

is a newsletter
published by the
Australian Bahá'í
community.

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Community

Symbol of peace inaugurated in Israel

Thousands of Bahá'ís from more than 180 countries gathered in Haifa, Israel, in May for the opening of a majestic series of garden terraces on the face of Mount Carmel.

The result of a ten-year project, the inauguration ceremonies culminated in an open-air classical music concert held at the base of the mountain on 22 May.

Attended by more than 3000 Bahá'ís, over 650 dignitaries from Israel and international embassies, and at least 100 representatives of the news media from around the world, the concert ended at dusk with the dramatic illumination of the 19 newly constructed terraces, which extend nearly a kilometre up the mountain.

The ceremony was broadcast live around the world via satellite and the Internet. In Australia, thousands of Bahá'ís gathered at universities, hotels and clubs in the early hours of the morning to watch the events live on big screens.

Built at a cost of some \$500 million, derived solely from voluntary contributions by Bahá'ís, the terraces are being offered to the world as a demonstration of how diverse people can come together in peace and harmony.

In the only speech of the inauguration ceremony, a message from the Faith's world governing body delivered by Albert Lincoln, Secretary General of the Bahá'í International Community, the project was offered as a source of hope against "the turmoil and crises of our time".

"Let the word go forth, then, from this sacred spot, from this Mountain of the Lord, that the unity and peace of the world are not only possible but inevitable", Dr Lincoln said. "Their time has come".

The terraced gardens are now open to the public every day, free of charge. Ultimately they are expected to attract more than a million visitors per year.

The inauguration was attended by a delegation of 18 Australian representatives from all parts of the country. They were Borhan Borhani (Brisbane), Erica Davidson (Hobart), Phil Doncon (Victoria Park), Pouya Ehsani

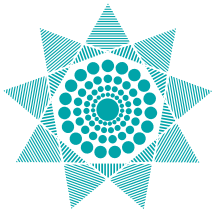
(Burwood), Mahshid Ferdowsian (Albany), David Freesmith (Darwin), Aladdin Jamali (Ballarat), Reza Khanlari (Tamworth), Nick Martin (Hobart), Anne Maslin (Dandenong), Shara Nguyen (Glen Eira), Philip Obah (Kururrungku), John Pepperell (Laramba), Howard Perkins (Whittlesea), Bronwyn Pinkster (Alexandrina), Kylie Richardson (Boroondara), Roya Shahgholi (Strathfield), and Mona Spottiswoode (Murray Island).



A representative of the Bahá'í community of Thailand at the opening of the Terraces

Notice of postponement

The joint Association for Bahá'í Studies-UNICEF human rights conference, "A Child-Centred Civilisation", which was to have been held in Canberra on 28-29 September, has been postponed until 2002.



AUSTRALIAN Baha'i Report

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Temple celebrates 40th anniversary

The 40th anniversary of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney will be celebrated with a weekend of festivities on 15-16 September.

The celebrations will include a wide range of activities for children, multicultural performances and a sausage sizzle on Saturday 15 September. All members of the public are warmly invited to attend.

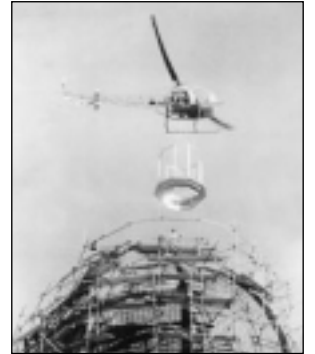
On Sunday morning, a special inter-faith service at the House of Worship will feature readings by representatives of different religions. It will be preceded by a formal reception.

In the afternoon, a multi-faith youth forum will be hosted in the Temple Information Centre by the World Conference on Religion and Peace - NSW branch. Young representatives from a number of religions will speak on the theme, "My Sacred Place".

The Bahá'í Temple, a well-known Sydney landmark, has been described by architectural historian Jennifer Taylor as one of four major religious edifices built in Sydney in the 20th century.

It is one of only seven Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the world.

It is hoped that the celebrations will make Sydney-siders aware that the Temple belongs to them, explained public information officer Natalie Mobini.



"We see the Temple as our gift to the community", she said. "It is a place where all people are welcome to come and pray or meditate in their own way."

Construction of the Temple commenced in 1957 under the supervision of architect John Brogan, and the building was dedicated on 17 September 1961. The building methods were innovative for the time, including the use of a helicopter to install the lantern at the top of the soaring white dome.

Over the past two years, the building has undergone major refurbishment to arrest concrete deterioration and take advantage of more modern building techniques.

