

2004 Goldin Institute Report

Taipei, Taiwan, 6 - 12 November 2004

Spirituality and Sustainability—Water: The Common Element



Today 1.1 billion people, one-sixth of the world's population, live without access to safe drinking water. This humanitarian crisis has staggering costs. Eighty percent of the illnesses and deaths in the developing world are attributable to water-borne diseases.

This issue is intertwined with many other social ills plaguing the planet. Making an impact on poverty, hunger, illiteracy, disease, water scarcity aggravated conflicts and many other issues are all significantly dependant on solving the world's water crisis. Ensuring reliable access to safe drinking water (ASDW) and repairing damaged water systems are crucial components of creating a just, peaceful and sustainable world.

Thankfully, there is a growing awareness that ASDW is an urgent and acute need around the world. The United Nations, Governments, NGO's, religious and spiritual communities, businesses and leaders from civil society have begun to understand the nature and dynamics of the crisis, create effective strategies and take meaningful actions. How can we reverse the trend of growing water scarcity? How can sustainable projects be created to provide reliable access to safe drinking water? How can cross-city and multi-sector efforts most effectively address the crisis at the local and global levels?

To explore these questions, teams of grassroots leaders and experts from twenty-six cities in Argentina, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, India, Israel, Kenya, the Philippines, Rwanda, Spain, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uganda convened in Taipei, Taiwan from November 6 – 12, 2004 to focus on the theme of Spirituality and Sustainability – Water: the Common Element.

The venue for the week was the impressive Museum of World's Religions located near Taipei. The Museum, founded by visionary Buddhist leader Dharma Master Hsin Tao, proved to be an inspiring meeting ground for the 2004 Goldin Institute proceedings. The location of Taipei proved to be a meaningful place as well, given that sixty-five percent of people without ASDW live in Asia.

The Goldin Institute is an annual forum started in 2002 to bring together local leaders from the emerging international Partner Cities Network to provide mutual support and share the methodologies and tools needed to build peaceful, just and sustainable communities.

The 2004 Goldin Institute followed the tradition of previous Institute gatherings in:

- **Chicago, USA, 2002:** at this inaugural Institute participants from over 20 cities learned from the experience of Chicago's grassroots leaders and worked together to build a platform for shared learning and support through a Network of Partner Cities.
- **Manresa, Spain, 2003:** teams of grassroots leaders and activists from over 20 cities explored the theme of building social cohesion in the midst of diversity, learning from each other and the nascent but growing movement to welcome and engage immigrant communities in Manresa, Catalonia and Spain.

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The 2004 Goldin Institute was a powerful global forum which focused the attention of participating teams on the theme of “Spirituality and Sustainability—Water: the common element”. In keeping with the emphasis on participation by teams from cities—rather than the individuals or organizations that inhabit them—as the principal bodies within the Partner Cities Network, the 2004 Goldin Institute encouraged a diverse set of organizers from within a city to come together to participate as a team that was comprised of experts and grassroots leaders from a variety of sectors of society. In this way, the Goldin Institute works to create partnerships between and within cities.

The program of the 2004 Goldin Institute was developed in consultation with leading experts and activists in Taipei, Taiwan and leaders around the world, and was designed to prepare all participants to effectively collaborate to address the global water crisis.

Dharma Master Hsin Tao, the staff and volunteers of the Museum of World Religions and their partners in Taipei played a leading role in the development of this innovative agenda. The agenda enabled all participants to:

- **share** experiences and knowledge
- **learn** from peers and fellow activists from around the world
- **design** innovative programs to meet the needs of their cities
- **act** in partnership with other cities to address critical issues

Every day the agenda offered optional morning religious observances from a variety of religious and spiritual traditions, daily presentations and discussions led by city teams focused on their work and informal times for interaction, and to visit local organizations to better understand local challenges and strategies.

Through this innovative process, participants were able to:

- **Interact** with leading experts and activists working to address water issues
- **Share** best practices from their city, and learn from others
- **Participate** in workshops, lectures and presentations
- **Strategize** with colleagues from Partner Cities world-wide
- **Partner** with teams from cities around the world
- **Commit** to action, and to continued sharing of lessons learned

The week began with an overwhelming display of hospitality at the opening ceremony and reception hosted at the iconic Grand Hotel in Taipei. Over five-hundred community leaders, religious leaders, dignitaries and supports joined the Institute participants for an evening of cultural programs, welcoming remarks and informal dialogue.

