



# AUSTRALIAN Baha'i Report

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A newsletter of the Australian Bahá'í Community

## State and community leaders pay tribute

During a week of celebrations and services marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Bahá'í Temple in Sydney, state and community leaders paid eloquent tributes to the role the Temple has played since it opened in 1961.

New South Wales Premier Barry O'Farrell said the anniversary was a momentous occasion not only for the Bahá'í Faith but for New South Wales as a whole.

"The Bahá'í community plays an important part in New South Wales' diverse social fabric, and it is important that we continue to promote and celebrate diversity, tolerance and community in this State," Mr O'Farrell said in a message, read on 18 September at a reception opening the celebrations.

"This idea encapsulates the ethos of the Bahá'í religion as it seeks to unify all religions and humanity - this Temple and the Bahá'í community have indeed achieved this," he said.

"I believe there is a lot to be learned from the Bahá'í Faith, which through its values of unity and equality has only enhanced the multicultural tapestry of New South Wales."

State MP for Pittwater, Rob Stokes, who read the Premier's message, told the reception that the people of Pittwater "feel privileged to have this Temple here".

"It stands as a silent sentinel of faith, of inclusion, of a real spiritual strength," Mr Stokes said.

### Pittwater Mayor

Pittwater Mayor Harvey Rose told the reception it was a privilege to be attending the anniversary celebrations.

"This place has been a beacon for 50 years," Cr Rose said.

"It's a beacon from the sea, the land, and the sky. It is also a beacon which lights the way to a better world where antagonism and division is replaced by unity, construction and of hope," he said.



Among the guests attending the anniversary reception and service were Pittwater MP Rob Stokes (back row, second from left), Pittwater Mayor Harvey Rose (front row, fifth from left) and Bahá'í representative, John Walker (back row, second from right)

"The Temple plays an important role in our local community and the broader Australian community. It is totally part of the community and part of our area.

"Our society is enriched and ennobled by the Temple.

"Pointing out religious unity and commonality is a very important task."

### Temple is for all

A member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, Mr John Walker, said the Temple is for the benefit of all people, regardless of religion, race, class or nation.

The reception began with a Welcome to Country by Michael West on behalf of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Other special guests attending the reception and service were State MP for Burwood Charles Casuscelli; the Mayor of Warringah Michael Regan; prominent Australian jurist Justice John Dowd; and the son of the architect who supervised the Temple's construction, John Brogan.



Cr Harvey Rose

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# Ethical responses to climate change under spotlight



Charles Boyle, one of the conference organisers

A conference on the ethical responses to climate change will take place in a highly appropriate environment in Tasmania in December 2011.

The conference, organised by the International Environment Forum (IEF), will be held at the Bahá'í Centre of Learning in Hobart, a building that has attracted worldwide interest due to the environmental sustainability of its design.

The theme of the conference, to be held 10-11 December 2011, is Ethical Responses to Climate Change: Individual, Community, and Institutions.

The IEF is a Bahá'í-inspired organisation uniting professionals, academics, and lay-people in constructive dialogues to build a cleaner, better future.

One of the conference organisers, Perth architect Charles Boyle, said the conference theme is especially pertinent for Australians to consider.

"As most now recognise, the issue of climate change can't be divorced from ethical considerations and it will take action at the individual, community, and institutional levels if we are to ever really make progress," Mr Boyle said.

## Themes

"Speakers will address issues such as the climate outlook for Australia, actions individuals can take to reduce their carbon footprint, and the adaptations communities might make to an adversely changed climate," he said.

Examples of successful international cooperation and solutions to climate change will be looked at, he said.

"There will be discussions about faith and climate change, with examples given of how people of faith are making a difference on the issue."

Workshops will be held on the science of climate change; refugees and food security; reducing your carbon footprint; contributing to an environmental strategy for the Australian Bahá'í Community and education and career choices.

## Unique potential

A Perth-based participant, scientist and consultant on bushfire smoke Dr Al Riebau, said the conference had unique potential.

"The really interesting thing is that the conference will combine speakers from a religious perspective, those from an activist perspective, and those from a purely scientific perspective," Dr Riebau said.

"There is a real potential for this conference to develop a new way of looking at climate change, especially since it is focusing on adaptation actions that can be taken rather than the politics of lowering emissions of greenhouse gases."

