



PRESS RELEASE

7TH ASEF Journalists' Colloquium

Keeping the Faith: Reporting on Religion

A dialogue between leading media and interfaith practitioners

In conjunction with the 5th ASEM Interfaith Dialogue

21-22 September 2009
Lotte Hotel Myeongdong, Seoul, Korea

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Interfaith journalists and practitioners meet in Seoul ahead of ASEM dialogue

Ahead of the 5th ASEM¹ Interfaith Dialogue taking place for the first time in Seoul, Korea on 23-25 September 2009, a group of distinguished journalists and religious leaders will meet to confront the dual challenges of interfaith cooperation and religion reporting.

Organised by the **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** with the support of the Foreign and Culture Ministries of the Republic of Korea, the 7th ASEF Journalists' Colloquium aims to engage media professionals and interfaith leaders from Asia and Europe in closer cooperation, against the backdrop of Korea's rich experience of managing interfaith harmony.

"The fact is religion matters. Whether our societies are experiencing religious revival or decline, religious leaders, practices, inter-and intra-faith relations regularly make the news," ASEF Executive Director Ambassador Dominique Girard said. "At the same time, the media has an inevitable influence in portraying the role of religion in society and consequently, on the way that religions communities and actors are understood. Collaboration between faith leaders and the media profession is key to the success of interfaith dialogue."

Colloquium participants include Korean religion specialist Noh Jong-Sun of Yonsei University, who has published widely on religious affairs in Korea, Cambodian Buddhist Heng Monychenda who leads the movement of socially engaged Buddhism, and leading Irish theologian Dr Eamon Conway, who was recently elected President of the European Society for Catholic Theology. They will be joined by BBC religious affairs correspondent Christopher Landau and Spanish TV journalist, writer and academic Lola Banon, who is known for her coverage of the Middle East conflict. Together with other prominent journalists and interfaith leaders, they will collectively draw up practical recommendations to promote balanced religion coverage, with the understanding that both religious leaders and the media can play an affirmative role in social cohesion and conflict resolution.

Their findings will contribute to the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue as practical recommendations from civil society to the inter-governmental proceedings. A central objective of the dialogue is to study the various approaches to engaging the media and in using communications tools to facilitate or support interfaith and intercultural dialogue, with a special focus on successful initiatives in the region and the rest of Asia and Europe.

ASEF's interest to initiate the Colloquium is a response to the call for increased dialogue and cooperation among the cultures and civilisations of Asia and Europe. The Colloquium is part of a range of multi-stakeholder dialogues that were designed to provide a neutral venue for open and

non-confrontational discussion, and to counterbalance the misconceptions and cultural contradictions highlighted in the public by facilitating meaningful and resonating exchanges.

More than twenty ASEF dialogues have been organised in the past six years in various ASEM countries, engaging diverse audiences on issues of cross-cultural significance – ranging from the tension between press freedom and religious freedom, to the management of emotional and at times violent public responses to external conflicts. This Colloquium follows from the last dialogue that took place in Davao City, the Philippines, which focused on mapping the trends in interfaith relations and in particular, highlighted the essential role that the media can play in challenging stereotyped perceptions and in connecting ideas and perspectives. More information and reports of ASEF dialogues are available at www.civdialogue.asef.org

There will be an opportunity for the media to conduct private interviews with participants. Interested parties please contact:

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The **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** advances mutual understanding and collaboration between the people of Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges. These exchanges include conferences, lecture tours, workshops, seminars and the use of web-based platforms. The major achievement of ASEF is the establishment of permanent bi-regional networks focussed on areas and issues that help to strengthen Asia-Europe relations. Established in February 1997 by the partners of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), ASEF reports to a board of governors representing the ASEM partners. ASEF is the only permanent physical institution of the ASEM process. Since 1997, the Foundation has initiated projects engaging 14,000 individuals from Asia and Europe. ASEF works in partnership with other public institutions and civil society actors to ensure its work is broad-based and balanced among the partner countries. www.asef.org

¹ **The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** is an informal process of dialogue and co-operation. It brings together Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Laos, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom, Vietnam, the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Commission. (www.aseminfoboard.org)



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