

IAPD: Washington DC Hosts Japanese and Pakistani Cultural Exchange

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Washington, D.C., United States – Two diaspora communities – Japanese and Pakistani – came together on February 7, 2026, for a shared experience at The Washington Times building in Washington, D.C. UPF's Global IAPD Peace Initiative hosted a Japanese tea ceremony for the Pakistan diaspora in observance of World Interfaith Harmony Week, as an approach to fostering peace, harmony, and understanding between peoples of different faith and cultural traditions.

Ms. Tomiko Duggan, Global IAPD coordinator, and **Ms. Aisha Khan**, president of the National Center for Women Entrepreneurs and Children Development Center, co-sponsored the event.



Ms. Duggan shared the spiritual aspect of the Japanese tradition of serving tea to others, and **Ms. Yuriko Arakawa**, staff of UPF-USA, conducted the tea ceremony. All participants then followed the ceremonial procedure in drinking the cups of tea they were offered.

The tea ceremony was followed by readings of Islamic devotional poetry. **Ms. Mona Shehab** explained that *naat* is poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammed, a deeply respected devotional art form in Islamic literature, particularly within Urdu, Persian, and Arabic traditions. She was followed by **Ms. Noreen Tallat Arooba**, Pakistan's first *naat* poet to have published several books, and the first poet to receive the

Presidential Award for three of her books.

Ms. Raheela Firdaus beautifully sang one of Ms. Arooba's poems, in a clear voice reaching out to Heaven. Among other speakers, she praised Ms. Arooba's life work and stressed the importance of poetry and literature in society.



Dr. Arif Mahmood, president and CEO of Muslim Response USA, praised Ms. Arooba as an excellent poet. **Ms. Hina Siddiqui** also earned great applause by singing one of the poems in a very graceful style. **Mr. Khalid Hameed** spoke about the theme of faith, and recited selected verses related to this topic. **Mr. Ahmed Kundi** discussed the importance of poetry and literature in society and recited a poem by Allama Iqbal, who is considered Pakistani's greatest poet.



Mr. Ramesh Singh, a Sikh and newly appointed ambassador for peace, said that minorities in Pakistan enjoy the same status as other citizens. He added that the core teaching of every religion is love.