

AUSTRALIAN Baha'i Report

Volume 4, Issue 2 - December 2000

A newsletter of the Australian Baha'i community

Australians to attend opening of Terraces in Israel

Nineteen Australian Bahá'ís are soon to join Bahá'ís from almost every country in the world for the opening of the Terraces on Mount Carmel at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

Since the 1950s, the Shrine of the Báb with its golden dome and white gleaming marble has been a familiar landmark in Haifa, Israel's third largest city.

The nineteen Terraces – one on the same level as the Shrine of the Báb, nine extending above it and nine below – form a grand series of brackets, which accentuate the Shrine's position in the heart of the mountainside. They will be officially opened in May 2001.

Ma'ariv, Israel's second-largest newspaper, reports that the project has earned the appellation "the eighth wonder of the world."

"I think it is really becoming a landmark, not only in Haifa, but also one of the spots in Israel that is a must-see," said Mirko Stefanovic, Yugoslavia's ambassador to Israel, who has visited many times. "As everyone knows, the Middle East is a hectic place, full of contrasts and conflict. The Bahá'í gardens are kind of like an island of tranquillity and peace."

Bahá'í Scriptures explain that the construction of the Terraces along with new administrative



buildings coincide with several other processes in the world.

"One of these processes is the maturation of local and national Bahá'í institutions. The other is the establishment of processes leading to political peace for humanity, and we feel this synchronicity is obvious if you look broadly at the way things are going in the world," said Douglas Samimi-Moore, director of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information.

The funds for the completion of the Terraces as well as the new administrative buildings and all of the structures on Mount Carmel came entirely from members of the Bahá'í Faith.

"No money has come from outside," said Albert Lincoln, Secretary General of the Bahá'í International Community. "And we are not a community that is rich. The funds for these projects have come from donations by thousands upon thousands of individuals, who have given sacrificially over many years.

"Three-quarters of the worldwide Bahá'í population resides in the third world," added Dr Lincoln. "It is not unusual to visit a mud hut in an African village and find a photograph of this project on the wall, along with a receipt for some small contribution."



INSIDE

Culture of Peace

4



UN Millennium Forum

6



Art for Unity

8





Philip Obah

Indigenous Australian elected to represent Australian Bahá'í community

Bahá'í representatives from around Australia have elected Mr Philip Obah in a by-election for membership of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia.

A descendant of the Wadja tribe of Central Queensland, Mr Obah holds a Bachelor of Community Welfare from James Cook University, and has worked as a youth and welfare worker.

He is also a member of the Tjukurpa Indigenous Advisory Group of the Australian Bahá'í community, which focuses on matters such as reconciliation, consultation with indigenous Elders, and the development of socio-economic development projects. Mr Obah describes the Bahá'í approach to reconciliation as one which "assists the Aboriginal people to reconcile their own differences between themselves as a community."

Towards a violence-free society

Professor H.B. Danesh will visit Sydney in January 2001 to promote the vision of a society without violence.

The highlight of his visit will be a keynote address on "A Violence-Free Society", to be presented at a public seminar at the Ryde Civic Centre on Sunday 28 January from 7.30 pm.

Dr Danesh will present awards to outstanding volunteers at a community dinner on 27 January. His week in Sydney will also include seminars on Fantastic Families, Wonderful Women, and Perfect Partnership.

Dr Danesh is the Rector of Landegg Academy, a Swiss tertiary education institution, where he also chairs the Department of Conflict Resolution.

With over 30 years of academic and clinical experience as a psychiatrist, his areas of research and expertise include the causes and prevention of violence; marriage and family therapy; spiritual psychology; death and dying; consultation and conflict resolution; ethics; and world order and peace studies.

Formerly Associate Professor of Psychiatry and

Second Aboriginal member

Mr Obah is the second Aboriginal person to be elected as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly, which is the governing body of the Bahá'í Faith in Australia. The first was Elizabeth Anderson, who served as a member from 1966 to 1972. The nine members of the National Assembly are elected on an annual basis.

