

AUSTRALIAN Baha'i Report

Volume 16, Issue 3 - November 2012

A newsletter
of the
Australian
Bahá'í
Community

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Ovation as composer beats odds



Greg Parker (front row, centre, with purple scarf) and cast of *The Servant*

Perth musician Greg Parker has beaten the dire prognosis of his doctors and has lived to direct the sold-out premiere of a musical he wrote.

On 13 October a capacity audience gave Parker and his cast a thunderous ovation at the conclusion of the premiere performance of *The Servant*.

That enthusiastic audience response was repeated at a performance the following evening.

In June 2010 Parker, a longstanding member of the Western Australian Bahá'í community, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Doctors told him he may have only six months to two years to live.

He has since undergone five operations including a hip replacement and has had courses of radiotherapy. For many months he was in a wheelchair.

But throughout the ordeal Parker has remained upbeat, attributing much of his exuberance to the power of prayer and a flood of support from family and friends around the world.

"I have terminal cancer but I refuse to die," Parker joked.

Before his illness Parker had made his mark with the *New Era Choir*, which he founded and is highly regarded in Perth for its performance at official events marking Anzac and Australia days. He also wrote two musicals as well as writing and performing his songs.

Since being diagnosed and before the current production, Parker had written and staged two more musical productions. Then came the idea for *The Servant*.

"The anniversary of my impending death was

approaching so to be defiant I decided to schedule a show," he said.

"I planned it for June - the two-year anniversary - but in January I had to have a hip replacement and recovery was very slow, so I couldn't start work on *The Servant* until after that.

"I rescheduled it for October but I did wonder at times if I would be around to see the show."

Journey

The musical marks the centenary of a journey by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a central figure in the Bahá'í Faith. He visited Europe and the United States, where centennial events are being held this year.

At 'Abdu'l-Bahá's funeral in Haifa in 1921, a Jewish orator described him as an example of "self-sacrifice", a Christian speaker said he had led humanity to the "Way of Truth", and a prominent Muslim called him a "pillar of peace". A year earlier, the British administration in the Holy Land had knighted him for his service to the community.

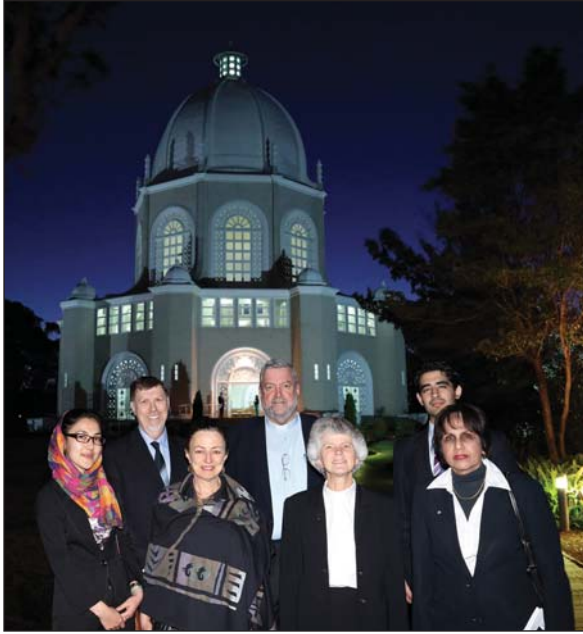
"*The Servant* is about how society reacts to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's spiritual message for our times," Parker said.

"It tells how persecution of a new unifying faith fails to silence a divine message to all mankind."

The show includes 16 songs, all written by Parker, and had a cast of 27.

Headlining the cast were recording and performance artists Gary Sterling, Shameem Taheri-Lee, and Amber Nicholls. Performing with them was the *New Era Choir*.

Tributes to the International Day of Peace



Some of the religious representatives prior to the service. Left to right: Ms Rayila Muhammad, Dr Eric Kingston, Ms Sheli Wallach, Father Patrick McNerney, Rev Meredith Williams, Mr Sina Fanaian, and Ms Mohini Gunasekera

Representatives of seven of the world's major religions read from their sacred scriptures at an International Day of Peace interfaith service at the Bahá'í Temple in Sydney.

The scriptural extracts had the theme of peace. Some were read in their original language. The nine readers represented the Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Zoroastrian communities.

Among the guests attending the evening service were outgoing Pittwater Mayor Harvey Rose and his wife, local residents, and other people from throughout Sydney and beyond.

