

Baha'i AUSTRALIAN Report

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A newsletter
of the
Australian
Baha'i
community

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Kevin Locke to tour Australia

Native American performer Kevin Locke will visit Australia in November to present the sixth annual Clara and Hyde Dunn Memorial Lecture.

The pre-eminent player of the indigenous Northern Plains flute, Kevin Locke is also an inspiring dancer, traditional storyteller, cultural ambassador and educator.

He is perhaps best known as the world's leading performer of the amazingly complex and acrobatic Lakota Hoop Dance, in which he whirls within twirling hoops, explicating the native view of the world as hoops intersect and grow into ever more revealing designs - a flower, a butterfly, an eagle, the moon and sun. Finally all 28 hoops interlock to form a sphere, symbolising the inter-connection and oneness of all humanity.

Ambassador of global culture

The pivotal force in the revival of an indigenous flute tradition that was on the brink of extinction just twenty years ago, Kevin Locke regards his work in preserving the unique Lakota cultural traditions as a contribution towards the global heritage of all humanity.

"We are infinitely diverse, but it is not something we should consider a liability", Locke says. "It is an asset that lends strength and it is imperative to bring these strengths with us as we move into the new millennium". He compares the cultures of the many peoples of the world to chapters in a great book: the book of humanity. "If you don't include all of the peoples and their traditions, you are missing some chapters of the book", he says - and humanity is much the poorer.

"I see that the Lakota people have many gifts to bring to the world. We know that humankind is in a crisis. Now we need to draw from all of these wellsprings of knowledge that are within the treasuries of the hearts of the peoples of the world."

Building a culture of peace

It is this message of unity in diversity, drawn from the Bahá'í writings, that Locke has sought to



Kevin Locke performing the Lakota Hoop Dance

convey through performances, lectures and workshops in more than 70 countries during a two-decade touring career. Most recently he participated in the World Parliament of Religions in Capetown, South Africa in December 1999. He was a featured performer and speaker at the 1996 United Nations Habitat II Conference in Turkey, as well as being a delegate to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The highlight of Kevin Locke's Australian visit will be the Clara and Hyde Dunn Lecture, which he will present at a dinner in Adelaide on Saturday 25 November. The lecture will offer an indigenous perspective on building a culture of peace, and is being hosted as part of the Australian Bahá'í community's contribution to the 2000 International Year for a Culture of Peace.

The Clara and Hyde Dunn Memorial Dinner and Lecture is an annual event named in honour of the founders of the Australian Bahá'í community, and dedicated to the social ideals that they championed.

Kevin Locke will visit a number of other cities during his Australian tour in November and December 2000. For more information, contact the Bahá'í Office of Public Information on 02-9913 2771 or email opi@bahai.org.au.

Reconciliation based on oneness of humanity

Reconciliation starts from a basic belief in the oneness of humanity, according to a recent statement by the Australian Bahá'í community.

"Recognition of the essential humanity and dignity of each individual, and of the spiritual kinship between all human beings, is the foundation of our commitment to reconciliation", says the statement, which was published in response to an invitation by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation for community organisations to share the commitments they have made to reconciliation.

"The commitment of the Australian Bahá'í community to the reconciliation process springs from our fundamental belief in the oneness of humanity ... We celebrate our character as a culturally and ethnically diverse community, striving to derive strength from our differences and to achieve a vision of 'unity in diversity'", the statement says.

Practical steps forward

The statement lists the following practical steps taken by the community to realise its commitment to reconciliation:

- The appointment in 1999 of an Indigenous Advisory Group, consisting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Bahá'í community, to advise its peak body, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, on matters including indigenous community development and indigenous protocols. This group replaces

the position of Indigenous Community Development Officer which was initiated in January 1999 for a twelve-month period.

- Development of a relationship with the traditional custodians of the land on which the Bahá'í House of Worship and National Bahá'í Centre are located at Ingleside, Sydney.
- Participation in the Advisory Group on Faith Communities to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, and support for its Week of Prayer for Reconciliation.
- Development of institute courses designed to educate members of the Bahá'í community in basic issues of Indigenous cultural practices and protocol, and to encourage personal commitments to the reconciliation process. Bahá'í youth have been a particular focus of this educative process, including a special four-day cultural institute held at Ross River, outside Alice Springs, in July 1999 and attended by more than 50 young Bahá'ís from around the country.
- Encouragement of historical research into early contacts between the Australian Bahá'í community and Indigenous Australians, including the biographies of early Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bahá'ís.
- Encouragement of projects to translate passages from the Bahá'í Scriptures into Indigenous languages, as a means of fostering mutual understanding and supporting the spiritual development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bahá'ís.

