

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

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A special service at the Bahá'í House of Worship on Sunday 14 October was part of the national program of events for Austcare National Refugee Week.

At a reception prior to the service, Patricia Garcia spoke about the plight of refugees and the work of Austcare in assisting them.

Concerned at the serious global situation for refugees and displaced persons, the Bahá'í community has consistently advocated that Australia should maintain its long-standing commitment to assisting refugees, and has called on the Australian government to uphold its international obligations and to adhere to

the international treaties and agreements to which it is a party.

The flow of refugees is a global issue that requires a global response based on consultation between all governments. At the heart of any solutions, in the view of the Bahá'í community, should be the principle of the oneness of humanity, respect for basic human rights, and the concept of world citizenship.

Bahá'í refugees escaping from religious persecution in Iran have been grateful for the welcome they have received in Australia over the past two decades. Since 1979, Australia has admitted up to 5000 Iranian Bahá'í refugees.



## Cricketers bowl 'em over in Fiji

A team of young Bahá'í cricketers has returned from an eighteen-day, nine-match tour of Fiji with an undefeated record.

The theme of the tour was "Building character through sport". In addition to playing a series of matches, the players spoke at local schools about the value of sport in the development of universal virtues like perseverance, courage and determination.

The theme continued on the field, with the presentation of certificates to opposing players who had displayed virtues during each match.

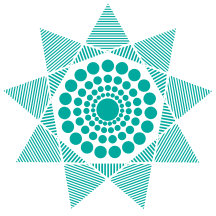
The tour had several aims, according to Stephen Hall, the National Secretary of the Australian Bahá'í community, who also acted as

the team manager.

"We wanted to gather a group of Bahá'í youths, build international friendship, and provide a bit of competition against teams in Fiji, particularly the national Under 19 team", he said.

"But overall we wanted to promote spiritual principles through sport. Sport in Australia is becoming more and more like a business, but what we wanted to show was that people can also be educated through sports".

For the record, the Australian team, which included one female player, won seven of its nine matches. The other two were drawn due to bad weather and bad light.



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A newsletter of the Australian Baha'i community

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## Racism expert to visit Sydney

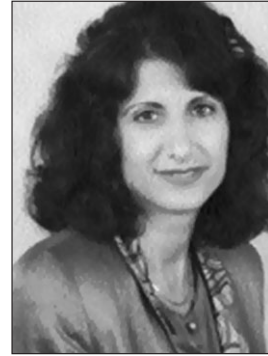
The director of an innovative program to assist university students to overcome racial barriers will make a two-week visit to Sydney from 20 January to 4 February.

Dr Jeanne Gazel has been invited by the Bahá'í community to present lectures and workshops on the theme of overcoming racism to build community within diversity.

She will present a keynote address at Parliament House, Macquarie Street on the evening of Friday 1 February. Other engagements include an address to the monthly "Turning Point" women's dinner on 23 January, and workshops in all parts of Sydney and in Wollongong.

Dr Gazel is the co-founder and director of the Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience (MRULE), a unique program that offers students living in residential halls at Michigan State University opportunities to increase knowledge and understanding of what they can do to contribute to positive race relations in their lives and on campus.

Through round table discussions, community service projects, interactive exercises and a



variety of experiences that encourage the development of genuine friendships, students create and cultivate the experience of multi-racial unity.

Dr Gazel, who is a Bahá'í, holds a PhD in American Studies with specialties in Race

Relations, Women's Studies, and Race/Class/Gender Intersectionality. She spent two years in South Africa researching community arts and race relations as a Fulbright scholarship recipient.

Dr Gazel's visit is part of a month-long project by the Sydney Bahá'í community. Other events to be held during the project include a children's arts festival at the Bahá'í House of Worship and a series of sporting events, all focused on the theme of building community harmony.

For further information, please contact the Office of Public Information on (02) 9877 5826.

## Bahá'í Centre of Learning opens in Western Australia

The Bahá'í Centre of Learning in Melville, Perth was officially opened by the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency Lieutenant General John Sanderson, on 18 August.

The new facility, which has been four years in the planning, is intended to offer a range of courses based on Bahá'í principles and spirituality to the general public, as well as meeting the educational needs of Bahá'í adults, youth and children.

The Bahá'í Centre of Learning is located at the corner of Marmion Avenue and North Lake Road, Myaree.



## Foundation honours mother and son

In Tasmania, a new foundation has been created in response to the tragic passing of Soheila Mirkazemi and her 13-year-old son, Naveed, who died in a horrific car accident in Hobart in December 2000.

The Naveed Foundation is an initiative of the Mirkazemi family and close friends who wanted to create a lasting and befitting legacy that honoured their lives and their service to the Bahá'í community.