Father Patrick McNerney, a reader representing the Catholic Church, said later that he "enjoyed participating in the event and found the simplicity of the interfaith service quite moving".

The Temple was illuminated for the evening

service and it cast its light on to a backdrop of eucalyptus bush land.

Peace Wall

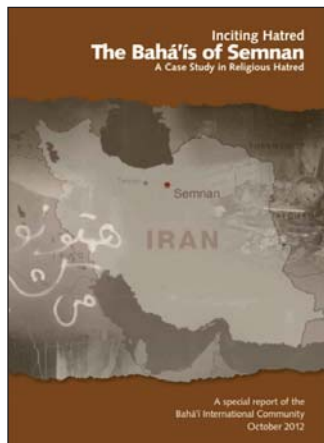
Members of the Bahá'í Community and Rotary Club Sunrise of Redlands in Queensland attended a ceremony on the International Day of Peace, 21 September, to re-dedicate their city's Peace Wall.

Wendy Jewell of the local Bahá'í community told the gathering that the wall was built in 1986 during the International Year of Peace as a joint initiative of the City Council and the Bahá'í community.

The Council decided earlier this year to refurbish the wall and install a plaque.

The Rotary Club became involved as part of its 2012-2013 project to promote "Peace Through Service".

During the re-dedication program a candle lighting ceremony took place to symbolise peace in the Redlands community, Australia, and throughout the world. A Bahá'í prayer was read by Mrs Jewell, a Christian prayer by Reverend Allan Goodwin, and words of harmony from Buddhist scripture read by Mr Bill Rockloff.



A special report of the Bahá'í International Community documenting religious hatred towards the Bahá'ís of Semnan

Attacks against Bahá'ís in Iran alarm relatives in Australia

A systematic campaign of attacks orchestrated by the Iranian authorities on the Bahá'ís of the city of Semnan has alarmed Australian relatives of the victims.

The coordinated and escalating attacks include arrests and imprisonments, raids on homes, firebombings, constant surveillance, economic pressure, virulent propaganda and hate sermons.

The attacks on the Bahá'ís of Semnan are being perpetrated by government ministries, clergy, police and semi-official groups.

Family members in Australia, many accepted here as refugees in the 1980s, have become highly anxious after hearing details of the campaign against their relatives and other Bahá'ís in Semnan.

Farisa Rohani of Sydney, a spokesperson for Australian relatives of Bahá'ís in Semnan, said the family knew of relations who had been

imprisoned and otherwise persecuted.

Semnan, with a population of 125,000, is 200 kilometres east of Iran's capital, Tehran.

A spokesperson for the Australian Bahá'í Community, Venus Khalessi, said the ongoing assault on Semnan's Bahá'ís is terrifying.

"So persistent are the attacks that young Bahá'í children have come to fear that a knock on the door will mean the arrest of their parents," Ms Khalessi said.

"The perpetual hounding of the Bahá'ís is psychological cruelty aimed at the complete subjugation of their spirit".

The Bahá'í International Community has published a special report on the persecution of Bahá'ís in Semnan. To read the report, visit:

<http://www.bic.org/inciting-hatred>.

Foreign Affairs Minister speaks out on persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran

Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr has told the Australian Senate that the treatment of Bahá'ís in Iran has been described as “among the most extreme manifestation of religious intolerance and persecution in the world”.

Senator Carr made his statement in response to a question from WA Senator Mark Bishop during Questions without Notice on 18 September 2012 about what Australia is doing to protect and promote human rights, including minority rights, in Iran.

“On 23 October 2011, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief described the treatment of the 300,000 Bahá'ís as among the most extreme manifestation of religious intolerance and persecution in the world,” Senator Carr replied.

“Both in Australia and in Iran we have called for the protection and promotion of rights to freedom of assembly and expression, respect for gender equality, the repeal of the death penalty and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities to be upheld,” Senator Carr said.

One day before Senator Carr made his comments, an Australian diplomatic representative told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva that Australia remains deeply concerned by the human rights situation in Iran, and said Australia condemned discrimination “against ethnic and religious minorities, including Arab Iranians, Bahá'ís and religious converts, as well as women and girls”.

A spokesperson for the Australian Bahá'í Community, Dr Natalie Mobini, said Bahá'ís were very grateful for the statements.

“The Australian Government has been consistent over the years in expressing its deep concern at the unjust treatment of the Bahá'í community in Iran and calling on the Iranian Government to abide by the norms of international law,” Dr Mobini said.

