

## IVth COMING TOGETHER ROUNDTABLE

by Roshan Rivetna

### What is The Coming Together Roundtable?

With migrations from the Indian subcontinent and Iran, mostly in the last half century, Zarathushtis are now a “Community Without Borders” spread all over the globe. Never before has there been a greater need to keep these pockets of Zarathushtis connected with each other and with the mother countries. The Coming Together Roundtable (CTR) provides such a forum -- to bring together Zarathushtis from around the world for information sharing, dialogue and action on matters of global import. The format of the Roundtable is open and free flowing. There is no protocol, no hierarchy, and no authority. It is a forum for any persons, especially those in leadership positions, to come together and work together for the growth and welfare of our Community. The basis for the CTR is firmly embedded in the concept of “*Hamazor*” – it is said that “Dialogue brings minds together and action brings hearts together.”

The CTR is a legacy of the Eighth World Zoroastrian Congress. Becoming aware of the need for our Community to Come Together the organizers of that Congress, in London in 2005, enabled holding of the first CTR. Since then, two succeeding ones have been held, in Mumbai in January 2007 and January 2008, at the Athornan Madressa in Dadar.

### The IVth Roundtable

The IVth Roundtable was held on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008, graciously hosted by the Zoroastrian Association of Houston. The meeting was conducted by Rohinton Rivetna, with Firdosh Mehta and Behram Pastakia, and attended by about 35 persons, from India, Iran, Canada and USA, plus a few more who participated through webcast facilities provided by Yazdi Tantra of On-Lyne Systems, and ZAH.

The tone for the day – *Hamazori* – was set by Benedictions and a Monajat by Er. Peshotan Unwalla and Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary and a Presentation (#3) on *Hamazori*, by Er. Ramiyar Karanjia (in absentia).

Among Discussion Items addressed by the CTR were the following:

**Venue for the Next World Congress (WZC).** The need for an equitable process to select the venue for WZCs arose at the 2005 World Congress in London. The concept of “Request for Proposals” was mooted and approved at the CTR in London and two subsequent CTRs. An RFP document outlining the selection process and evaluation criteria was drafted by Rohinton Rivetna, Firdosh Mehta and Behram Pastakia, with input from representative stakeholders in North America, India, UAE, UK, Iran, Australia and New Zealand. The document was finalized in July 2008, circulated widely. As per the process, proposals were invited, and received from Australia, Iran, Mumbai and Singapore, and evaluated by a Selection Committee of four independent individuals from India, Iran, NA and Europe who had experience in hosting World Congresses. The evaluations were tallied by an independent accountant who provided the results in a sealed envelope. The sealed envelope was opened at the Houston CTR, and the venue was announced as “Singapore.”

This announcement evoked strong objection from the Iranian delegates. Zoroastrian M.P. in the Iranian Majlis Dr. Esfandiar Ekhtiyari made an impassioned plea for holding it in Iran: “Remember the Congress is for our children to become more aware of our culture and heritage,” he said, “Our Congresses are becoming more International showcases instead of bringing us back to our roots,” and he, along with Khodayar Attaie (WZCC Director, Iran Region) proceeded to leave the meeting. Rohinton persuaded them to stay, and opened the floor for further discussion. Questions were raised on the viability of Singapore as host for a World Congress and on the selection process followed, especially in the face of the firm decision made by the Bombay Parsi Punchayet to host the Congress.

Rohinton requested a group of four, including Kersi Limathwalla (WZCC president, from India), Bomi Patel (FEZANA president), Dr. Ekhtiyari (MP, Iran) and Alayar Dabestani (USA and Iran) to discuss the matter over the Lunch break and come to a consensual agreement. After Lunch, spokesman Kersi Limathwalla presented the outcome: ***“In view of the strong decision made by BPP (Mumbai) that the Congress should be held in Mumbai, Iran and USA had agreed to support Mumbai.”*** Also, Kersi would urge that the next WZCC AGM after Dubai in 2009, be held in Iran. Iran has also requested that if the next Congress is held in Mumbai, the following one after that be held in Iran.

Bomi Patel suggested, and most concurred, that a global council/committee with elected representatives from BPP, Iran, ZTFE, FEZANA and other regions, be charged with allocating future world congresses, including the youth congress; and that BPP take the initiative in this regard.