To attend meetings of the National Assembly, Mr Obah makes a monthly round trip from his home in the community of Kururrungku (Billiluna), in far north Western Australia, to the national Bahá'í centre in Sydney.

Mr Philip Obah replaces Dr Graham Hassall, who has recently taken up appointment as Associate Dean of Landegg Academy, a tertiary education institution in Switzerland that specialises in peace studies.

Family Medicine at the University of Ottawa, Canada, his latest book is titled Conflict-Free Conflict Resolution: A Developmental Approach.

Radically different approach needed

Dr Danesh says: "We need a radically different approach to the solution of human violence."

"If we are to create a violence-free society, we must, above all, realise that such a society must be not only free from violence, but also endowed with life-engendering and creative forces of unity," says Dr Danesh.

Dr Danesh's book, A Violence-Free Society, was commissioned by UN agencies in 1994 for the United Nations International Year of the Family. He was also commissioned in that year to organise an International Symposium on "Strategies for Creating Violence-Free Families," where he delivered the keynote address.

To obtain further details on Dr. Danesh's itinerary, contact the Bahá'í Office of Public Information on (02) 9877 5826 or email opi@bahai.org.au.

Australian NGOs support global mobilisation against racism

Action in support of the United Nations World Conference against Racism has gathered momentum following a visit by Dr Barney Pityana, the President of the South African Human Rights Commission.

Dr Pityana's visit to Australia was sponsored by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. His itinerary included meetings with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to discuss the World Conference.

To be held in South Africa in September, the World Conference will review the progress of the world in eradicating racism and will address its continuing effects.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, said she has been heartened by the active role being played by an increasing number of NGOs in the work of the World Conference.

"What we have here are the seeds of a worldwide movement against racism," she said. "In this sense, these preparations and the World Conference itself serve as the launch pad for the movement against racism, much as Beijing was for the women's movement – the beginning and not the end of a process."

Further information on the World Conference can be found through visiting the High Commissioner's website www.unhchr.ch.

In Australia, a meeting of NGOs held in Canberra in November decided to establish an Australian NGO working group to support action for the World Conference.

An NGO email discussion list has also been established, and can be subscribed to at the website of the National Women's Justice Coalition <http://www.nwjc.org.au/avcwl>.

NGOs have written to the Foreign Minister, Mr Downer, and the Minister for Immigration, Mr Ruddock, urging strong government support for initiatives for the World Conference.

The Bahá'í community is committed to the eradication of prejudice of all kinds and the promotion of the oneness of humanity. It will carry out a range of projects in local communities to promote the World Conference and anti-racism.

For further information contact Michael Curtotti on (02) 6287 2211 or email michaelc@bahai.org.au.

A child-centred civilisation

Care of children is central to the future of all civilisations. Jointly sponsored by the Association for Bahá'í Studies and UNICEF, a conference on the theme "a child-centred civilisation" will examine the realisation of the human rights of children and youth in the International Year for Dialogue among Civilisations.

The conference will be held in Canberra on 28-29 September 2001. It will feature panels on the rights and well-being of children and youth, addressing international, national and community perspectives. The panels will seek to explore human rights themes, rights issues as they relate to children, and children's experience of rights.

Papers are called for on a wide range of topics including children seeking asylum, children in poverty, children's health, indigenous children, alienation and exploitation, juvenile justice, education, and more.

For further information or to submit paper proposals, please contact Michael Curtotti at 18 Hickey Court, Weston, ACT 2611. Michael can be contacted by telephone on (02) 6287 2211, or email michaelc@bahai.org.au



unicef
AUSTRALIA



United Nations Children's Fund

Native American celebration of global unity

Kevin Locke meets
Lieutenant Governor
of South Australia,
Bruno Kruminis



Native American performer Kevin Locke enchanted and inspired 220 South Australians with his musical message about the essential unity of the world's different spiritual traditions.