Brave symbol

The public statements by the representatives of the Australian Government came in the same week that Vargha Taefi, the son of Mrs Fariba Kamalabadi, one of seven Bahá'í leaders now serving 20 year jail terms in Iran, met with Australian MPs interested in human rights.

“Although my mother is not alone in the battle for free expression in Iran, she has become a brave symbol for those seeking religious freedom and the right to say who they are and what they stand for,” said Mr Taefi, who noted that the seven leaders were recognised as Prisoners of Conscience by Amnesty International.

“She and her colleagues have been denied a fair trial and due judicial procedure. They have faced baseless charges of espionage for Israel, insulting Islamic sanctities, crimes against national security, and spreading corruption on earth -- each charge alone can result in a death sentence. No evidence was provided to back up any of their charges.

“They have been transferred from one prison to another, from bad to worse, jailed alongside murderers and other serious criminals”.

While in Canberra, Mr Taefi, a Melbourne-based government and corporate adviser, also outlined the plight of the seven leaders to officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and gave media interviews to journalists.



Senator Bob Carr



Mr Vargha Taefi



The seven Bahá'ís arrested in 2008 are, seated from left, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Saeid Rezaie, and, standing, Fariba Kamalabadi, Vahid Tizfahm, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, and Mahvash Sabet. All are from Tehran. The photograph was taken several months before their arrest.

Spirituality motivated climb of world's highest peak



Beow Lim (left) and Sherpa Tengzi climbing to the summit of Mt Everest

Melbourne psychologist Beow Lim says his successful climb to the summit of Mt Everest this year was prompted by "spiritual questioning".

Mr Lim, 50, reached the summit on 26 May with the assistance of expert mountaineer and expedition leader, Dan Mazur of SummitClimb.

A member of the Bahá'í Faith since he was 20, Malaysian-born Mr Lim said he was inspired by the quotation from the Bahá'í scriptures:

"As ye have faith, so shall your powers and blessings be."

Another quotation from the writings of Bahá'u'llah, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, he found relevant was:

"Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds."

"Twelve months ago, I was in a position in my life to question myself deeply, to 'bring myself to account'," Mr Lim said.

"I asked did I really have faith in God, in Bahá'u'lláh? And if I did have faith, what powers and blessing would there be?

"So, I dreamt up this spiritual adventure of putting my understanding and faith to test by climbing Mt Everest."

A decade earlier, Mr Lim and his wife, Jasmine, had begun trekking in the Himalayas, including traversing to altitudes above 5,300 metres. Since then Mr Lim had completed other treks as well as a climb last year to Everest Nepal Camp 3 at 7,300 metres in an expedition led by Mr Mazur.

He trained for nine months on his physical strength and psychological conditioning in the lead-up to this year's summit attempt.

Form of meditation

"Climbing mountains has always been my way of being at one with reality and sensing the dynamic beauty of life and God," Mr Lim said.

"Mountain climbing also systematically and necessarily focuses one on the here-and-now. When we meditate and pray without

distractions, we also focus on the here-and-now. So, climbing is a form of meditation for me.

"This is the spiritual aspect of climbing. Of course, there are also the physical, social and psychological dimensions."

So did the Everest climb intensify his feelings about the presence of a Creator?

"Yes. During the expedition, when facing challenges like headache, inability to sleep, biting cold, loss of appetite and frostbite, I spontaneously turned to God for assistance and 'powers' to keep me going."

As he approached the summit he saw the sunrise over the curve of the earth.

"The spectacular hue of red, yellow, orange and white rays gleaming from the sun, falling on top of white snowcapped mountains, surrounded by a carpet of silvery clouds, is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. Immediately, I remember saying to myself: 'The world is really so beautiful. Why do humans fight?'"

Summit

"When I reached the top, I was deeply grateful for the loving generosity and bounty from God," he said.

He then said a Bahá'í prayer for the unity of mankind.

The climb has affected his subsequent life. The possibility of death and the injunction to bring himself to account each day was a sobering spiritual experience, he said.

"I had to learn more about myself, my values, my purpose and a much deeper sense of detachment from this material and social world.

"It re-confirmed for me how little we need to live a simple, happy and spiritual life -- and that our modern society has been conned into believing that happiness is based on material products, instead of spiritual experiences.

"It has made me remember we need to slow down and live in the here-and-now, be truly mindful of ourselves, family, friends, and community and of our daily blessings, and learn to pace ourselves and our short life journey on earth."