**Promoting Celebration of Nou Rouz.** Fariborz Rahnamoon presented a paper on promoting the celebration of Nou Rouz more widely. He urged the community to take a lead in promoting public celebrations of the event all over North America and around the world, and initiate programs to promote the real significance of Nou Rouz. He drew attention to the astronomical event, when sunrise will coincide with the equinox, which will unfold in the vicinity of Chicago, Indianapolis and Louisville, Kentucky, on Nou Rouz 2009. He urged communities in these areas to spearhead the celebration of the Real Nou Rouz and promote mass media coverage. Fariborz offered to help those associations in formulating the program. Details are at [www.ancientiran.com](http://www.ancientiran.com).

**Iranian youth immigrants to USA.** Fariborz Rahnamoon drew attention to the fact that Zarathushti youth from Iran are legally arriving in USA on a daily basis. They are well educated but are lost in their new environment and need guidance to find the right job, to upgrade their education and to settle down. Finance is not their problem – they need help to settle down quickly in the right environment with the right job. He urged that local associations take the initiative to seek out these new immigrants and assist them, as they have no means of finding the local associations.

**Economic Support for Iran.** Dr. Ekhtiyari presented the economic status of Zoroastrians in Iran: “... The population trend is dwindling ... Very few youth are left now, especially in Yazd and Kerman ... The best way we can help is to create employment opportunities in Iran, so that they are not drawn to come to America. This can be done (1) through direct foreign investment in Iran. Arrangements can be made to protect the investment; or (2) by bringing an old/outdated technology system that may still be usable in Iran ... it would create jobs for Iranian youth, and profits for the investor ...” It was decided to form an ***Iran Economic Advisory Council*** comprising of Khodayar Attaie, Alayar Dabestani, Bomi Patel, Dr. Ekhtiyari, and Kersi Limathwalla, to help and advise in this matter.

**Community Enhancement Projects.** Firdosh Mehta presented the status of numerous community enhancement projects, many of which needed further support, including: participation in *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*; *ParZor Foundation* projects; *Gene Study* project (Avestagen); Dastur *Meherji Rana Library* and *K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* projects and efforts for *Manuscript Restoration*; *World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation* projects including archeological excavations at Sanjan; web-based world-wide directory of Zoroastrian individuals and businesses at *ZoroastrianDirectory.com* and *Parsiana Yellow Pages*; academic fund for *school children* in Iran; the Iranian newsletter *Amordad*; *Parsi Resource Goup* projects; the *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* of the Oriental Institute in Chicago; assistance to *religious infrastructure* – agiaries, atash behrams, dokhmas, aramgahs, darbe mehrs; *Sadhana School* for Autistic students in Mumbai; *Farohar Foundation*, producers of Zarathushti heritage films; and various other needy *welfare projects* for food distribution, hospitals, schools, playgrounds, sports centers, science centers, rural community support and more. Behram Pastakia urged support for *Operation Eyesight* (eyeglass collection will be done at the Dubai Congress) and developing a project through Parsi General Hospital for *screening Zarathushti women for breast cancer*.

**UN and Interfaith Programs.** Behram Pastakia encouraged participation in UN events, especially as this was the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Rohinton Rivetna, a trustee of the *Parliament of World's Religions* announced the next Parliament, in Melbourne, December 3 – 9, 2009, and distributed a beautiful, glossy brochure with a warm welcome from the local host – Zoroastrian Association of Victoria ([pwr@zav.org.au](mailto:pwr@zav.org.au)) which read: “We the Zoroastrians of Victoria open up our hearts and homes to all Zoroastrians of the world, to visit our beautiful country, enjoy our hospitality and take pride in our glorious heritage.”

**Other discussion items** included: *Duties, Rights and Privileges* of the Diaspora communities; passing the torch to the *next generation* and the YLEP Youth Leadership program in Dubai; *Zoroastrian Bank* seeking patronage from NRIs; preparation of a document on the *Code of Civil Conduct*; and promoting the *Ethic of Collective Giving*.

The need was expressed to put *Farsi translations* of important information on the web and in Farsi-language publications. Alayar Dabestani offered to fund an administrator, based in India, who could translate the information into Farsi. Dr. Ekhtiyari offered to facilitate the printing of translations in Iranian publications.

**Next Roundtable.** The next CTR will be held on December 30, 2009, during the 9<sup>th</sup> World Zoroastrian Congress in Dubai.

*For detailed reports of all the proceedings visit [www.zoroastrians.net](http://www.zoroastrians.net) (category “Round Table”) .maintained by Yazdi Tantra of On-Lyne Systems, Mumbai, or contact CTR administrator Percis Dubash of Mumbai ([pdubash1@gmail.com](mailto:pdubash1@gmail.com)).*