Most of the meeting will be webcast in real-time with viewers world-wide being able to address the conference and ask questions via the web. Presentations will also be available on the IEF's website after the conference concludes.

Speakers will include: Dr Arthur Dahl, President of the International Environmental Forum; Dr Miriam Pepper, Secretary of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change; Mr Todd Houstien, President of Sustainable Living Australia; Ms Tessa Scrine, Member of the Bahá'í Continental Board of Counsellors; Mr Gareth Johnson, Founder of Future Forward; Mr Peter Adriance, NGO Environmental Liaison for the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the USA; Mr Peter Boyer, Founder of Climate Tasmania; Dr Arini Beaumaris, Member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, and Dr Natalie Mobini, Director of the Office of External Affairs of the Australian Bahá'í Community.

Bahá'í Centre of Learning in Hobart



[www.internationalenvironmentforumhobart.com.au](http://www.internationalenvironmentforumhobart.com.au)

# Bahá'ís represented at Commonwealth People's Forum



*Wendy Wisniewski, right, with Mary Okumu, Chief Technical Advisor Gender Equitable Local Development, UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)*

A member of the Bahá'í Community of Western Australia, Wendy Wisniewski, represented Australian Bahá'ís at the 2011 Commonwealth People's Forum in Perth from 25-27 October.

The People's Forum brought together 250 delegates from non-governmental groups from the 54 member countries to seek dialogue and action on key issues facing Commonwealth people.

Discussions were on topics such as climate change, culture, indigenous rights, education, the global financial crisis, food security, gender issues, health, and human rights.

Mrs Wisniewski attended workshops on human rights, and gender and women's rights.

"The theme of 'women as agents of change' was adopted for the meeting," Mrs Wisniewski said.

"The Commonwealth action plan for gender equality was discussed with regard to Commonwealth commitments to the Millennium Development Goals, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)," she said.

"Many encouraging stories were shared about opportunities to improve the educational and economic circumstances of girls and women in Commonwealth nations.

"However, there are still many challenges to be faced, particularly in countries where cultural

and traditional practices stifle change."

Mrs Wisniewski said there was emphasis on the need to develop the political will to bring about the advancement of girls and women, and to educate the opinion makers within cultures.

In a contribution to the meeting, Mrs Wisniewski said that education needs to incorporate all aspects of a child's development, including the material, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of life.

"When spiritual qualities such as justice, love, respect and tolerance are incorporated into educational programs, girls and women as well as boys and men will assist the development of more peaceful communities," she said.

## Volunteer

A physiotherapist who also holds an MBA from Notre Dame University in Perth, Mrs Wisniewski works at the neighbourhood level to build unity and to foster spiritual awareness in children and youth.

She has volunteered as a community advisor on the selection committee of the Medical School of Notre Dame University, and the support of applicants to the AFS Intercultural Exchange Organisation.

In the WA Bahá'í community, Mrs Wisniewski is involved in community affairs, teaching children's classes and hosting weekly public devotional gatherings.

## Religions unite in harmony at Temple

The religions came together in harmony in Sydney on 21 September 2011 at a Temple whose very design symbolises the unity of religion.

Representatives of seven of the world's major religions read their sacred scriptures at an International Day of Peace service in the Bahá'í Temple, which was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary that week.

The nine sides of the Temple symbolise the underlying spiritual unity of the great religions of the world, a theme that has been a hallmark of this Ingleside holy place since 1961 when it became one of the pioneers of the interfaith movement in Australia.

Those attending the 21 September service included local residents as well as people from throughout Sydney and beyond. They walked along a candle-lit path to the illuminated Temple which cast its light on to a beautiful backdrop of eucalyptus bushland.

As with the opening in 1961, media interest was strong, including a TV live broadcast by Channel 10 before the service as well as articles in preceding days in the *Manly Daily*

and *Pittwater Life*, mentions in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and an ABC radio breakfast show segment outlining the Faith's teachings and the anniversary program.

The interfaith service featured songs of worship performed by the Temple choir in Arabic, English, Hindi and Samoan. Soloists also sang at intervals during the program.

The scriptural extracts were on the theme of peace and some were read in the original languages. The 10 readers represented the Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Zoroastrian communities.

