



## **Institute of Social Sciences**

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### **High Level Yemeni Delegation Study Program to India on Federalization and Decentralization**

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The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), New Delhi organized the study program of a High level Yemeni delegation to India from May 4 to 9 2014. It was funded by the World Bank's 'Yemen Decentralization and Local Governance Initiative' to support Yemen's political transition while specifically supporting the implementation of the outcomes of Yemen's National Dialogue Conference (NDC). Through the NDC, the Yemenis have agreed to a series of guiding principles aimed at guaranteeing rights and freedoms, reducing the centralization of power, eliminating corruption, empowering women and youth, among others. Yemen has agreed to accept a six-region federal state structure and regional autonomy and devolution of power.

Yemeni President has appointed a 17 - member Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC), which is tasked with drafting - in coordination with a broader political body representing groups within the NDC - the country's new constitution reflecting the



The delegation with Dr. George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences (1st from left) at the Institute

outcomes of the NDC and some of the details relating to the above issues. The CDC has been given a one-year mandate to complete this task.

The Institute organized a series of interactions involving stakeholders, academics and former functionaries of the government. These interactions were meant to facilitate a lot of learning from India's federal model and democratic decentralization. The delegation consisted of the following members:

1. Mr. Abdulkader Helal, Mayor of Sana'a and head of the delegation,
2. Mr. Wahid Al Rasheed, Governor of Aden,
3. Mr. Mohammed Ahmad AlHaj, Secretary General of the Local Council, Taiz,
4. Mr. Abdullah AlShater, Deputy Minister for Planning,
5. Dr. Mohammed Hamoud AlHammadi, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Local Administration,
6. Mr. Mohammed Qahtan, Islah Islamic Party,
7. Ms. Um Al Khayr Al Saadi, NDC member and
8. Mr. Hussein Hamoud Al Ezzi, Head of Political Affairs, Ansar Allah Party

The secretary to the Mayor of Sana'a, Mr. Abdulghani Helal too was part of the delegation.

The delegation arrived in New Delhi early morning on May 4<sup>th</sup>. The delegates were received at the airport by the Ambassador of Yemen, Her Excellency Khadija Radman Mohammad Ghanem and the Chairman of the Institute of Social Sciences, Dr. George Mathew.

On the first day a visit to Agra was organized.

The formal sessions began on May 5<sup>th</sup> at the Institute of Social Sciences with Dr. George Mathew, Chairman of the Institute welcoming the Yemeni delegates.

The first session began with the main presentation on "Democracy is India's manifest destiny" by Dr. Ash Narain Roy, Director of the Institute. The



Dr. Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences addressing the delegation. From left: Her Excellency Khadija Radman Mohammad Ghanem, the Ambassador of Yemen and Mr. Abdulkader Helal, Mayor of Sanaa

presentation consisted of slides briefing the team about the historical and contemporary links India shared with Yemen. Dr. Roy during the presentation said that the oldest mosque in India was established by Arab traders in 629 AD during the time of Prophet Muhammad and stated that Islam was





Mr. S.D. Sharma, former State Election Commissioner, Government of Jharkhand, addressing the delegation

accepted peacefully as against the belief that Islam was adopted as a result of invasion. The basic federal structure in India was explained to the team. Some highlights of the election process in India were also discussed at length. Dr. Roy stated that the Indian model focused on becoming

economically viable through democracy whereas many others in Asia sought to become economically fit for democracy. The speaker concluded emphasizing the role of the three D's in Indian democracy; Debate, Dissent and Decision.

During a very fruitful interactive session after the presentation, questions were asked about the election process and specifically the team wanted to know how illiterate voters identified the political parties they wished to vote for and also details regarding composition of the various councils at the local level among others.

The presentation in the second session was by Mr. S.D. Sharma, former State Election Commissioner of the state of Jharkhand. His focus was on "Election process in Local governments". A background summary of the election processes at the State and Centre was presented by the speaker. The significance of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments was also discussed which changed the grammar of Indian democracy. Some of the queries during the interactive session related to appointment of the Election Commissioner and whether he/she can be aligned to any political party and how the concept of "Zero Error" in the election process could be guaranteed.

The session by Prof. O.P. Mathur, specialist on urban finance, presented an overview of the urban local bodies focusing on their functions and financial aspects. He discussed the composition of the various urban local bodies, their powers and their



Presentation by Prof. O.P. Mathur, Urban Specialist and Senior Fellow, Institute of Social Sciences



Prof. Balveer Arora, Chairman, Centre for Multilevel Federalism (ISS), speaking on the occasion

responsibilities. The speaker also focused on the challenges that urban cities and towns in India were facing and how crucial it would be for a country like Yemen to take stock of its development needs and come up with a vision or a long term

perspective plan laying down clearly the roles and responsibilities of each local and administrative unit.

The following three sessions looked at the Indian Federal structure in detail. Prof. Balveer Arora and Dr. Rekha Saxena enlightened the team about the concepts of division of power, the parliamentary system in the country and about the various central and state committees appointed to oversee the working of the Indian federal system over the years. Prof. Arora spoke about the salient features of Indian federalism in global perspective. He gave a short background of the evolution of the Indian federal system where he stated that federalism was a combination of self rule and shared rule. He also referred to certain aspects of federal systems in South Asia namely Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. The speaker also briefed the team about several lessons one could learn and unlearn from the Indian federal system.

