

MEDIA RELEASE

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NIC Panel Embraces Diversity

Join NIC for a discussion of Buddhist, Islamic, Humanist and First Nations perspectives

Join NIC's Office of Global Engagement in welcoming a diverse group of speakers for a multi-faith panel discussion, Tuesday, March 20 at the Stan Hagen Theatre. Doors open at 6 pm with the discussion starting at 6:30 pm.

Everyone is welcome at this free, community event held the day before the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Events take place worldwide on this day to promote tolerance, inclusion, unity and respect for diversity.

"Conversations about diversity foster community," said event organizer Cathy Mutis, associate director at NIC's Office of Global Engagement. "There is a quote by Parker Palmer that I love; the more we learn about other people's stories, the less possible it is for us to dislike them, distrust them, or dismiss them. I couldn't say it better myself."

Panelists include Dr. Evelyn Voyageur on First Nations perspectives, Bill Fradgley on Humanism, Geshe Yongdung on Buddhism and Shazia Anwar on Islam.

Each panelist will share a 10 to 15 minute presentation on the main philosophies of their tradition and provide an overview of how their philosophy reaches across ethnicity and language to a deeper common humanity. Retired atmospheric scientist Peter Schwarzhoff, known locally for his participation in the monthly Philosophers' Café, will moderate the panel.

Schwarzhoff moderated a similar panel at NIC last fall, which included representatives from Unitarianism, Christianity, Wicca and Baha'i.

"The forum in the fall was great learning for me," said NIC Elder in Residence, Dr. Evelyn Voyageur. "I heard all the speakers and learned about their beliefs, which helped me understand them better."

Voyageur looks forward to sharing her worldview while learning from others during the next panel discussion.

"I will be speaking mostly on the Kwakwaka'wakw spirituality, which my people have always had, long before contact," she said. "I will probably include some other nations in my talk, as I believe we all had the same beliefs, but different ways of performing our traditional ways of being."

NIC's Office of Global Engagement hopes to plan more events like this in the future.

"I can't think of a better way to observe International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination," said Mutis. "Conversations like this are a great way to learn about each other's differences with sincere curiosity and respect."

For more information on this free community event, contact Nadine Biggs, global engagement liaison at nadine.biggs@nic.bc.ca. For a full list of community events hosted by North Island College, visit www.nic.bc.ca/events.

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Dr. Evelyn Voyageur will be participating in a multi-faith panel at NIC's Stan Hagen Theatre, Tuesday March 20 as part of a discussion that includes perspectives from Buddhist, Islamic, Humanist and First Nations communities.

Panelists

First Nations Perspective

- **Evelyn Voyageur** is NIC's Elder in Residence. She is of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation, of the Dzawadainox tribe. She has worked in hospitals and communities in Alberta and BC, as well as taught and developed nursing curricula at UVic and NIC. She counsels survivors for the Indian Residential School Society. She has received many awards for her contribution to Aboriginal nursing, including becoming one of Health Canada's First Nation and Inuit Branch's first recipients of the Award of Excellence in Nursing, and winning a 2018 Indspire award for Indigenous health promotion.

Islamic Perspective

- **Syeda Shazia Anwar** is a first-year Associate of Science student at North Island College. Shazia is originally from India, and arrived in Courtenay in December 2017. She is bold, exciting, adventurous and passionate about her career and religion. She is an extrovert. She has always been a curious person who wants to know the answers for every when and why. She is a combination of kind and courageous. She believes in humanity.

Humanist Perspective

- **Bill Fradgley** became skeptical about religion at an early age. He called himself agnostic in his teens and declared himself an atheist in his thirties. He has been with Comox Valley Humanists for five years. Trained as a chemical technologist, Bill worked for a large multinational corporation and finished his career in sales management. In retirement, Bill moved with his wife from Alberta to Comox where he enjoys pickle ball, improv and creative writing. He also enjoys discussing religion and other worldviews with whomever cares to engage him in conversation.

Buddhist Perspective

- Geshe YongDong was born in the village of Nagpa, Amdo, Tibet in 1969. When he was 13 years old, he entered the Nangzhig Bönpo Monastery, the largest Bön Monastery in Tibet, and took the "Getsul" monks vow. At 15, he began studying logic, paramita (perfection), the middle way and traditional studies of Tibetan grammar, and poetry. The following year, he took his "Gelong" monk's vow from his beloved root teacher, Gyalsap Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche. He moved to the Comox Valley in 2001 where he began teaching philosophy. He is Resident Lama at the Tibetan Bön Buddhist Centre.