The Bahá'í Temple is open to the public from 9 am to 5 pm every day of the year.



Eliminate racism, community groups urge



The Australian Bahá'í community joined other NGOs and community groups on 21 March in calling for the elimination of racism.

On 21 March 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid in Sharpeville, South Africa. The anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre is commemorated by the international community as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. It has also been nominated as Australia's Living in Harmony Day, celebrating Australia's diverse population.

On Living in Harmony Day this year, a coalition of groups called for problems of racism in Australia to be addressed seriously. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, members of migrant communities, and asylum seekers continue to experience racism, even though much has been achieved in this area.

World Conference against Racism

The groups encouraged community involvement in the preparation for the World Conference against Racism to be held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August-7 September.

The World Conference is the third global consultation on the problem of racism, and the first in the post-apartheid era. Representatives of government and community organisations will work on formulating an agreed global plan of action to address racism in the coming decade.

Community groups from around Australia have established the Australian NGO Working Group on the World Conference.

The working group has supported the production of the Australian community action kit against racism, which provides a range of practical activities that can be undertaken in support of the World Conference. Copies of the kit are available at the Human Rights Council of Australia website at www.ozemail.com.au/~hrca.

The working group is also facilitating dialogue with the Australian government and parliament on Australia's approach to the World Conference. It can be contacted at

wcar_australia@hotmail.com.

Local Bahá'í communities are involved in a national campaign in support of the World Conference including public meetings, approaches to local councils and other projects in support of the eradication of racism.

National Summit against Racism

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has convened a National Summit against Racism, involving representatives of over 70 community organisations. The two-day summit followed a youth summit also addressing racism.

Held in Canberra at the ACT Bahá'í Centre, the summit called on participants to review the causes of racism in Australia and the effectiveness of current strategies, and to suggest ways ahead.

The National Summit is being followed by regional consultations around the country to further develop strategies to address racism. The outcomes from the National Summit will form a background to these regional consultations.

More information on Australia's participation in the lead-up to and during the World Conference can be found at the website created by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission at www.humanrights.gov.au/worldconference.



Artwork by Chloe, a year six student, in Children's Voices for Reconciliation

First steps to overcome racism

The key challenge facing humanity is “laying the foundations of a global society that can reflect the oneness of human nature”, according to a statement of the Bahá’í International Community for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

“From this basic principle of the unity of the earth’s peoples is derived virtually all concepts concerning human liberty and well-being. If the human race is one, any notion that a particular racial, or national group is in some way superior to the rest of humanity must be dismissed”, said the statement.

According to the statement, which was presented to Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, racism has blighted human progress.

Noting that conscious, deliberate and sustained effort was required to overcome racism, the statement called for the implementation of appropriate legal measures to safeguard rights and opportunities for all and the adoption of educational initiatives to foster global citizenship and human solidarity. These should be “first steps” in overcoming racism.

The statement also highlighted the necessity of moral leadership from religious communities as a key component of any such effort.

“To ensure a constructive role for religion, however, the followers of all faiths must acknowledge the strife and suffering caused by those who have appropriated the symbols and instruments of religion for their own selfish purposes”, the statement warned.

“The challenge facing all religious leaders is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of social justice and peace”.

It is possible to both believe in God and be tolerant, the statement observed.

“Close your eyes to racial differences”, said the statement, quoting from the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, the founder of the Bahá’í Faith, “and welcome all with the light of oneness ... Blessed is he who mingleth with all men in a spirit of utmost kindness and love”.

Children’s voices for reconciliation

“Reconciliation is a big long word but it means people living side by side. Let’s respect and listen to each other”.

In these few words, Stephanie, a student at Redfern Public School, captured the essence of the reconciliation movement, according to Kerry McKenzie, one of the convenors of the Lane Cove Residents for Reconciliation.

Ms McKenzie was speaking at a reception preceding the special service for National Reconciliation Week held at the Bahá’í House of Worship on Sunday 3 June.

Stephanie’s quotation is included in a book of children’s thoughts on reconciliation which was launched on 31 May, explained the co-convenor of the group, Lorraine McGee-Sippel.

Titled Children’s Voices for Reconciliation, the book was produced by the Lane Cove Residents for Reconciliation working together with local schools in Lane Cove and Redfern Public School.

It is an example of what is being achieved by the grassroots reconciliation movement, which now comprises some 600 local reconciliation groups around the country.

Ms McGee-Sippel explained that she had been separated from her Aboriginal mother at birth, learning she was Aboriginal twenty years ago.

“Every non-indigenous person in this country has benefited from the dispossession, dispersal and disadvantage of Aboriginal people”, Ms McKenzie observed.