Beow Lim celebrating after successfully climbing the summit of Mt Everest

Importance of education of girls emphasised at launch

The Australian Bahá'í Community has welcomed the inaugural International Day of the Girl Child launched by Prime Minister Julia Gillard in Canberra on 11 October 2012.

The launch was hosted by the Australian Council for International Development, Plan International and the United Nations Information Centre.

At the launch, the Prime Minister acknowledged the significant role that education plays in changing the lives of girls.

"Teaching girls and women is one of the most important investments in the development of a nation," the Prime Minister said.

"Education makes an enormous difference to the health of women and their children, to their job opportunities, their wage levels," she said.

At the event, a statement signed by more than 30 Australian organisations, including the Australian Bahá'í Community, was released calling for Australia and world leaders to prioritise girls' education.

A spokesperson for the Australian Bahá'í Community, Natalie Mobini, welcomed the inauguration of the special Day.



Inaugural International Day of the Girl Child launched by Prime Minister Julia Gillard. ACFID photo/Steve Keogh

"Bahá'ís work together with others to establish the equality of women and men as part of our efforts to help build a global civilisation based on peace, justice, and collective prosperity," Dr Mobini said.

"Our grassroots programs seek to empower individuals of all ages to recognise and develop their spiritual capacities, and to become agents of change in their communities," she said.

"Our educational programs for adults, adolescents and children are helping women and girls to realise their full potential."

Poet dedicates launch of new volume to Táhirih

An accomplished South Australian poet has paid tribute to Táhirih, a 19th century Persian poet who called for the emancipation of women.

Roshanak Amrein made her comments at the Adelaide launch of her second volume, *Songs from a Far Island*, an event held at the South Australia Art Gallery Auditorium on 28 October.

Dr Amrein, whose first collection of poetry, *One Million Flights*, was launched in 2010, was the subject of an extensive interview on the ABC Radio National program *Poetica* in 2011.

The presenter of *Poetica*, the poet Mike Ladd, launched her latest volume.

Dr Amrein dedicated the launch to Táhirih (1818-1852) who is considered to be the first prominent woman to unveil in Iran and to question political and religious orthodoxy.

Táhirih has inspired generations of women of all faiths in Iran and her influence has spread worldwide mainly because of her heroic role in Bahá'í history, exemplifying the Faith's principle

of the equality of women and men.

Dr Amrein speaks up for Iranian women and salutes their courage in working to obtain the human rights that have been taken away from them and others in Iran.

"Iranian women are hardworking and educated; they are very opinionated and very artistic. They have remained very much part of the society despite 33 years of oppression," she said.

Born in Iran in 1974, Dr Amrein came as a refugee to Australia in 1994 after experiencing persecution as a Bahá'í, including being denied entry into university because of her religion. She spoke little English when she arrived, but repeated Year 12 and qualified as a dentist by 2000. She now has her own practice in Adelaide.



Dr Roshanak Amrein

Big audiences attend campus events on access to education



The Honourable Justice Thomas Gray
of the Supreme Court of South
Australia

At universities across Australia, capacity audiences have been attending events that draw attention to the right to higher education, currently denied by the Iranian Government to Bahá'ís in Iran.

The events, which centre on the screening of the documentary, *Education Under Fire*, include discussions on the importance of education as a right of every human being.

Those attending have included professorial and other academic staff, students, members of the professions, and the general public.

Also present have been academic staff and students of the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), an organisation founded to educate young Bahá'ís banned from Iranian universities because of their religion.

The events have been held at La Trobe University, University of Queensland, Murdoch University, Australia National University, University of Western Australia, Charles Darwin University, University of Wollongong and University of Technology Sydney.

At an event held in Adelaide, keynote speaker

Justice Thomas Gray of the Supreme Court of South Australia spoke about the role of education in relation to the prosperity and progress of individuals. Justice Gray also drew attention to Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which recognises that everyone has the right to education.

Associate Professor Hubertus Jersmann of the University of Adelaide's Medical School addressed the gathering on the need for advocacy to assist those Bahá'ís deprived of tertiary education in Iran.

BIHE, in which some Australian professors are involved via the Internet, was in the news throughout the world last year when Iranian authorities arrested and jailed its professors and administrators, including close relatives of Australian Bahá'ís.

The peak tertiary body in Australia, Universities Australia, wrote to UNESCO expressing its concern about the situation. Australian professors and academics sent an open letter to the Embassy of Iran, calling for the release of those jailed.