Mr Locke (Tokeya Inajin is his Lakota name, meaning "First to Arise") spoke, sang, danced and played the Indigenous Northern Plains flute in the course of presenting the annual Clara and Hyde Dunn lecture in Adelaide on 25 November. This year's lecture was dedicated to the theme of building a culture of peace.

Mr Locke is the world's leading performer of the complex and beautiful acrobatic Lakota Hoop Dance and the pivotal force behind reviving an indigenous American flute tradition – which was on the brink of extinction just 20 years ago.

Indigenous spiritual traditions

Mr Locke was welcomed by Adelaide's traditional indigenous landowners, the Kaurna people.

He paid tribute to indigenous Australian spiritual traditions and acknowledged that it was not just formal houses of worship that could be sacred.

Mr Locke read from a prayer by the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, which declared that all places on the planet "where mention of God has been made" are blessed.

His goal in performing around the world is not only to preserve his indigenous culture, but also to raise awareness of the "oneness we share as human beings".

Mr Locke gently and humorously reminded his audience of the importance of cultural tolerance, patience and compassion.

"Blessed are the flexible", he said, "for they shall not be bent out of shape".

During his one-month stay in Australia, Mr Locke visited Bahá'ís in several other cities and regional centres, including Alice Springs, Broken Hill, Wilcannia, and Thursday Island.

Culture of Peace around the country



Children's Arts Festival

While the Australian visit of Kevin Locke was the Bahá'í community's major initiative for the International Year for a Culture of Peace, many local activities were organised to support the vision of the year.

Based on the view that world peace begins in local communities, these small-scale activities ranged from inter-faith prayer gatherings to forums, exhibitions and even children's art projects aimed at inspiring young people to think about peace.

New South Wales

The grounds of the Sydney Bahá'í House of Worship hosted a Children's Arts Festival. Held as a school holiday activity from 20-22 December, the festival was dedicated to the theme "Children Creating a Culture of Peace".

Children between the ages of five and twelve explored ways they could be an integral part of building world peace through drama,

music, meditation, Aboriginal arts and felt making.

The Bahá'ís of Ryde, Sydney, hosted a multi-faith prayer gathering at dawn on New Year's Day 2001, inviting people of all religions and faiths to pray together for peace in the twenty-first century.

Queensland

At Pine Rivers, in Queensland, the Bahá'í community initiated the establishment of the Pine Rivers Community Millennium Peace Garden. The purpose of the project was to encourage the whole of Pine Rivers Shire to work together, donating dedication, time and materials.

Featuring trees, flowering plants and a simple open-air structure, the garden will offer an opportunity to relax and meditate on the benefits to be gained from oneness and harmony in the community.

“The garden will be a practical and aesthetic symbol of peace and unity into the next millennium”, said Kaye Forester, one of the organisers of the project.

In Brisbane, a celebration of United Nations Day hosted by the local Bahá’í community focussed on a Culture of Peace. Senator George Brandis, representing Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, Mr Gordon Nuttall MLA, representing the Premier of Queensland, and Cr Tim Quinn, Deputy Mayor of Brisbane, joined Mr Uri Themal, Executive Director of Multicultural Affairs Queensland and Jef Clark, Brisbane Bahá’í community, in calling for greater tolerance, acceptance and global engagement in order to create a Culture of Peace.

Mr Themal, a Rabbi, noted the linguistic similarities between the Jewish greeting “Shalom” and the Islamic welcome “Salam”, which both mean “Peace be with you”. He went on to note that the Aramaic root of both words means to be whole, concluding “you cannot be whole, complete, without peace.”

In Atherton, North Queensland, the Bahá’í community hosted a devotional meeting for the International Year on the theme of reconciliation. About 50 adults and children participated in prayers, meditation, and songs and dances of praise, including readings from the Bahá’í writings and a Quaker “silence”.