“Therefore, we have a responsibility to learn the truth of our history.

“There is no alternative for us to reconciliation”, Ms McKenzie concluded. “We can’t have peace, have harmony and nurture the spirit of our nation without it.

“The only way for us to heal our nation is to learn the truth and work together for reconciliation”.



Middle Eastern experience inspires outback film

A tale of love and oppression, set in the outback and focusing on the story of an Aboriginal-Afghani girl and a group of Lutheran missionaries, opened at cinemas in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide on 31 May.

The full-length feature film, *Serenades*, was written and directed by Mojgan Khadem, an Iranian-born Bahá'í from Adelaide. Shot on location around Leigh Creek in the South Australian outback, *Serenades* is Ms Khadem's first feature film. It stars Alice Haines and Aden Young. Producer Sandra Levy and director of photography Russell Boyd both have a long list of major films to their credit.

Serenades is set in the 1890s when German Lutheran missionaries were trying to bring Christianity to South Australia's Aboriginal people. It tells the story of a young woman, Jila, who has an Afghan father and an Aboriginal mother.

"The film does have a love story at the very centre of it," Ms Khadem said. "It's basically a journey of one woman through very diverse cultures and religions. And it's a journey where she is desperately searching for identity, for a sense of love."

The film received a positive review from Margaret Pomeranz on *The Movie Show* on SBS TV.



"Mojgan Khadem has created an insightful and compassionate story", she said. "The film looks wonderful ... performances are generally excellent".

"What's refreshing is the dignity Khadem allows to each culture, each religion", observed Pomeranz. "No-one is demonised here. For a first time director, dealing with the difficulties this production must have encountered, she's certainly achieved a lot".

Ms Khadem explained that in making the film, she drew on her own experience of being caught between different religions and cultures. She escaped from Iran with her family in 1978 due to religious persecution.

"And yet I had very close friends who were Muslims and I loved them," she said. "I needed to reconcile the whole religious thing ... I was appreciative of Muslim poetry and Muslim artistic expression and yet I had escaped a fanatical regime ... I needed to think about it and express it, and my way to express it was to tell a story"

"The diversity of religious belief and cultural belief that has really torn a lot of individual people into pieces ... that's the myth I wanted to tell".

Ms Khadem's family settled in Spain as refugees before migrating to Australia three years later. At 18 she was the youngest-ever student accepted into the Australian Film, Television and Radio School in Sydney, from which she graduated in 1991.

The film was well received at the Perth International Arts Festival, where it had its world premiere in February, and Ms Khadem is hoping for a similar reception elsewhere.

"I'm trying to just be detached from what's going to happen", she said. "I hope that it finds its audience. It's a tale of spiritual investigation, and so I wonder what kind of an audience there is out there.

"I set out to express something that I had an amazingly great urge to express. I had to tell this story. It was the film I needed to make."

Mojgan Khadem on the set of *Serenades*



Historical journey for Adelaide photographer

As a photographer on a metropolitan daily paper, Brenton Edwards spends most of his time covering politics, murders and accidents.

Photographing sites of historical Bahá'í interest around the world was, he says, "a wonderful change of pace".

Last year, Mr Edwards decided to follow in the footsteps of an arduous journey made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh.

In the early years of the twentieth century, 'Abdu'l-Bahá left his home in Haifa, then part of Palestine, to visit followers of the Bahá'í Faith across the United States and Europe. He addressed countless gatherings in churches, halls and private homes, speaking on unity, peace and tolerance.

Mr Edwards revisited the major points on his itinerary, including Paris, London, Montreal and New York, as well as Haifa in Israel, to take photographs for a collection to be published later this year.

"I've been working for the Adelaide Advertiser for the past 13 years, so this was a big change from what I do every day", said Mr Edwards.

"The project really began about six years ago, when I went on a Bahá'í pilgrimage to Haifa. It's similar to Jews visiting Jerusalem, or Muslims going to Mecca; we try to make this journey at least once in our lifetimes. I took a lot of photographs while I was there, and when I came back to Australia friends kept asking for copies.

"I had also given some copies to the Bahá'í bookshop in Haifa, but they sold out really quickly, and reprints also kept selling out. Eventually, a friend suggested I put all the photos I'd taken into a book".

As well as images of Haifa, Mr Edwards decided to take photographs in some of the cities 'Abdu'l-Bahá had visited.

"For me, it was a very exhausting trip", he said. "Five countries in three weeks puts a lot of pressure on you to get each image right.

