEW DELHI: IMPACT OF MEDIA ON CURRENT INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS: FROM DISCORD TO DIALOGUE

In New Delhi, over 100 attendees gathered in Gulmohar Hall in the Indian Habitat Centre on 25 November for a lively dialogue.

The panellists were KAICIID Board member and founder of SDS **Swami Agnivesh**, Former Minister of Civil Aviation and noted Muslim leader **Arif Mohammad Khan**, communication expert and Chairman of the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) **N. Bhaskara Rao**, former director of the National Council of Education Research and Training **Dr. J. S. Rajput**, and Head of Initiatives at KAICIID, **Mike Waltner**. The panel was moderated by **Nayana Jayarajan**, KAICIID Media Officer.



KAICIID Board of Directors Member Swami Agnivesh meets participants on the sidelines of the public event.

Discussions were inclusive and included a special statement delivered on behalf of His Excellency **Archbishop Salvatore Pennachio**, the Apostolic Nuncio to India. Swami Agnivesh delivered a strong message on behalf of KAICIID about the importance using Social Media to spread the messages in support of dialogue and peace. Present in the audience were representatives of the National Human Rights Commission of India, Jamiete E Islami E Hind, Vishwa ahimsa sangh (Jain), Brahmakumaris, Islamic student organization, Mar Thoma Church in New Delhi (Anglican), and many more.

The panel discussion explored the role of media in either supporting or disrupting social cohesion. There was a shared perspective among all panelists that sensationalism and conflict were driving much of the news coverage related to religion, and that a new model should be put forward that includes dialogue and peace-building. Several panelists and audience members praised KAICIID’s initiative in convening the discussion and Dialogue Days activities in India.



Participants encouraged KAICIID to broaden its training throughout East Africa, and to help support journalists through training in their efforts to strengthen reporting about religion.