Western Australia

Sister Veronica Brady was the keynote speaker at the function organised by Bunbury Bahá’ís and other interested members of the public. The function was attended by more than 100 people, many of whom signed the Manifesto 2000 for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence.

Bahá’í communities in Swan, Albany, Joondalup, Cottesloe, Stirling, Geraldton, Canning, Cockburn, Wanneroo, South Perth, and Melville organised celebrations, displays in public places such as libraries, newspaper articles and advertising on the themes of the year.

Victoria

The Bahá’í community of Boroondara, in Melbourne, hosted an evening of performances to celebrate the diversity of cultures. Six hundred people from 32

nationalities enjoyed a wide range of musical performances and a parade of nations.

The vice president of the United Nations Association spoke on the significance of the year, and presented prizes to the winners of a drawing competition that encouraged students to express their views on peace.

South Australia

An art competition for primary school students organised by the Adelaide Bahá’í community attracted more than 80 entries. At the special judging night, Leonie Ibbott, a representative of the United Nations Association, spoke to the children about Torrens Red Kangaroo Dreaming, a reconciliation project to recognise a sacred site of the local Kurna people that was destroyed by white settlement.

“I think we knew we had achieved a success for peace and reconciliation when, at the end of the night, the Talkinjeri Aboriginal Dancers got everyone up on stage imitating emus and kangaroos,” said Sharon Hulin, one of the organisers.

Tasmania

The Bahá’í Unity Choir performed musical items from the Scriptures of different religions at the multi-faith dawn service on 1 January 2000, at which the Hobart City Council launched the International Year. The choir provided its support to other peace events during the year, including the Peace Expo held at the Hobart Town Hall in September.

The Bahá’ís of Kingborough hosted an afternoon tea at the Redwood Village retirement centre devoted to the theme of honouring women as peacemakers.

An artist’s impression of the Pine Rivers Community Millennium Peace Garden



Millennium Forum provides practical path

Our vision is of a world that is human-centred and genuinely democratic, where all human beings are full participants and determine their own destinies.

The vision of one human family living in a just, sustainable and peaceful world was a result of the consultations held at the Millennium Forum.

Held over five days at the UN Headquarters in New York, the Forum drew 1350 representatives from more than 1000 Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and 115 countries to consult about humanity's future in anticipation of the United Nations Millennium Summit.

The Declaration and Agenda for Action that resulted from the Forum inspired a vision of global unity, without neglecting the practical steps needed to achieve this vision. "We are not here to re-invent the wheel", said Techeste Ahderom, Forum co-chair, in his opening address. "We are here to show the world how to use the wheel".

People participation

Speaking before the Forum, Mr Ahderom, who is the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, said the development of people participation was extremely significant.

"Although unheralded in many circles, one of the most important international trends in the 1990s has been a worldwide blossoming of civil society and the corresponding recognition of the importance in world affairs of NGOs and

other citizens' groups", he said.

As co-chair of the Forum, he had the opportunity to see this blossoming at very close quarters.

"People's participation has been among the most powerful forces for social change and transformation over the last decade – and, indeed, over the last century.

"As a model for global consultations by citizens groups worldwide, the Millennium Forum truly offers the next step in the process of empowering and enabling the peoples of the world to participate directly in the global decisions that affect everyone everywhere".

Millennium Summit

In his capacity as Co-Chair of the Millennium Forum, Mr Ahderom presented the results of the Forum to the UN Millennium Summit in September. The Summit drew together more than 150 world leaders, making it the largest gathering of heads of state and government ever held.

In his address, Mr Ahderom described the Forum Declaration and Agenda for Action as a bold vision for humanity. It outlined a series of concrete steps that the United Nations, governments, and members of civil society could take to address the global problems facing humanity today, he said.