Members of the National Spiritual Assembly meeting with Indigenous Bahá'ís



Conference to focus on international order for human rights

Buried at the end of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a little-known article which has the potential to transform the world in which we live.

According to Article 28, "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised".

While the Universal Declaration has been with us for more than fifty years, the full implications of Article 28 have yet to be thoughtfully explored.

The Association for Bahá'í Studies aims to shed a little more light on this question at a conference which will take Article 28 as its theme. To be held in Canberra at the ACT Bahá'í Centre on 9-10 June, the conference will examine current and future progress in building a world in which the human rights of every individual are protected.

Conference speakers

The keynote speaker at the conference will be Sir Ronald Wilson, President of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid and former President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Sir Ronald was co-author, with Dr Mick Dodson, of *Bringing Them Home*, the report which revealed the extent and nature of separation of Aboriginal children from their families.

Other speakers at the conference include:

- Dr Elizabeth Evatt, former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia and member of the UN Human Rights Committee
- Mr Kieran Fitzpatrick, Director of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions
- Mr Andre Frankovits, Executive Director of the Human Rights Council of Australia
- Dr Melinda Jones, Director of the Australian Human Rights Centre at the University of New South Wales
- Dr David Kinley, Professor of International Human Rights Law, Monash University
- Commander Robin Warner RAN, Deputy Director Operations and International Law (Maritime), Department of Defence

The guest international speaker will be Ms Layli Miller Bashir, a women's rights lawyer from the US.

Ms Miller's work in gaining recognition of female genital mutilation as a human rights issue was featured in the book *Do They Hear You When You Cry*, reviewed in the December 1999 issue of the Australian Bahá'í Report. She has gone on to found the Tahirih Justice Center, which provides free legal representation in cases that champion the rights of women and protect them from international human rights abuses. The Center is named after an early heroine of the Bahá'í Faith.

The conference will begin with an evening reception on Friday 9 June, followed by a full day program on Saturday 10 June. Registration for the main conference will cost \$50 per person (standard rate), \$45 for members of the Association, and \$20 for pensioners, students and the unwaged. A registration form can be downloaded from the website www.bahai.org.au/abs.

For more information, contact Michael Curtotti on 02-6287 2211 or email michaelc@bahai.org.au.



Layli Miller Bashir

Summer education projects a hit



Two participants in the Education for Peace Program

Summer may seem a long time ago, but the organisers of two summer education projects hope that their young participants will apply the lessons they have learned throughout the year.

The Education for Peace Program for youth aged 13 to 15, and the Children's Arts Festival for 4 to 12 year olds, were both community service projects of the Australian Bahá'í community. Designed by their volunteer organisers to offer an alternative to the usual holiday fare of TV and shopping malls, feedback from parents and children indicates that both programs hit their mark.

Education for Peace

Now in its seventh year, the Education for Peace Program aims to provide its young participants with the skills needed to develop inner peace, to establish peaceful relationships with others and their environment, and to promote peace within society.

Held in the idyllic rural setting of the Yerrinbool Bahá'í Centre of Learning, more than 200 youth have graduated from the two-year distance-learning and residential program since 1992.

This year the 40 participants came from around Australia and as far afield as New Zealand and Vanuatu.

In one session, students were to assume that they would be attending the World Summit on Youth in Favour of a Culture of Peace on the Threshold of the Millennium, organised by the United Nations.

They were asked to prepare for the summit by outlining current issues standing in the way of peace at a global, national, family and school level. They also had to propose practical solutions to resolve these issues, and identify methods for implementing the solutions.

Lorni Hyland teaches Aboriginal painting to a participant at the Children's Arts Festival



According to program director, Dr Golshah Naghdy, the Education for Peace Program can transform the lives of its young participants. Many graduates have gone on to complete the Advanced Education for Peace Program, and are making a difference back home in their schools and local communities, she said.

Feedback from the participants affirms the program's appeal. "I loved it", said one youth. "Everyone was so nice and comforting. The lessons really taught me a lot and changed me spiritually". "Overall it was a wonderful school", added another. "I can't wait to come back next year".

