



Globethics

Peer-learning Dialogue on “Diversity as Strength: A Human Rights Imperative”

Date: Monday, 25 August 2025

Time: 10:30–12:00 CET (with possible continuation until 13:00 CET)

Hosted by: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Partners: Dharma Alliance and Globethics

Keynote Speaker: Swami Sarvapriyananda, Minister and Spiritual Leader, Vedanta Society of New York

Venue: OHCHR Offices (Palais Wilson meeting room 1.016, Rue des Pâquis 52, Geneva)

Registration link for in-person participation: <https://indico.un.org/event/1019152/>

Background and Rationale

In an increasingly polarized world, the recognition of diversity as an essential pillar of peace and human dignity is both urgent and transformative. From identity politics to culture wars, the rigid binaries of *us vs. them*, *religious vs. secular*, *local vs. global* continue to shape public discourse and institutional responses, often undermining the universality and indivisibility of human rights.

This peer-learning dialogue aims to reframe the conversation: not merely to tolerate difference but to affirm it as a source of collective strength and resilience. By exploring traditions that transcend dualistic worldviews—such as Vedanta—it seeks to reimagine human rights through the lens of non-binary, intersectional, and intercultural ethics. It also aims at leveraging the spiritual and moral weight of religions and beliefs to strengthen the protection of universal human rights and to develop preventative strategies, in line with the 18 commitments on “[Faith for Rights](#)”.

Convened by OHCHR with strategic partners from the human rights, interfaith, peacebuilding and academic sectors, this dialogue will connect international human rights actors with ethical and spiritual thought leaders to explore shared values, interrogate normative frameworks, and deepen solidarity across worldviews. It also responds to growing global calls to incorporate pluralistic epistemologies into mainstream legal and policy frameworks.

The dialogue also builds on a trajectory of recent peer-to-peer learning events, focusing on confronting intolerance (organized in [Tirana](#), January 2025), on the role and responsibility of religious leaders in times of war, atrocities and polarization ([Wilton Park](#), February 2025), on living together in harmony ([Geneva](#), May 2025), and on coexistence, peace and the role of responsible leadership ([Rome](#), June 2025).

Strategic Objectives

- To affirm the centrality of diversity—across identities, beliefs, cultures, and experiences—as a foundational principle of human rights.

- To advance non-binary, intersectional, and intercultural frameworks that address emerging complexities of identity, belonging, and recognition.
- To bridge spiritual and ethical traditions with contemporary human rights, offering more holistic pathways to justice and social cohesion.
- To generate practical insights and policy-relevant strategies for inclusive lawmaking, education, and conflict resolution.

Making Human Rights Norms More Relevant and Universally Accepted

This initiative contributes to broader international efforts to:

- Broaden the normative appeal of human rights by integrating values and philosophies that resonate across cultures and faiths.
- Strengthen the legitimacy and reach of international human rights norms by addressing critiques of cultural abstraction and Western bias.
- Engage spiritual and philosophical narratives as complementary sources of dignity, agency, and universality.
- Foster community-level ownership of human rights by linking legal norms with local ethical traditions and lived experiences.

By exploring Vedanta’s inclusive metaphysics, the dialogue opens new entry points for advocacy and norm development, especially in contexts where legalistic rights frameworks may lack local resonance.

Vedantic Perspectives on Diversity

Vedanta—a non-dualistic spiritual tradition—affirms the inherent divinity and unity of all beings, transcending distinctions of creed, gender, race, or ethnicity. It teaches that diversity is not a threat to unity but its expression.

This non-binary worldview aligns with emerging understandings of human rights that affirm fluidity, intersectionality, and pluralism. Its affirmation of interconnectedness and ethical interdependence can enrich human rights discourse with deeply rooted, spiritually compelling narratives of inclusion, mutual respect, and justice.

Swami Sarvapriyananda, one of the leading global voices on Vedanta, will share reflections on how these principles offer tools for human rights, peacebuilding, and democratic resilience in the 21st century.

Format and Agenda

The dialogue will be conducted as a closed, invitation-only discussion with select representatives from Geneva’s multilateral, academic, and civil society communities. The setting will be informal, enabling free exchange and co-creation of ideas, and will build upon earlier peer-learning dialogues.

Tentative Agenda

- Opening Remarks – OHCHR [5 minutes]
- Keynote Address – Swami Sarvapriyananda [30 minutes]
- Interactive Discussion / Q&A with keynote speaker [50 minutes]

- Closing Reflections and Way Forward [5 minutes]

Key Themes

- Ethical traditions and the evolving concept of human dignity
- Beyond binaries: legal and social recognition of complex identities
- Democracy, inclusion, and pluralism in public institutions
- Combatting hate, marginalization, and epistemic exclusion
- Cross-sectoral dialogue: linking spirituality, law, and grassroots action

Expected Outcomes

- Enhanced legitimacy and relevance of international human rights through ethical pluralism
- Policy and advocacy pathways that reflect intersectional and non-Western worldviews
- Strengthened collaboration across UN agencies, religious actors, academic institutions, and civil society
- Concrete recommendations for inclusive policymaking and educational initiatives
- Strategic follow-up proposals for mainstreaming intercultural human rights dialogue

Target Audience

- OHCHR and other UN human rights mechanisms
- Peacebuilding organizations and multilateral institutions
- Academic experts, think tanks and interfaith leaders
- Youth, media, and civil society movements

A Broader Vision

This event is part of a broader effort to rehumanize the human rights project, responding to today's fragmented world with a compelling narrative of shared dignity. By rooting diversity in spiritual and philosophical frameworks, this dialogue invites new collaborations and co-creation of inclusive, peaceful futures grounded in mutual respect and cultural humility.

Keynote Speaker Profile

Swami Sarvapriyananda has been the Minister and spiritual leader of the Vedanta Society of New York since January 2017. He is a well-known speaker on Vedanta and his talks are extremely popular globally via the internet with his YouTube channel having close to 50 million views. He has been a speaker on various prestigious forums such as TEDx, SAND, Google Talks etc. He has also been invited to speak at several universities across the world, including Harvard University. He has engaged in dialogue with many eminent thinkers such as Deepak Chopra, Rupert Spira, Rick Archer, David Chalmers, Bernardo Karstrup and Sam Harris. He has played a prominent role in organizing and participating in various interfaith panels and seminars, including speaking at the World Parliament of Religions in Toronto in 2018, and at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. He is also a Guest of Honour at the 52nd European Yoga Congress which will be held in Switzerland in August 2025.

Widely celebrated for his bridge-building abilities between the East and the West, his approach also shares substantial common ground with the philosophies of Thich Nhat Hahn and Jiddu Krishnamurti, which emphasize self-inquiry as a means to realize deeper truths beyond externally determined identities.

Swami Sarvapriyananda belongs to the spiritual lineage of Swami Vivekananda, one of the best-known spiritual masters of the Vedantic tradition. Swami Sarvapriyananda's became a monk of the Ramakrishna Order in 1994 and received sannyasa (final monastic vows) in 2004. He served as an acharya (teacher) of the monastic probationers' training centre at Belur Math, India. He also served in various capacities in different educational institutes of the Ramakrishna Mission in India and as the Assistant Minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. During 2019-2020 he was a Nagral Fellow at the Harvard Divinity School.