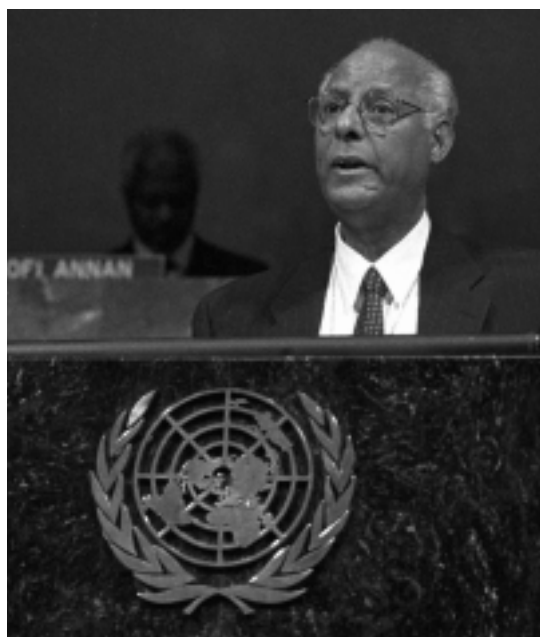
The Declaration condemned global poverty as a violation of human rights. It urged the immediate cancellation of Third World debt, and called for a stronger, democratised United Nations with a reformed Security Council, invigorated through an enlarged membership, more democratic procedures and eventual elimination of the veto.

It also urged governments to make serious commitments to restructuring the global financial architecture based on principles of equity, transparency, accountability and democracy.

Partnership with society

Mr Ahderom urged world leaders to join in a global partnership with civil society to create a peaceful and more prosperous world.

Techeste Ahderom addresses the UN Millennium Summit



“Throughout history, from the abolition of slavery to the recognition of the equality of women and men, most great social movements have begun not with governments but with ordinary people,” he said.

“This historic Summit may well be remembered as having opened the door to a long-awaited era of peace, justice and prosperity for all humanity”, Mr Ahderom told the Summit on 8 September.

Religious leaders meet together

Bahá’í International Community representative, Dr Albert Lincoln, called for a “global community based on unity in diversity” at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders held at the United Nations headquarters in New York in August.

The historic four-day meeting of religious and spiritual leaders was aimed at building tolerance, fostering peace and encouraging inter-religious dialogue among all the world’s religions. It was the first such gathering of high-level religious leaders ever held in the United Nations

The Summit was attended by more than 1000 religious leaders from around the world, representing virtually all of the world’s religions including the Bahá’í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam, Shintoism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism, as well as indigenous religions.

Focus on shared values

Dr Lincoln, the Secretary General of the Bahá’í International Community, spoke of the need to

Beijing + 5

Linda Shallcross, of the Australian Bahá’í Office for the Advancement of Women, was one of 50 Australian women who represented NGOs at the United Nations- 5th World Conference on Women, informally known as Beijing +5.

The conference was held from 5-9 June 2000 at the UN headquarters in New York. Titled “Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century”, it

“This new era will, of course, require concrete deeds and not just words.

“We in civil society stand ready to work with you and your governments, side by side, in a strong new partnership to create this new world. At the same time, civil society also stands ready to hold you to your commitments if you do not deliver on your words”.

identify “core values that are common to all religious and spiritual traditions”.

“Our disordered world is in desperate need of a moral compass that is above passing fashion and untainted by the pervasive materialism of the modern era,” said Dr. Lincoln. “The convening of this summit suggests that the world has become aware of this need and of the capacity latent in the world’s religious traditions.”

Dr Lincoln said that one of the greatest dangers facing humanity comes from a generation of children growing up in a moral vacuum.

“Each child is potentially the light of the world, and its darkness,” said Dr Lincoln. “Lighting the lamps of these souls is the responsibility we must collectively assume if civilisation is to thrive.

“Children must not be deprived of the light of moral education, especially the girl-child, who is the transmitter of values to future generations. Indeed educated women are one of the most important keys to world peace.”

focused on the achievements and obstacles in implementing the Platform for Action developed at the World Conference on Women held in Beijing five years ago.