The Foundation aims to promote, encourage and carry out Bahá'í-inspired social and economic development projects by providing funding and project guidance to communities around Australia and throughout the Pacific.

Its first project is the purchase of land and the construction of a Bahá'í Centre for Tasmania.

Situated in a prominent location alongside the ABC building at the gateway to Hobart, this building is being designed not only as a centre for the activities of the Tasmanian Bahá'í

community, but also as a centre of learning, offering educational and spiritual programs.

It will also provide a venue for use by other non-governmental organisations and community groups that are aligned with the Bahá'í principles of peace and unity.

Naveed's 10-year-old sister, Monna Mirkazemi, suffered serious injuries in the accident, which left her blind and partially paralysed. She and her father, Pedram, who was not in the car at the time of the accident, have received an outpouring of public support since the tragedy.



## Bahá'í Councils formed in each state

While national attention was fixed on the federal election in November, the Australian Bahá'í community was conducting its own historic ballot.

For the first time, community members around the country voted to elect a Bahá'í Council for each state or territory.

Complementing the national and local Spiritual Assemblies that have been elected annually in Australia since the 1930s, the Bahá'í Councils will represent the Bahá'í community at the state level.

They will provide a central contact point for the community, and will be responsible for planning Bahá'í activities in each state and territory.

The Bahá'í Councils will also coordinate the community's work with other groups towards shared goals such as the elimination of racism and other forms of prejudice, the advancement of women, human rights and the education of children.

### Unique election process

The Bahá'í Faith is unique among religions because the ordinary members elect their religious institutions from among themselves every year.

There is no equivalent to the priesthood.

A further characteristic feature of the Bahá'í elections is that candidates, nominations, and electioneering are strictly forbidden. All adult members are eligible to be voted for. The election is seen as a spiritual process which should be conducted in a prayerful atmosphere.

In the recent elections, the recipients of the highest number of votes in five of the seven Councils were women, reflecting the emphasis placed on women playing a full role in the affairs of the Bahá'í community. A high proportion of the Council members live in rural or regional areas rather than metropolitan centres.

Each Council has nine members except that of the Northern Territory, which, because of the smallness of the population, has five. New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory share one Council.

While they are establishing their offices, Bahá'í Councils can be contacted by email at [secretariat@\[state\].bahai.org.au](mailto:secretariat@[state].bahai.org.au) (for example, [secretariat@vic.bahai.org.au](mailto:secretariat@vic.bahai.org.au)).

# Religions come together in prayer

More than 1000 people gathered in the Bahá'í House of Worship in Mona Vale, Sydney to attend an interfaith service on Sunday 16 September.

Worshippers filled the mezzanine floor and spilled out of the doorways as representatives of the major religions shared readings from their sacred texts.

Originally planned as part of the celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the Bahá'í Temple, the service brought together members of different religions to remember the victims of the terrorist attacks in the United States, and to pray together for peace in the world.

The readers were Sister Trish Madigan from the Catholic Commission for Ecumenism; Sarosh Batliwalla, representative of the Zoroastrian community; Aziza Abdel Halim, President of the Muslim Women's National Network of Australia; Josie Lacey, member of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies; Gerard Brennan from the Rama Krishna Sarada Vedanta Society; the Abbot from the Kwanum Korean Buddhist Temple; and representatives of the Bahá'í community.

"This act of coming together shows that what unites us is stronger than what divides us", said Bahá'í representative Natalie Mobini.

"As people of faith, we need to demonstrate that love and unity are stronger than violence and hate".

## 40th anniversary marked

At a reception held prior to the service to mark the 40th anniversary, the Hon John Hatzistergos MLC, representing the Premier of New South Wales, spoke on the theme, "Unity in Diversity". A message from the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Philip Ruddock, was also read.

In the afternoon, an inter-faith youth forum was held in the Temple Information Centre.

Organised by the World Conference on Religion and Peace NSW branch, the forum brought together young people from the Quaker, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and Bahá'í communities. Each participant offered their own perspective on the theme "My sacred place".

Following the talks, audience members took the opportunity to question the young representatives on how they would address the serious problems the world is facing.

A well-known landmark on Sydney's northern beaches, the Bahá'í Temple 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.



*A Pacific Islander dance group performs at the 40th anniversary celebrations for the Bahá'í House of Worship*



# Recognising the oneness of humanity

In the month of September, the Australian Bahá'í community distributed a statement on the oneness of humanity to all federal Members of Parliament and Senators.

Originally prepared as a follow-up to the World Conference against Racism, held in South Africa in the first week of September, the statement (below) became all the more pertinent in the light of subsequent events, both in Australia and overseas.