The team had queries on the composition of the houses of parliament, the difference between the urban and rural local governments and how the census is taken in the country.

The third and final session of the day was on the rural local governments in India within the context of



Dr. Rekha Saxena, Associate Professor, University of Delhi, addressing the delegation





Prof. M. Aslam, Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), making a presentation

Indian federalism. The presentation by Dr. George Mathew, Chairman of the ISS, provided the delegates with the background to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, the role of the *panchayats* as the *de facto* third tier of government in the federal structure, their roles and responsibilities and the challenges that they faced.

On 6<sup>th</sup> May, the delegation was invited to the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) where they had an enlightening discussion with Prof. Mohammad Aslam, Vice-Chancellor, who is a specialist on Indian federalism and local governments. The pro vice-chancellors and other high level officials and academicians were also present on the occasion. During the discussions the Mayor of Sana'a was very keen to see that a distance-learning initiative like IGNOU be established in Yemen. He was also very optimistic about the World Bank supporting education through the establishment of partnerships with similar Universities.

The Ambassador of Yemen, Her Excellency Khadija Radman Mohammad Ghanem, hosted a dinner in honor of the visiting delegates at her residence the same evening. Many important dignitaries from the Yemeni Embassy and senior officials of the Ministry of External Affairs were also present on the occasion.

On 7<sup>th</sup> May, the delegation visited the Haryana Institute of Public Administration (HIPA) in Gurgaon, Haryana. The delegation spent over three hours discussing issues of local government administration, the role of training institutes and the challenges



Mr. R.S. Dalal, Director General, Haryana Institute of Public Administration (1st from left) interacting with the delegation

they faced in implementing programs. The Director-General of HIPA, Mr. R.S. Dalal and other senior faculty briefed the team about their work and addressed their questions.

Following this, the delegates had a field



Mrs. Shanti Devi, President, Gomla Village Council, Haryana (sitting middle) with the delegation during their field visit

visit to the Gram panchayat (village council), Gomla, in the state of Haryana. Here the team interacted with the elected representatives of the village and the lady president of the village council. The delegation went around the village looking at the various development

initiatives carried out by the panchayat including the drainage systems, local schools, construction of parks etc. The team was keen to know how decisions were made and how these decisions were implemented. It may be mentioned here that the Gomlapanchayat has emerged as a model panchayat in the state in the past 10 years.

On 8<sup>th</sup>, May, the final day of the program, the delegation was addressed by Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar, Member of Parliament and Former Union Minister for Local Governments, Government of India. Mr. Aiyar highlighted that development and progress of the poor were the two main aspects required for any nation to prosper. He also dwelt on the state of civil services in the country today and on the problems that are faced by the poor and marginalized due to the funds not reaching them.

Mr. Aiyar described the current inability of the government to provide adequate funds for the development of the poor and explained in detail the complexities the government faced with the allocation of funds as it is usually diverted to other areas like infrastructure and



Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar, former Union Minister, Government of India, speaking on Local Government System





The delegation with Mr. S.Y. Quraishi, former Chief Election Commissioner of India

defense. Further he said that huge funds were allocated for the upkeep of the administrative staff in the various state and central departments in the country.

Following this session, a film produced by ISS titled “*Swaraj – The Little Republic*” was screened. The film highlighted the plight of rural women in India, who, for their basic necessities in life like water, face serious challenges. The delegation gave a cheerful applause when the film ended praising the courage and dignity with which the women confronted the bureaucracy and conservative attitudes of people around them.

The final session was the presentation by Mr. S.Y Quraishi, former chief election commissioner of India. Mr. Quraishi explained in detail the procedures involved in the



Dr. George Mathew presenting a memento to Mr. Abdulkader Helal, Mayor of Sanaa and head of the delegation

process of conducting elections in the country which involved high levels of personnel deployment and meticulous planning. He mentioned that 99 per cent success is not acceptable but a 100 per cent flawless election is very important. He also explained in detail the system of electronic voting and the high ethical and moral values of the staff of the election commission who did their job without being unbiased and corrupt. Mr. Quraishi went on to explain the

model code of conduct that the election commission strictly follows. The various achievements and components of the election commission were also explained.

The delegates had questions relating to the voting methods that were adopted and the financial angle of holding frequent elections amongst others.

In the farewell session, the ISS Chairman and Director presented souvenirs to the delegates and wished them all the very best in adapting the lessons and experiences gained over the past few days in India. A copy of the Constitution of India was also presented to the delegates. The Mayor of Sana'a signed the Visitors Book and thanked on behalf of all the delegates, The World Bank and the Institute of Social Sciences for planning and implementing the study program in a very effective and purposeful manner.

The Yemeni delegation left for Srinagar on May 9, early morning for a visit to Kashmir. They had a two-day leisure trip to Kashmir.



The delegation in Srinagar  
[at Pari Mahal (Fairies' Abode) a seven-terraced garden on top of Zabarwan mountain range overlooking Srinagar and Dal Lake]