After this welcoming dinner participants convened the following morning at the Museum of World Religions for welcoming remarks by Dharma Master Hsin Tao, Museum Director Liao Yi Shih and the Goldin Institute founder, Diane Goldin. Participants used the rest of the morning and lunch getting to know each other through appreciative inquiry interviews and structured small group discussions.

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To begin our exploration of the global water issues, participants who suffer from a lack of access to safe drinking water were invited to share stories of their personal experiences. These lived experiences of personal and community struggles grounded the week's discussions in real life experiences; putting a human face on what is too often discussed as an abstract issue defined by official statements, statistics and rhetoric.

Prominent speakers from Taipei and around the world then led a presentation on the topic of "Understanding the Global Water Crisis". This panel presentation put the water crisis into a global perspective and was followed by a lively question and answer period.

The afternoon was spent discussing the theme of "The Unique Role of Religion and Spirituality in addressing the Global Water Crisis". A panel presentation and discussion with senior religious leaders provided an overview of the special contribution that religious and spiritual communities can make in addressing the global water crisis. It was clear from this discussion that religious communities are a crucial component of any successful strategy because of the direct actions taken by religious people and in light of the moral and ethical framework that these traditions can bring.

That evening participants were invited to a special session hosted by the Islamic community of Taiwan. A site visit to the local mosque was followed by an informative presentation on the history and dynamics of the Muslim community in Taiwan and a guided tour of a wonderful exhibit of Islamic calligraphy.

The third day was focused on the theme of "Understanding and Responding to the Water Crisis in Taiwan". The morning offered a panel presentation and discussion providing an overview of the unique challenges and opportunities of the water crisis in Taipei. This session showcased the innovative strategies and efforts in Taipei and provided an interesting comparison point to animate the sharing of experiences and struggles for the participants from around the world.

That afternoon the panel discussion focused on "Religion and Civic Empowerment from the Ecological Perspective". This panel was followed by a group discussion examining how religious, spiritual and ethical convictions can inform and motivate environmental activism and provide the necessary moral framework for addressing the global water crisis.

That evening the participants were hosted by Ing-jo Ma, the Mayor of Taipei, at City Hall. In his remarks, the mayor emphasized the importance engaging all sectors of society in order to develop and undertake successful initiatives.

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The following two days were focused on the theme of “Engaging Partners in the Broader Society”. Through a series of panel presentations, small group discussions and case studies, participants defined and shared best practices for working with a variety of sectors of society. Separate workshops were held to focus on best practices from the following sectors and segments of civil society:

- Arts and Cultural Groups
- Media
- Business
- Urban Planning
- Environmental Activists
- Scientists and Engineers
- Religion and Spirituality
- Government Institutions
- Educators
- Indigenous Communities
- Youth and Elders
- Interested NGOs

One particularly informative and inspiring session was led by the International Youth Interfaith Union which highlighted the efforts to address the ecological issues in Tainan, Taiwan, the site of the Daitan Temple. This Case Study focused on the relation between folk belief and ecological sustainability in Taiwan.

On each of these two evenings the participants were hosted by local communities for dinner, discussions and cultural programming. First, the group was hosted by I-kuan Tao which featured a wonderful cultural program at the I-kuan Tao Temple that sat atop a mountain overlooking the city. The evening featured a “night of a thousand candles”, where over 1,000 members of the I-kuan Tao community lit the road to the buses by holding candles. This moving evening was a cultural highlight for many participants. The second night was hosted by the Christian community at the Presbyterian seminary located in Yang Ming National Park outside Taipei. After a dinner with the students and faculty participants were invited to a cultural program led by students that featured song, dance and indigenous cultural expressions.

The sixth day was focused on the theme of “Addressing the Water Crisis at Home and Throughout the Network”. Building on the work of the previous two days of identifying, sharing and refining best practices from different sectors and cities, participants spent the day creating strategies for their efforts to address the global water crisis.

In the morning session city teams met individually to develop practical plans and strategies for engaging partners to address the water crisis in their home region. After lunch teams shared the highlights of their strategies with all participants to prepare for the development of cross-city partnerships and to inspire other cities to incorporate applicable ideas from each other.