Bahá'ís believe that recognition of the oneness of humanity, a core principle of their faith, is the only constructive starting point for dealing with the problems facing the world.

"The Oneness of Humanity" is based on "One Same Substance: Consciously Creating a Global Culture of Unity", a statement by the Bahá'í International Community to the World Conference against Racism. A full copy can be found at [www.bic-un.bahai.org/01-0831.htm](http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/01-0831.htm).

The earth  
is but one  
country  
and  
mankind  
its citizens

## The oneness of humanity

Racism originates not in the skin but in the human mind. Remedies to racial prejudice, xenophobia and intolerance must accordingly address those mental illusions that have given rise to false concepts of superiority and inferiority among human populations.

At the root of all forms of discrimination and intolerance is the mistaken idea that humankind is composed of separate and distinct races, peoples or castes, and that those sub-groups possess varying intellectual, moral, and/or physical capacities, which in turn justify different forms of treatment.

The reality is that there is only the one human race. We are a single people, inhabiting the planet Earth - one human family bound together in a common destiny, a single entity created from one same substance, obligated to "be even as one soul".

A proper understanding of the oneness of humanity can carry humanity beyond intermediate notions of tolerance or multiculturalism - concepts that are important stepping-stones to building a peaceful, just and unified world but insufficient for the eradication of such deeply rooted afflictions as racism.

The reality of human oneness is endorsed by science. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, sociology and, most recently, genetics, in its decoding of the human genome, demonstrate that there is only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. The world's great religions likewise uphold the principle. The Founders of the world's great religions have all promised that one day peace

and justice would prevail and all humanity would be united.

The contemporary realisation of humanity's oneness comes after a historic process in which individuals were fused into ever-greater units. Moving from clans, to tribes, to city-states, to nations, the next inevitable step for humanity is the creation of a global civilisation. As stated by Bahá'u'lláh more than 100 years ago, "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens".

Further, as explained in the Bahá'í writings, the oneness of humanity "implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarisation of the whole civilised world - a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units."

In considering the themes of the World Conference against Racism, a proper understanding of the oneness of humanity holds a number of implications.

It implies that any law, tradition or mental construct that grants superior rights or privileges to one grouping of humanity over another is not only morally wrong but fundamentally at odds with the best interests of even those who consider themselves to be in some way superior.

It implies that nation-states, as the building blocks of a global civilisation, must hold to



*Members of the Bahá'í  
International Community  
delegation to the World  
Conference against Racism*

common standards of rights and take active steps to purge from their laws, traditions and practices any form of discrimination based on race, nationality or ethnic origin.

It implies that justice must be the ruling principle of social organisation, a corollary principle that calls for widespread measures on the part of governments, their agencies, and civil society to address economic injustice at all levels.

Issues of xenophobia in relation to contemporary problems of minority diasporas, the uneven application of citizenship laws, and refugee resettlement can likewise best be addressed in the light of humanity's oneness and the concept of world citizenship.

Further, the principle of the oneness of humanity exposes any attempt to distinguish separate "races" or "peoples" in the contemporary world as artificial and misleading. While racial, national and/or ethnic heritage can be considered as sources of pride and even a backdrop for positive social development, such distinctions should not become a basis for new forms of separation or superiority, however subtle.

Over the years, the Bahá'í Community has supported or called for specific actions in support of human oneness and the fight against racism, including:

- the widespread promotion of international educational campaigns that would teach the

organic oneness of humankind, involving national and local governments, as well as non-governmental organisations.

- the widespread ratification of, and adherence to, international instruments, which represent humankind's collective conscience and might contribute to a comprehensive legal regime for combating racism and racial discrimination, especially the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.
- the worldwide promotion of human rights education, with the aim of creating a "culture of human rights."

The principle of human oneness is not another way of talking about the ideal of brotherhood or solidarity. It reflects, rather, an eternal spiritual, moral and physical reality that has been brought into focus because, for the first time in history, it has become possible for all of the peoples of the world to perceive their interdependence and to become conscious of their wholeness.

The expression of the oneness of humanity is the motive force underlying the diverse challenges facing our global community. Until this issue is acknowledged and addressed, none of the ills afflicting our planet will find solution, because all of the essential challenges of the age we have entered are global and universal not particular or regional.

## International spirit in Mt Gambier

The Bahá'í community of the South Australian country town Mt Gambier hosted its tenth annual international dinner on 10 November.

More than 180 adults and children enjoyed a sumptuous range of international dishes. The meals were prepared by the participants themselves, who represented more than twenty different national backgrounds.