The readers were Judith Navidi and Chris Heggie (Bahá'í Council for NSW and ACT), Ranmal Samarawickrama (Buddhist Council of NSW), Rev Meredith Williams (National Council of Churches in Australia), Rev Manas Ghosh (Uniting Church), Vijai Singhal (Hindu Council of Australia), Lynda Ben-Menashe (Jewish Board of Deputies for NSW), Suhail Noor and Rahile Ansari (Affinity Intercultural Foundation), and Minoo Batliwalla (Zoroastrian community of Sydney).



Reverend Manas Ghosh (Uniting Church) reading from the Bible

Bahá'í Temple illumined on International Day of Peace



# Temple hosts local residents at anniversary events

During the week-long fiftieth anniversary celebrations, the Bahá'í Temple played its ongoing role as a spiritual host for the local community.

The capacity-attended opening service on 18 September was characterised by the Bahá'í principle of unity in diversity. The choir sang in an Aboriginal language (Wirradjuri dialect), Arabic, English and Samoan.

As with every weekly service, readings were from Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic scriptures.

Among the readers were two who had also read from scripture at the inauguration in 1961, Stanley Bolton and Allaine Duncan.

Another reader was the State MP for Pittwater, Rob Stokes.

On 24-25 September when the festivities came to a climax, more than 1,100 visitors from the local community and beyond participated in services, tours and other activities.

On Saturday, visitors joined guided tours in which they participated in a mini-service and explored the ground and upper floors of the Temple.

They also examined exhibits in the archives, strolled through parts of the surrounding bushland and visited the picnic space and bookshop.

On Sunday, the Temple hosted three services, the first two focussing on the theme of gratitude for the development and success of the Bahá'í Temple during the last 50 years.

The third service for the day was conducted by children, with all the readers aged between eight and twelve. Some were pupils who attend Bahá'í education classes in State schools and neighbourhoods of metropolitan Sydney

Pouneh Sedghi, who coordinated the readers, said the children were happy to be part of the celebrations.

"They brought their learning about devotion and service into fruition by participating in such a momentous occasion," Ms Sedghi said.

Other events for children included storytelling, peace-building activities such as creating a "virtue" garden and making a



Temple at full capacity on final day of anniversary celebrations

community quilt combining images from a community into a whole.

More than 900 artworks submitted by children were on display, the young artists coming from local schools as well as from Bahá'í classes in New South Wales and inter-state.

Visitors were also able to participate in devotional meetings and study circles to experience the community service activities of the Bahá'í community.

Rotary and local businesses provided food stalls.

## Visitors

Among the visitors during the week were Bob and Margaret Brownly from Balgowlah Heights.

They had decided to visit the Bahá'í Temple after reading an article in their local newspaper, the *Manly Daily*.

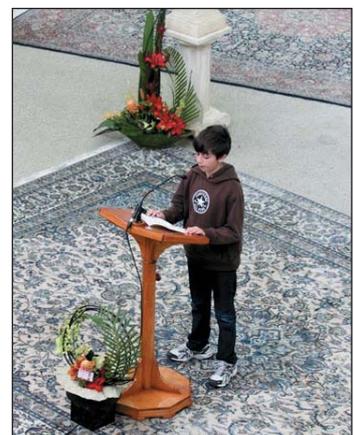
Others came after hearing about the anniversary events on TV and radio or reading about it in newspapers or in flyers.

Another visitor was Margaret Ford from Pennant Hills, who joined the services during the mid-week noon celebrations.

"I always enjoy the services at the Bahá'í Temple because of the variety of contributions - including the Christian ones," Ms Ford said.



Pittwater MP Rob Stokes



Imaan Sedghi reading during the service hosted by the children

# Blogger active in aftermath of Cyclone Yasi



Dr June Perkins

Witnessing the spiritual capacity of the local community has been the “the most amazing experience” in recent months for a Bahá’í blogger contributing to “The Aftermath Project” of the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*.

June Perkins was at home in Tully with her husband, three

children and a multitude of pets when Cyclone Yasi struck North Queensland with devastating force on 3 February 2011.

A huge mango tree fell through the roof of their house, splintering the ceiling. Terrifying winds struck the house from all directions.

Then, in the calm of the eye of the storm, the family fled their damaged house for a safer, low-to-ground brick home of one of their neighbours.