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The afternoon and evening were spent in cross-city teams to explore opportunities for effective collaboration. Examples of local and global strategies developed during these sessions include:

- **Water Access in Northern Uganda:** participants from the Yukon Territory, Madrid, New York and Uganda are working to set up a prototype system to provide safe drinking water in the war-torn region of Northern Uganda.
- **Water Issues at the Navajo Nation:** participants from the Navajo Nation and water experts from the Carus Chemical Company (engaged in water treatment) have committed to work together to provide access to safe drinking water to the Wide Ruins area of the Navajo Nation, where residents currently travel up to 40 miles to purchase water.
- **Bay Area Water Conference:** participants from the Bay Area of California have partnered with local agencies to host a “Water: the common element” conference on June 19, 2005 to share resources for addressing the global and local water crisis.
- **Jewish – Muslim - Christian Student Environmental Group at Hebrew University:** Participants from the Interfaith Encounter Association based in Jerusalem have partnered with the Green Course Movement to found an innovative cross-cultural environmental group. They have reported that “environmental issues cut across religions and borders and can serve as a basis for dialogue and cooperation”.
- **Improving Water Conservation on Campus:** participants from the Los Angeles region have developed a plan to analyze water consumption on their University campus in collaboration with science departments and environmental student groups and to campaign for water conservation as a model for other colleges and universities.
- **Water Conservation Awareness in Philadelphia:** The Presbyterian, Jewish and Muslim communities in Philadelphia are planning a joint community study program that they hope will lead to innovative approaches for religious communities to conserve water.

In addition to these and other growing partnerships the Institute helped create a powerful network in Taipei. Building on the relationships developed through the planning and hosting of the 2004 Goldin Institute, the religious and spiritual leaders of Taiwan have come to collaborate in new and inspiring ways. The Taiwan Inter-religious Fund was recently created to provide significant support to respond to the Tsunami crisis in December of 2004. In partnership with participants from Sri Lanka, leaders from Taiwan have provided support to rebuild communities on the coast of Sri Lanka.

The final day was spent at the beautiful Ling Jiou Mountain Wu-Sheng Monastery in the mountains overlooking the ocean. During the closing session participants shared pledges with each other, describing the work that they have committed to do upon returning home. This was a powerful session of expressing personal convictions and commitments to take action. Commitment has become a key to the work

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of the Goldin Institute. We have all come to understand that it is not enough to issue statements for others in the world to act — rather, it is necessary to commit and act ourselves. This session was concluded with a moving cultural program that featured indigenous music.

Through participant evaluations it is clear that the Goldin Institute met our goals of providing a forum for teams of grassroots leaders to:

- **understand** the causes, impacts and dynamics the global water crisis.
- **learn** about creative and effective approaches to address the water crisis from leading activists from a broad range of sectors of society including religion, government, business, education, media, science and the arts.
- **develop** strategies to engage multiple sectors of society in addressing the water crisis in each participant's city or region.
- **partner** across cities to lead efforts to address the water crisis at local and global levels.
- **document** and refine tools and methodologies for assisting those who wish to use the outcomes and learnings from the Institute.
- **commit** to action with confidence that results from the inspiration, knowledge, partnerships, and ongoing communication gained through the Institute.

The Goldin Institute pledges to provide on-going consultative and networking support for participating cities to help them achieve their goals and to continue to host annual Goldin Institutes. In addition to the annual gatherings, the Institute is working to achieve our mission through the following activities:

- **Regional gatherings** will be convened to focus on topics of concern to the region.
- **Institute Associates** will be engaged to develop and provide tools, trainings and facilitation skills, serving as regional “extension staff” for the Institute.
- **Consultative support** will be provided through site visits, workshops and other methods appropriate to the local context. Particular attention will be given to projects and initiatives that have grown out of Institute gatherings focused on the global water crisis, social cohesion in the midst of diversity and reconciliation efforts.
- **Documentation and recognition** of the strategies, challenges and outcomes of successful partnerships in the Partner Cities Network. The Institute will distill and describe effective strategies and offer those resources for use in other cities.
- **Interactive Website** will provide the capacity for participants to communicate and collaborate with partners in cities across the globe between Institute events.

The 2004 Goldin Institute would not have been possible without the vision, leadership, hospitality and support of our local partners, hosts and supporters. The Institute extends its profound gratitude to Dharma Master Hsin Tao, the Museum of World Religions and its Executive Director, Liao Yi Shih and the Ling Jiou Mountain Monastery. A special thanks to the committed and wonderful staff and volunteers of the Museum of World Religions.

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The local co-hosts provided expert presentations, gracious hospitality and support that made the success of the event possible. These co-hosts include the Taiwan Conference on Religion and Peace (TCRP), the Taipei City Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Council of Cultural Affairs, Mr. Joseph Chen and the I-kuan Tao community, the community of T'ienti Teachings, Nankuenshen Temple, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, the Ling Jiou Mountain Honorary Board, Sri Saldas Baba and the Sai Foundation, the Chinese Petroleum Lubricants Business Division and individual supporters Bo-Chu Tin and Frank Tsai. Our deepest gratitude to these partners and friends for making the 2004 Institute possible.