Children's Arts Festival

While older youth consulted on the problems of the world, the grounds of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney buzzed with the excited chorus of happy voices as children aged between 4 and 12 participated in a Children's Arts Festival.

For five days in January, almost 250 children explored virtues such as love, courtesy, joyfulness, courage and harmony through the creative arts. The program was offered as a service to the surrounding community during the school holidays, and it transformed the usually-tranquil Temple grounds into a carnival atmosphere, complete with brightly-coloured marquees.

Professional arts educators Helen Ramoutsaki, Ruth Park, Lorni Hyland, Virginia Ferris and Melanie Price held workshops in story-telling, ceramic mask-making, Aboriginal painting, dance and music. All workshops were based on the universal virtues valued by all the world's religions.

The festival culminated in a Temple service in which the children read prayers and sang for their parents and tutors.

According to festival coordinators Ann Hinton and Kath Podger, the public response to the festival was overwhelming, with many parents commenting on the creative program, its positive values and the hard-working tutors. Judging from this feedback, the Arts Festival may have to become an annual event.

Australia should advocate UN reform

Australia can make a significant contribution to the welfare of the world by advocating the reforms needed so that the United Nations can create a more peaceful, cooperative and united world, guaranteeing protection of the basic rights and freedoms of every human being.

This is the conclusion of the Australian Bahá'í community's submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Relations with the United Nations in the Post Cold War Environment, held recently by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.

The United Nations has already played a profound role in the construction of a more peaceful and unified world, according to the submission. But many of its original objectives remain unfulfilled.

National sovereignty has hampered the UN

The submission advocates a range of reforms to the United Nations including changes to the membership and mechanisms of the General Assembly, the establishment of a standing army for the United Nations, an increase in the resources allocated to human rights mechanisms, and vigorous approaches to improve the funding situation of the UN.

It argues that attachment to the concept of national sovereignty has prevented the UN General Assembly from developing into an institution that truly reflects the will of the people. "The General Assembly and its voting structure ... must come to represent more accurately the people of the world", it says.

In arguing the case for a standing army, the submission points to the political and logistic complexities of ad hoc peace-keeping arrangements, most recently experienced in the case of East Timor. A standing army could be deployed more rapidly, and its loyalty to the UN and independence from national considerations would be assured.

In the interim, the submission supports Australia's participation, in response to international crises, in forces that are properly established according to United Nations processes.

Human rights mechanisms should be strengthened

The submission points out two principal challenges to United Nations work for the protection of human rights: lack of enforcement and follow-up; and an insufficient emphasis on responsibilities as the counterpart and guarantor of human rights. It suggests that Australia should continue to advocate an increase in the resources allocated to UN human rights work.

The issue of the participation in UN human rights mechanisms of governments which have not committed themselves to core human rights treaties, or which are themselves under scrutiny for gross human rights violations, is pointed out, and a review of membership qualifications for such mechanisms recommended.

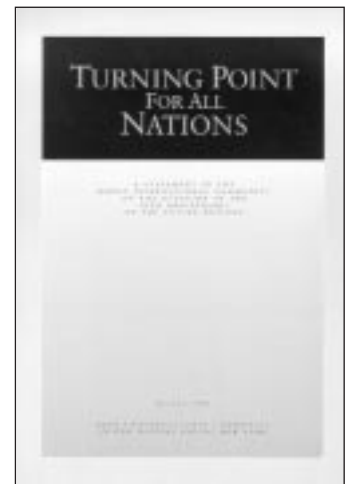
In relation to UN funding, vigorous approaches to improve the situation are advocated, based on the principles that there should be no assessment without representation; assessments should be graduated for fairness and justice; and voluntary mechanisms should not be overlooked.

Federalism - a guiding principle

As a long-term vision, the submission advocates the application of the principle of federalism to world institutions. The experience of Australia demonstrates how much benefit evolving federalism can bring to a people, it says.

Further information about the issues discussed in the submission can be found in *Turning Point for All Nations: A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations*. It is available from the Bahá'í Office of Public Information on 02-9913 2771, or email opi@bahai.org.au.

Note: We acknowledge with thanks the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for its permission to publish extracts from this submission.



National Convention held in Melbourne

The Bahá'í National Convention, held in Melbourne from 27-30 April 2000, elected the new National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia for the coming year.