"And although these are places which are very special to Bahá'ís, it was important for me to

work in the same way I would on the newspaper, taking each photo with an idea of how it will look on the page.

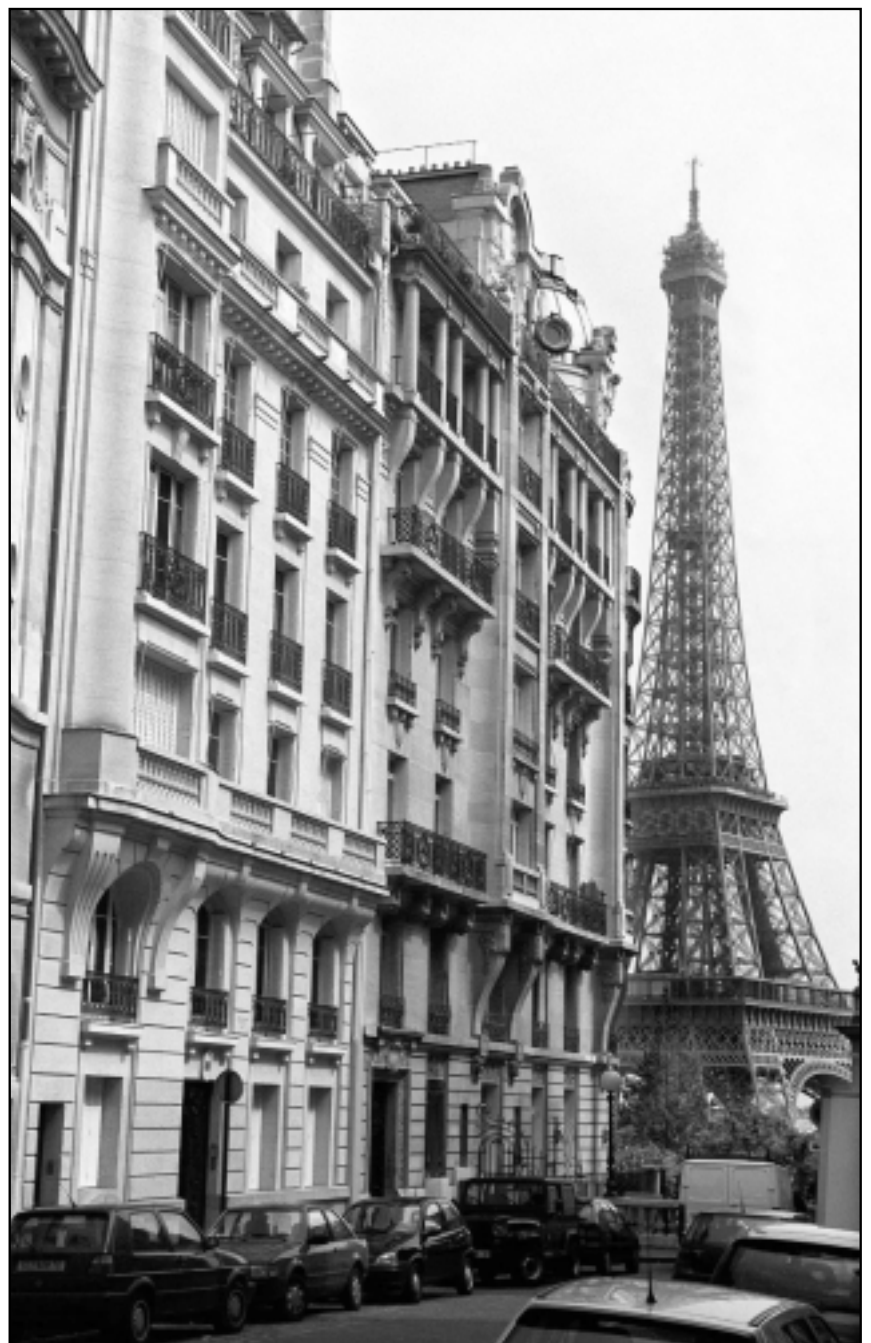
"What I hope, when the book is published, is that people will see places they haven't seen before, from an angle or in a certain light that they might not expect.

"It's my way of showing people a little bit about the Bahá'í Faith".

Mr Edwards' book is being published by British publisher George Ronald, and will be available in Australia later this year.



A view of the apartment building where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed in Paris



Sustainable development: the spiritual dimension

The Bahá'í International Community has urged the world's governments to make spiritual considerations more central to the development process.

In a statement to the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the community stated that "unless and until spiritual issues become central to the development process, the establishment of a sustainable global civilisation will prove impossible".