The next day they returned to find their home was wrecked. They have recently moved to Murray Upper.

## The Aftermath Project

After a local told the *ABC* about postings by Dr Perkins on *Pearlz Dreaming* <http://pearlz.wordpress.com>, her long-running blog on life, poetry and virtues, she was invited to be a guest blogger representing North Queensland for “The Aftermath Project.”

The project follows the stories of people trying to rebuild their lives and their communities and to recover from recent natural disasters. It is online at <http://open.abc.net.au/projects/aftermath>.

Dr Perkins was asked to write a blog at least once a fortnight on her experiences following the cyclone.

“So far I have contributed thirteen written blogs, one video and 24 photographs to the project,” she says.

“The most amazing thing about everything our family has been through in the last few

months has been witnessing the spiritual capacity of our community.

“In terms of spiritual and faith themes I focus on themes to do with virtues people are displaying in the recovery process, such as resilience, caring and helpfulness.”

In one posting, she writes about “Ute Angels”, people who “walk the spiritual path with practical feet.”

“How do you picture angels?” she writes.

“For me they are dressed in shorts and t-shirts with big smiles on their faces as they help load a ute of more sodden belongings to sort. These angels are the ones who are there for you -- unmasked and rarely publicised.

“Some of the best days during the recovery process in the Cassowary Coast have been the unexpected and unasked for assistance from many people we never knew cared about us and also from complete strangers.

“The day we arrived at our new home there were fresh new sheets, towels and pillow cases waiting on the doorstep. It felt like some angels put them there. We made so many trips back and forth between our old and new home that we needed more angels, specifically ute angels, and as if our prayers were answered, they appeared!”

Dr Perkins’ postings cover a range of themes, including helpful visits by people from outside the district.

“I have covered the role of the arts in the healing process at some length - with visits from musicians, songwriters, and writing mentors playing an important role in assisting people to be inspired to get back on their feet.

“I plan to do about six more written blogs and am collaborating on a video documentary of our family’s experience of the cyclone, recovery and aftermath. I am producing several small video documentaries of local stories and am sharing these on *Pearlz Dreaming* and *ABC Open*.”

“The Aftermath Project” will have a website. It is scheduled to be launched in December of this year.

# Passing of 'a distinguished servant': Dr Peter Khan

A memorial service was held in the Bahá'í Temple in Sydney on 28 August 2011 for Dr Peter Khan, who passed away after a sudden illness in Brisbane on 15 July 2011.

Dr Khan, a prominent Australian Bahá'í, was a member of the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, at its world headquarters in Israel for nearly a quarter of a century.

Major newspapers in Australia, including *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Courier-Mail*, and *The West Australian*, published obituaries for Dr Khan.

In 1957, aged 21, Dr Khan became the youngest-ever member of the Faith's elected national governing council in Australia, the National Spiritual Assembly.

In 1987, Dr Khan became the first Australian elected to the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. He was re-elected five times and when he relinquished his membership in 2010 he had spent 23 uninterrupted years as a member of the nine-member institution.

During those years, he employed his immense intellectual, organisational and spiritual capacities in collaboration with his fellow members to oversee great building and beautification projects on Mt Carmel, to guide the development of a spiritual community of more than five million in more than 170 countries throughout the world, and to seek to alleviate the persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran.

As a master orator, Dr Khan spoke in many cities worldwide, attracting huge audiences to his talks. He regularly introduced his presentations with his trademark humour before examining spiritual principles through the prism of logic, usually accompanied by scientific analogies.

## Family

Peter Khan was born in Bowral, New South Wales on 12 November 1936, the son of Fazal and Hukoomat (Bibi) Khan, migrants from the Punjab region of India.

Peter was an outstanding student at Bowral High School and at the University of Sydney

where he received the prestigious University Medal and gained degrees in science and engineering before obtaining his PhD in 1963.

His research on high-frequency electronics led to a Fulbright postdoctoral fellowship and a position at the University of Michigan, where he was appointed Associate Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. Returning to Australia for sabbatical leave in 1975, Dr Khan undertook research at the University of New South Wales. From 1976 to 1983 he held a senior academic position at the University of Queensland.

## Intellectual gifts

A prominent Australian Bahá'í historian, Associate Professor Graham Hassall, said Dr Khan demonstrated to Bahá'ís a systematic approach to understanding Bahá'í scripture, and a disciplined approach to the community's organisation and advancement.