The National Assembly is the governing body of the Bahá'í Faith in Australia, and is elected annually by 95 delegates representing Bahá'ís around the country. The Bahá'í Faith is distinctive as a religion whose affairs are governed by democratically elected institutions of lay believers.

The Bahá'í election process is deeply devotional. Elections are carried out without candidates, nominations or electioneering, each elector relying on individual conscience in casting their vote. All adult Bahá'ís in Australia are eligible for election to the National Assembly.

The members of the National Assembly come from most states of Australia, and will meet every month at the Bahá'í national centre in Sydney. They are Dr John Davidson, lecturer in

Banking and Finance at the University of New South Wales; Professor Bijan Samali, lecturer in engineering at the University of Technology Sydney; Dr Marjorie Tidman, a counsellor living in Tom Price in northern WA; and Mr John Walker, an accountant based in Toowoomba.

Needs of children, women and Indigenous Bahá'ís highlighted

Apart from electing the National Assembly, delegates to the convention consulted about a range of issues concerning the development of the Australian Bahá'í community.

The nurturing and education of children and youth was a recurrent theme, with delegates encouraged to make their local Bahá'í communities "child-development centred". This requires seeing children as valued members of the community and being aware of the needs of families when planning community events, delegates from the National Bahá'í Education Committee for Children explained.

The needs of women were also discussed in the light of the explicit Bahá'í teaching of the equality of women and men. The National Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women shared its five year strategy for advocating the advancement of women and promoting the equality of women and men, both within and outside the Bahá'í community.

A convention highlight was the presentation by Mr Phillip Obah, a delegate from Bililuna in the Northern Territory, and one of approximately 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bahá'ís in Australia. Mr Obah provided an update on the establishment of the Fred Murray Institute in Alice Springs. Named after one of the first Aboriginal Bahá'ís, the institute is one of a range of initiatives specifically tailored to meet the needs of Indigenous Bahá'ís. It will also provide a forum for exploring the relationship between the Bahá'í teachings and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and spirituality.

An update was also provided on the restoration work at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney, the first stage of which has now been completed.



A delegate from Queensland addresses the Bahá'í National Convention

psychology at the University of Tasmania; Mr Naysan Faizi, director of a graphic design company based in Brisbane; Mr Stephen Hall, teacher and full-time secretary of the National Assembly; Dr Graham Hassall, director of the Asia-Pacific program at the Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies at Melbourne University; Mrs Fiona McDonald, an adult educator from Perth; Professor Fariborz Moshirian, Head of the School of

International reports

London, UK

The All Party Parliamentary Friends of the Bahá'ís, a new All Party Group in the British Parliament, was launched on 21 March 2000.

The Group will be a formal link between parliament and the Bahá'í community of the United Kingdom. It will offer a united voice in defence of the human rights of the persecuted Bahá'í community in Iran.

Speaking at the launch, Mr Lembit Opik MP, Chair of the Group, said that its members were already considering forming a parliamentary delegation to visit Iran later in the year to speak to Iranian parliamentarians and government officials about the treatment of the Bahá'ís there.

The All Party Group will also provide a means for promoting in parliament the principles of unity, social justice, good citizenship and good governance by which Bahá'ís strive to live.

Mashhad, Iran

Three Bahá'í men were sentenced to death in February due to their religious beliefs.

Two of the men, Mr Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam and Mr Hedayat Kashfi-Najafabadi, have been held in prison since 1997. The main reason for their arrest was that they had resisted official pressure to cancel the monthly "Family Life" meetings held for local Bahá'í families. They were sentenced to death in early 1998, but later re-tried for technical reasons. They were advised on 3 February that the original death sentences have now been confirmed.

It is not known what charges were brought against the third man, Mr Manuchehr Khulusi, who was arrested in 1999 due to his Bahá'í activities. Mr Khulusi has now been released from prison, but it is not clear whether the death sentence has been quashed.

All three men have close relatives in Australia, who pleaded for international action to secure their release. US President Bill Clinton protested against the sentences. The Australian, Canadian, UK and German governments also raised their concerns about the cases.

Meanwhile on 10 April the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva passed a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran. The resolution expressed concern at the unabated pattern of

persecution against the Bahá'ís, including death sentences and arrests, and called on the Iranian government to completely emancipate the Bahá'ís and other minority religious groups.