Leadership forum emphasises service to others



Josh Toloui-Wallace (back row, centre) and
other participants at the leadership forum
with Tim Mander MP (front row, second
left)

Service to others and leading by example were key themes of a recent leadership forum in Brisbane, according to a young Bahá'í participant.

Josh Toloui-Wallace, 19, was selected with 40 other youth to attend the *Queensland Servant Leadership*

Forum (QSLF) held in Brisbane 2-5 August 2012.

A physiotherapy student at the University of Queensland, Mr Toloui-Wallace is a facilitator of a Bahá'í-inspired junior youth spiritual empowerment group in Brisbane.

The Queensland forum, an initiative of Queensland State MPs, has been held since 2005 as a subsidiary of a national student leadership forum on faith and values.

The hosts come from all major political parties across a wide spectrum of philosophies. They work with business and other community

leaders to develop and present the program, which does not focus on politics but rather addresses the topic of leadership more generally.

The participants visited Parliament House in Brisbane where they listened to politicians and other speakers outline their views on 'servant leadership' and the values that had shaped them.

Among the speakers were Annastacia Palaszczuk MP (Leader of the Opposition in Queensland), Fiona Simpson MP (Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland), George Savvides (managing director, Medibank Private), and Norah Amath (human rights and peace activist).

Mr Toloui-Wallace said the speakers had told them inspiring and relevant stories about experiences which led them to learn the necessary qualities of leadership. The speakers spoke of compassion and the virtues of equality, unity, consultation, cooperation, teamwork, and love, he said.

Visit the QSLF website: <http://www.qslf.org>.

Support given to campaign to combat racism

The Australian Bahá'í Community has become a partner and supporter of Australia's new National Anti-Racism Strategy.

The strategy was launched in Melbourne in August by Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner Dr Helen Szoke alongside the Attorney-General Nicola Roxon and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Senator Kate Lundy.

Members of the Australian Bahá'í Community contributed to the development of the strategy via a formal submission and participation in a nation-wide series of community consultations.

Spokesperson Venus Khalessi said the Bahá'í Community's contribution to the strategy will be the education programs it provides across Australia at the neighbourhood level, particularly in the form of children's classes and the junior youth spiritual empowerment program, which are to be expanded in the future.

"The moral capabilities taught in these programs are anchored in the central social and spiritual principle of our time, namely the equality and interconnectedness of humanity as a whole," Ms Khalessi said.

"Recognition of the oneness of humanity is essential to combatting all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including racism," she said.

"The Bahá'í community will also contribute by providing information about the strategy on our national website, www.bahai.org.au and on the Facebook page of the Australian Bahá'ís."

During the next three years, the National Anti-Racism Strategy will focus on five key priority areas: schools and higher education, the media, government service provision, workplaces and the Internet.

The first step is the implementation of a public awareness campaign with the tagline "Racism. It Stops With Me".

Visit the campaign website:
<http://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/>.



Launching the Anti-Racism strategy: (Left to right) Senator Kate Lundy, Dr Helen Szoke, Attorney-General Nicola Roxon

Educational excellence awarded at all levels

Two Australian Bahá'ís have been recognised for outstanding contributions to their respective educational fields.

Professor Fazel Naghdy received a Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning from the Federal Government in recognition of his inspiring contributions towards student learning at the University of Wollongong.

Professor Naghdy, from the Faculty of Informatics, was granted the prestigious award for his sustained endeavours in educational leadership and curriculum design, helping to foster the development of individuals and build dynamic learning communities within and beyond informatics.

Minister for Tertiary Education, Senator Chris Evans, made the announcement as part of the Australian Awards for University Teaching.

"I have approached the academic career as an opportunity for scholarship in teaching, research and educational governance - each

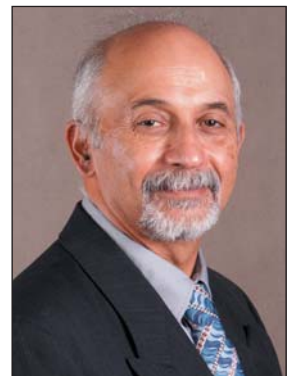
revealing elements and contexts of the same process," Professor Naghdy said.

In Victoria, laboratory technician Russell Ghanbari received an award from Prime Minister and Member for Lalor, Julia Gillard, for his commitment and services maintaining the science laboratory at Laverton College. College Principal Neil Sproal said Dr Ghanbari, who has a PhD in plant physiology and horticulture, was "a very worthy recipient of the Above and Beyond Award".