Beijing +5 concluded with an Outcomes Document detailing further initiatives that governments are required to take in order to implement and strengthen the Beijing Platform for Action. The document is available through the www.un.org/daw website.

In the year 2000 an estimated 875

million adults are

illiterate. Nearly

two-thirds are

women.

133 million children

are out of school;

sixty percent of these

children are girls.

Since 1985 there have

generally been more

female students than

male in higher

education in the

most developed

countries. By

contrast, in the

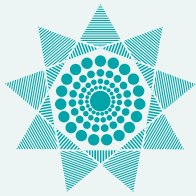
world’s least

developed countries,

only one in four

students at this level

are women.



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 Bahá'í Report

173 Mona Vale Road
Ingleside NSW 2101
Australia

Phone:
(02) 9877 5826

Fax:
(02) 9970 7275

Email:
opi@bahai.org.au
World Wide Web:
www.bahai.org.au

Editor:
Natalie Mobini-Kesheh

Assistant editors:
Ladan Rahmani
David Levick

Design and layout:
Simon Creedy

The Australian Bahá'í Report is distributed free of charge. If you would like to have your name added to, or removed from, our mailing list, please contact us at the address above.

© Australian Bahá'í
Community

Art reflects unity in diversity

Artists Robin White of New Zealand and Leba Toki of Fiji recently opened an exhibit at the Helen Maxwell Gallery in Canberra of collaborative works on tapa (bark cloth). The works have won widespread admiration for their unique and harmonious blending of Western and Fijian artistic traditions.

Ms White and Ms Toki are both highly regarded artists and members of the Bahá'í Faith. Their collaboration was "not just a way of experiencing new forms of artistic expression," said Ms White, "but also a way of demonstrating the potential for people from very different cultural backgrounds to work together in harmony, in a positive and creative manner."

The opening of the month-long exhibit on October 20 was attended by the High Commissioner of New Zealand, Simon Murdoch, and the Counsellor of the Fijian High Commission, Akuila Waradi.

Tea provides a theme

The three works, each approximately two metres by two and a half metres, revolve around "tea" as a symbol of people coming together in a convivial atmosphere, a symbol which is common to English and Indian culture and has been incorporated into Fijian culture as well.

The designs, integrating European and Indian imagery with traditional Fijian patterns, are based on the packaging of three well-known products: Punja's Tea and Rewa Milk, which

are very commonly used in Fiji, and Chelsea Sugar, which is produced and sold in New Zealand from sugar grown in Fiji.

"We were interested in taking the idea of having a cup of tea as a means for conveying a deeper significance and investigating a broader theme, that is the possibility of different cultures being able to come together harmoniously, to honour and celebrate their diversity and to share in the pleasures and benefits of this world," said Ms White.

"The work is about the process involved in exploring the interface between cultures and arriving at a visual metaphor for the concept of unity in diversity."

Bark cloth medium

Tapa was chosen as the medium because it is inseparably associated with indigenous Fijian culture and other indigenous Pacific Island cultures.

"Leba and I wanted to produce a work that could not have been done by either of us on our own," said Ms White, "something that sits at a fine balance between what is familiar and traditional, and what is unexpected and new.

"In recognition of this goal, the set of three tapa have been titled 'Cakacakavata,' which means 'working together'."

The project came about when Ms White was visiting Ms Toki at her home in Fiji about three years ago.

"I questioned her about some samples of tapa that she had in her home. Leba explained that she had made them herself and that she came from the island of Moce, one of only two islands in Fiji where tapa is made," said Ms White.

"For some time I had been attracted by the particular aesthetic quality of Fijian tapa and had a long-held desire to experience the making of it. This prompted me to ask Leba if she would be interested in entering into a collaborative art project with me and she readily agreed."

The set of three tapa has been purchased by the National Gallery of Australia.

- Bahá'í World News Service