The statement acknowledged that the global action plans that emerged from the world conferences of the 1990s, beginning with the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, did recognise that individuals had spiritual needs. But it called on governments to move beyond generalities and to explore, in depth, the spiritual principles at the heart of development.

The expansion of inter-faith relations and initiatives such as the World Faiths Development Dialogue, the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and the Parliament of the World's Religions were suggested as a starting point for such analysis.

"In such work, religious and spiritual value systems are viewed not as separate from 'real world concerns,' but as vital sources of knowledge and motivation, as wellsprings of values, insights, and energy without which social cohesion and collective action are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve", it said.

"Ultimately, the creation of a peaceful and just global civilisation, in which the diverse peoples of the world live in harmony with one another and with the natural world, will require a significant reorientation of individual and collective goals and a profound transformation in attitudes and behaviours. Such far-reaching changes will come about only by addressing the non-material dimension of reality and drawing on humanity's vast spiritual resources".

The World Summit on Sustainable Development is scheduled to be held next year in Johannesburg, South Africa. It will focus on reviewing environmental progress made worldwide since the 1992 Earth Summit.

The full text of the statement can be found on the website of the Bahá'í World News Service, www.bahaiworldnews.org

Women launch inter-faith network

A Women's Inter-faith Network initiated by women from nine different faith groups was launched at Sydney's Parliament House on 22 March.

The launch was hosted by Rachael Kohn, presenter of the ABC radio program, *The Spirit of Things*.

The network aims to show that religion can be a force for unity, and that our very differences can engender understanding and respect.

Comprising women from the Aboriginal, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Quaker and Zoroastrian communities, the network hopes to link up with similar movements around the world, and to encourage new groups to establish themselves. Members are available for reference or as a personal resource for others who wish to take up the challenge.

"Like a genuine friendship, inter-faith dialogue is a living thing, which necessitates, if it does not spontaneously effect, changes in the way we view each other and the way we view ourselves", Dr Kohn observed as she launched the network. "There is no genuine relationship which does not change the people involved".

Bahá'í and Buddhist representatives at the launch of the Women's Inter-faith Network



Book review: Elect the Ambassador!

In *Elect the Ambassador!* Duncan Kerr presents a challenging examination of the impact of globalisation on democratic governance.

Beginning with the question, "Why do people who have won the democratic right to choose their own leaders feel powerless and alienated?" the book explores the thesis that citizens have become powerless as decision-making has increasingly moved from national to global level.

The book faces the issues of globalisation head on, noting that global government already exists, even though it has evolved piecemeal and its constitution is largely unwritten.

"A vast number of important decisions, often shrouded in secrecy, are being taken by global government," it says.

But global government, unlike national government, is almost completely outside democratic control.

Rather than adding to the voices of doom, however, the book presents an analysis of what

needs to be done to successfully address the problems of globalisation.

"Citizens should begin to insist on the democratisation of global government," it says. The absence of democracy at global level presents a danger of increased conflict, greater racialism and ultra-nationalism, and growing social divisions.

"The challenge for those of us who value democracy is to extend the argument for direct citizen involvement that has been won at local and national levels to the international sphere. Without the consent of the governed there is no right to govern."

Kerr presents ten proposals for increasing democratisation at international level, including the suggestion of establishing democratic endorsement of national nominees for international posts, hence "electing the ambassador".

Elect the Ambassador! is published by Pluto Press Australia (www.plutoaustralia.com)



National Convention in Wollongong

The Bahá'í national convention was held in Wollongong from 26 to 29 April.

Attended by 95 delegates from around the country, the convention is held annually to elect the nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, the religion's peak governing body in this country.

The members of the National Assembly for the coming year are John Davidson (Hobart), Naysan Faizi (Brisbane), Stephen Hall (Sydney), Fiona McDonald (Perth), Fariborz Moshirian (Sydney), Philip Obah (Kururrungku, WA), Bijan Samali (Sydney), Marjorie Tidman (Perth), and John Walker (Toowoomba).

Bahá'í Councils to be formed in each state

A key topic at the convention was the Bahá'í Councils which will be elected for the first time in every state and the Northern Territory later this year.

"The formation of Bahá'í councils will be an historic occasion for us", explained Stephen

Hall, who was re-elected as secretary of the National Assembly.

"As well as the decentralisation of resources, it involves the gradual devolution of decision-making authority to the state level".

In addition to providing pastoral care for the Bahá'ís of each state, the Councils will represent the Bahá'í community on an official level, working with other community groups towards shared goals like the elimination of prejudice, the advancement of women, human rights and the education of children.

Members of the National
Spiritual Assembly