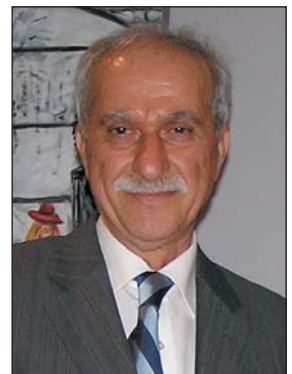
Presenting the awards, Ms Gillard said the recipients had gone the extra mile to do things that made life easier for other people.

"They don't do these things because they have to, they do them because they want to make a difference," she said.

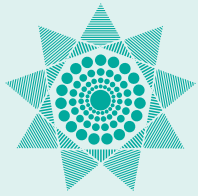
The role of the educator is given prime importance in the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í Writings describe teaching children as "among the most meritorious acts of humankind."



Professor Fazel Naghdy



Dr Russell Ghanbari



The Australian Baha'i Report is a newsletter published by the Australian Bahá'í Community.

For more information on the stories in this newsletter, or any aspect of the Australian Bahá'í community and its activities, please contact:

Australian Baha'i Report

173 Mona Vale Road
Ingleside NSW 2101
Australia

Phone:
(02) 9746 8347

Fax:
(02) 9998 9223

Email:
opi@bahai.org.au

World Wide Web:
www.bahai.org.au

Editorial team:
Michael Day
Venus Khalessi
Natalie Mobini

Staff Writer:
Michael Day

Graphic Design by
Simon Creedy
www.creedy.com.au
(02) 9427 0632

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International News

Knighthood recognises extensive services to adopted country

An Australian Bahá'í who has lived in the Solomon Islands since 1968 has been awarded a knighthood for his outstanding service to business, the public and community development in that country.

Bruce Saunders, 70, the managing director of the BJS group of companies, will receive his KBE (Knight Commander of the British Empire) from Queen Elizabeth II at a ceremony in Buckingham Palace.

He will be accompanied by his wife, Lady Keithie Saunders, who was honoured in 2010 for her environmental beautification of the capital, Honiara.

The award of a knighthood required the unanimous consent of the Prime Minister, Parliamentary Speaker, and all cabinet ministers of the Solomon Islands.

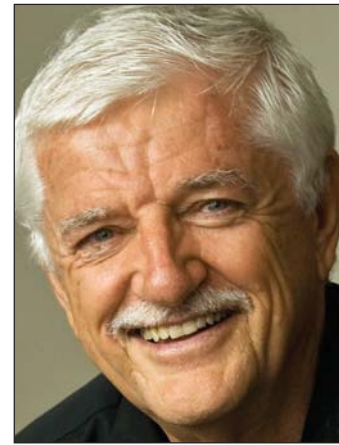
Sir Bruce said he was humbled by the honour.

"I accept it as an acknowledgement of the contribution of all who have served and continue to serve the people of the Solomon Islands," he said.

"Keithie and I have endeavoured to follow in the footsteps of her late parents, Alvin and Gertrude Blum, who arrived in the Solomons in 1954, introduced the Bahá'í teachings and made service to their fellow men and women the cornerstone of their lives."

Sir Bruce served on the National Spiritual

Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Solomon Islands for 20 years, and for 10 years was a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia, a senior Bahá'í advisory board that guides Bahá'í communities in all countries throughout the Pacific.



Sir Bruce Saunders

National unity

A recipient of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2003, Sir Bruce has recently been in the forefront of a project to erect a monument honouring Solomon Island wartime heroes, an initiative widely seen as contributing to unity in the country by reinforcing pride in national identity among schoolchildren and other citizens.

Sir Bruce was prominent in establishing a civil society network in the Solomons in 2000 during the years of unrest following a coup, which had led to the disintegration of public institutions.

His BJS group of companies has long been a major employer in the Solomons and provides a range of services including insurance, real estate, handicrafts, recruitment, recycling and events management.

Video documenting Bahá'í House of Worship launched online

The first video newsreel documenting progress in the building of the new Bahá'í House of Worship in Chile has been launched online.

The innovative design for the building, which was selected from 185 entries from more than 80 countries, has won several international accolades.

Bahá'í Houses of Worship are distinctive buildings, open to all, where visitors can pray and meditate in a serene atmosphere. The Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2011.

The newsreel is in Spanish with English subtitles. It is available for viewing via the official website <http://templo.bahai.cl/>.



A computer-generated rendition of the Bahá'í House of Worship under construction in Santiago, Chile. Image © Hariri Pontarini Architects