

For Immediate Release

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International Conference to Consider "The Future of Secularism"

Questions about the separation of religion from the state and the implications of the rise of theocratic states and the opposition to secularism in democracies will be the subjects of an international conference on "The Future of Secularism." Whether secularism was imposed on societies with no secular traditions by charismatic founding leaders, such as Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Gamal Abdul-Nasser, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sukarno, and Josip Tito, and it came under threat after their demise is another of the issues to be discussed.

Convened by T. N. Srinivasan, Samuel C. Park, Jr. Professor of Economics and the chair of the South Asian Studies Council, the conference on March 26-27 is sponsored by the Rustgi Family Fund, the Edward J. and Dorothy Clarke Kempf Fund and the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, with support from the South Asian Studies Council and the Council on Middle East Studies at the Yale Center for International and Area Studies. The events of the conference will take place at the Roland Betts House, 393 Prospect Street. A complete schedule of the conference activities is available at www.yale.edu/ycias/southasia/events/secularism.htm.

"There can not be a more timely moment to discuss these issues which have enormous implications for political and economic life " said Srinivasan. He pointed out the twentieth century was marked by conscious attempts to insulate the state and the public sphere from the private practices of religion. But those attempts to create secular states are now under threat, concludes Srinivasan. Geo-politics such as the fall of the Soviet empire is one cause for the decline of secularism, but there are other political and ideological forces at work.

Attracting internationally-renowned scholars on secularism in India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, and the former Yugoslavia, the conference will also feature discussants from the Yale faculty. Among the visiting speakers will be Fakir Syed Aijazuddin (historian, Pakistan); Jagdish Bhagwati (Columbia University); Rajeev Bhargava (University of Delhi, India); Amila Buturovic (York University, Canada); Dilip Menon (Yale University and University of Delhi, India); Goenawan Mohamad (editor of Tempo, Indonesia); Dani Rodrik (Harvard University); Romila Thapar (Jawaharlal Nehru University, India); and Nur Yalman (Harvard University).

Confirmed participants from the Yale faculty will include Abbas Amanat (History); Faisal Devji (History); Michael Holquist (Comparative Literature); Gustav Ranis (YCIAS); Lamen Sanneh (Divinity); and Shyam Sunder (Management).

The political and religious tensions over secularism are foundational to understanding current crises in the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent, Southeast Asia, and the Balkan states. In addition to considering the status of secularism, the conference participants also will probe the implications of rising religiosity in political life for economic liberalism and globalization and consider viable options for national and international institutions to diffuse the threat.

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