"His brilliant intellectual gifts drew him to service that was public, global and sacrificial," Professor Hassall said.

## Author

With his wife, Dr Janet Khan, who survives him, Dr Khan was the author of the book *Advancement of Women: A Bahá'í Perspective*, which elaborates on the implications of the Bahá'í principle of the equality of women and men.

After Dr Khan passed away, the Universal House of Justice issued a message to the Bahá'ís of the world which paid tribute to him as a "distinguished servant".

"By any measure, his was a remarkable life, one of earnest striving, of unbending resolve, of unflinching dedication to principle, and of constancy of effort," the message said, before moving on to recognise "his considerable intellectual gifts", and to describe his addresses to "unnumbered audiences" as presentations of "uncommon eloquence and endearing humour - lifting hearts, stimulating minds, galvanising spirits".



Dr Peter Khan



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

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## Australian academics and lawyers speak out as educators sentenced

Academics from universities throughout Australia have called on Iran to make higher education accessible to students from all religious backgrounds, including members of the Bahá'í Faith.

Their call was made as news arrived in October that seven Bahá'í educators in Iran had been sentenced to four and five years in jail after teaching academic subjects to young Bahá'ís banned from attending university because of their religion.

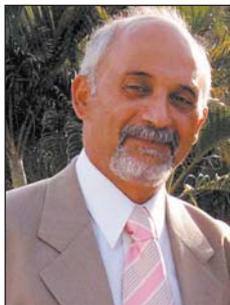
The seven were among 16 detained after a series of raids on 22 May, in which 39 homes associated with the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) were targeted. The Institute's activities have since been declared illegal by Iranian authorities.



*Professor David Battersby*

### Open Letter

In an open letter to the Ambassador of Iran to Australia, Dr Mahmoud Babaei, the Australian academics say they joined with their counterparts from other countries in calling on Iran to remove discriminatory elements from its education system.



*Professor Fazel Naghdy*

The letter is signed by 73 academics, including senior professors, from institutions ranging from the University of Sydney and Monash University on the eastern seaboard to the University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University in the west.

Among the signatories is the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ballarat, Professor David Battersby. The organiser is Professor Fazel Naghdy, head of the school of electrical, computer and telecommunications engineering at the University of Wollongong.

The President of the Law Society of New South Wales and the NSW Young Lawyers also wrote to the Ambassador calling on the Iranian Government to ensure that the human rights of all people, including the Bahá'ís, are respected, protected and fulfilled, in accordance with Iran's international human rights obligations.

The letter by the Australian academics condemns attacks by the Iranian authorities on the BIHE - an

informal educational initiative of the Bahá'í community - in which Bahá'í professors, barred by the Iranian government from teaching at universities, voluntarily offer their services to teach young community members who are banned from higher education because of their religion.

Some of the Australian signatories to the open letter, including Professor Naghdy, have provided academic instruction online to the students, several of whom are now pursuing postgraduate studies in Australia.

### Australian Vice-Chancellors

The Australian academics noted that Universities Australia, representing the Vice-Chancellors of all Australian universities (formerly the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee) had raised the issue of the ban with UNESCO in 2006, 2007 and in June this year. British academics also spoke up in an open letter published in *The Guardian* newspaper.

The Australian university staff reminded Iran it had signed international covenants guaranteeing freedom of thought, conscience and religion as well as the right to education.

"We call for the arrested individuals to be treated in accordance with the right to which they are entitled under international law and be released immediately."

On 10 October, in an open letter published in the *Daily Telegraph* in the United Kingdom, 43 distinguished philosophers and theologians from 16 countries, including two from Australia, also condemned Iran's policy to bar young Bahá'ís and others from higher education. The signatories were from Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim backgrounds.

### Nobel laureates call for release

In September 2011 Nobel laureates Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, and Jose Ramos-Horta, President of East Timor, called upon the Iranian government to release unconditionally and drop charges against the seven Bahá'ís on trial for their educational activities.

Denial of education made despots appear fearful of the very age they live in, the Nobel Laureates said.

"Perhaps the most glaring example of this fear today is the denial of higher education to the members of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran - a peaceful religion with no political agenda, which recognizes the unity of all religions."