At the Commission the Australian government welcomed emphasis on the rule of law by the Iranian government, but expressed concern about remaining human rights issues, "especially in relation to due process and the treatment of Bahá'ís".

Haifa, Israel

Madame Ruhiiyih Rabbani, international dignitary of the Bahá'í Faith, passed away on 19 January in her 90th year.

Madame Rabbani's life as the pre-eminent member of the worldwide Bahá'í community exemplified the priority the Bahá'í Faith gives to the unification of humanity, the elimination of all forms of prejudice, and the advancement of women. Much of the last 35 years of her life were devoted to travels that took her to 185 countries and territories.

Madame Rabbani visited Australia several times, including attending the dedication of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney in 1961.

In addition to being an administrator and world traveller, Madame Rabbani was an author, poet, lecturer, and film producer. Her unique contribution to the development of the worldwide Bahá'í community was recognised by her appointment as a Hand of the Cause, the highest station within the Bahá'í Faith, in 1952.

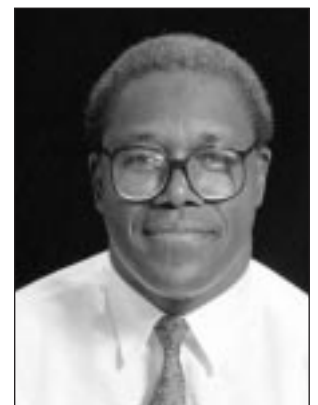
As a resident of Israel since her marriage to the late Guardian and world head of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, in 1937, Madame Rabbani was intimately involved with the development of the Bahá'í world centre from its early formative years.

In another loss to the Bahá'í community, Mr Adib Taherzadeh, author and member of the Universal House of Justice, passed away on 26 January. Based in Haifa, the Universal House of Justice is a nine-member council that administers the affairs of the international Bahá'í community. Its members are elected for five-year terms, and Mr Taherzadeh had been a member since 1988.

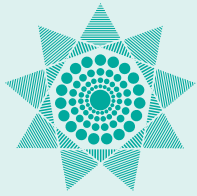
A by-election held to fill the vacancy left by Mr Taherzadeh has resulted in the election of Mr Kiser Barnes, formerly a lecturer in law at universities in the Republic of Benin and Nigeria, as the new member of the Universal House of Justice.



Madame Ruhiiyih Rabbani



Mr Kiser Barnes



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*For more information on the
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Community

Bahá'í studies a growing field

The fourth annual Bahá'í scholarship institute, held at the Yerrinbool Bahá'í Centre of Learning in New South Wales over the Easter long weekend, confirmed that Bahá'í studies is a growing field of research in Australia and around the world.

The purpose of the institute is to provide a forum where researchers can discuss their current interests, methods and projects. This year's institute attracted approximately 25 participants from several states of Australia. Their current research projects ranged from the Bahá'í approach to biblical interpretation to Bahá'í socio-economic development projects in the Czech republic and Tuvalu, and from Bahá'í theology to the development of the Australian national Bahá'í archives.

Annual Report on Scholarship presented

The 1999 Report on Scholarship was also presented at the institute. Compiled by the Association for Bahá'í Studies-Australia, the Report brings together updates from individual researchers and a variety of institutions and scholarly enterprises around the world. Its aim is to provide an indicative survey of the range of subjects under investigation, and the variety of approaches to research being adopted. Associations for

Bahá'í Studies in Europe, India, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, North America, the Philippines and Singapore are covered in this year's Report. It also contains a bibliography of references relevant to Bahá'í studies for the year 1999. The Report can be downloaded from the Association's website at www.bahai.org.au/abs, or by contacting its secretary, Mr Colin Dibdin, on 02-9317 3883.

Conference on Health

The next major event on the Australian Bahá'í studies calendar is the Association's annual conference, which will be held at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, from 29 September to 1 October 2000. The conference theme is "Health, Healing and Religion". It will explore the relationship between health and religion, including the questions of whether religious life helps or hinders the development of a sound mind and a sound body, and how the Bahá'í community can assist its members to attain a balanced state of health.

The conference call for papers can be found at the website www.bahai.org.au/abs, or by contacting the conference convenor, Dr Vahid Payman, at vahid@netlink.com.au.

*Performers at the annual multicultural evening hosted
by the Bahá'í community of Tamworth on 1 April*