"Now more than ever before, it is necessary to bring people together to share what is common between us", said local organiser Stephen Bolton.

"It is hoped that through the sharing of food, we can create an opportunity to develop friendships and enjoy the best that each culture has to offer.

It is a reminder that cultural diversity can enrich all our lives," Mr Bolton said.

This year the organisers were joined by the Multicultural Committee of Mount Gambier. The event was also supported by a small grant from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.



## Teacher of the Year inspired by Bahá'í ideas

The winner of a prestigious university teaching award says that his creed in teaching is inspired by Bahá'í philosophy.

Dr Duane Varan was presented with the Prime Minister's Award for University Teacher of the Year at a ceremony held at Parliament House in Canberra in December.

He also won the Australian Award for University Teaching in Economics, Business and Related Studies. Together, the two awards are worth \$75,000.

Director of the Interactive Television Research Institute and a lecturer in electronic marketing and advertising at Murdoch University, Dr Varan takes up the inaugural Chair of New Media at Murdoch in January.

Since coming to Australia from the United States in 1997, he has become known as one of Australia's foremost authorities on digital communication, marketing and interactive television.

*Dr Duane Varan accepts his award as University Teacher of the Year*



Dr Varan says that his educational creed is drawn from the Bahá'í International Community's statement to the United Nations World Summit on Social Development, entitled "The Prosperity of Humankind".

"In that statement I discovered my creed which suddenly brought everything I was trying to do as an educator into sharp focus", he says.

"Effective teaching is about 'creating an environment conducive to releasing the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness'."

"We spend too much time in universities competing with others instead of competing with ourselves", Dr Varan explains.

"In my approach, I educate my students that they are not competing with each other, that this is about them achieving their full potential, and about me doing whatever I can to help.

"When you start believing in your students and you treat them like they do have that potential, they rise to achieve".

The success of Dr Varan's approach is borne out by the testimony of his students. "He makes you want to learn", said one. "Prof. Varan and his course are inspiring", according to another student. "He pushed me to heights above what I thought was attainable".

Dr Varan, who has been a Bahá'í all his life, was elected as a member of the first Bahá'í Council for Western Australia in November.

## Persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran: an update

Despite continued international condemnation, recent events show that the persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran, which dates back to the Islamic revolution of 1979, is continuing.

The short-term detention of individuals has become a widespread means of harassing the Bahá'í community. Since 1998 at least 70 individuals have been detained in different parts of the country for periods ranging from one or two days to 30 months.

The Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education, a correspondence-based institution established by the Bahá'í community in response to the denial of access by Bahá'í youth to higher education, continues to function under difficult circumstances following the coordinated raids against it that took place in 1998.

In September a judge of the Supreme Office of Control and Review upheld a 1999 verdict which declared that "all equipment and properties related to the operations of the

misguided sect used for the purpose of reported education matters ... must be surrendered to the Staff of the Executive Command of His Holiness the Imam to be used for religiously approved activities". This equipment included computers and other office equipment as well as residential property.

Private Bahá'í ownership of property is not respected. In November it was reported that in the preceding two to three months, courts had ordered the confiscation of 14 houses owned by Bahá'ís in Yazd, Isfahan, Shiraz and Tehran.

On a more positive note, two Bahá'í prisoners were released in October. Five Bahá'ís are known to remain imprisoned in Iran because of their religion, with sentences ranging from seven years imprisonment to death.

### UN adopts resolution

On 30 November, the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in

Iran. The resolution included a strongly-worded reference to the Bahá'ís in three operative paragraphs.

Reflecting a long-standing bipartisan approach, Australia was one of 34 countries to co-sponsor the resolution. It was adopted by 71 votes in favour and 53 against, with 41 abstentions.

The UN resolution maintains international scrutiny and provides a focus for international concern about human rights in Iran, including the situation of the Bahá'ís. Over the years, the resolution has maintained international pressure and thereby limited violations of human rights. Nevertheless, Bahá'í institutions continue to be banned and individual Bahá'ís continue to face persecution, imprisonment and systematic discrimination.

The Australian Bahá'í community has expressed its gratitude for Australia's role in the successful adoption of the resolution to the Hon Alexander Downer MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

## The Promise of World Peace

The 1986 International Year of Peace was one of the most widely-supported international years ever held by the United Nations. Yet, after the passage of almost two decades, peace remains an elusive and unfulfilled hope.

Much has changed since 1986. The end of the Cold War and the accelerating process of globalisation have strengthened the world's capacity to make real strides towards peace. At the same time, the eruption of new conflicts, the rise of religious fanaticism, and the ever-growing gulf between rich and poor have ensured that much of the world's population lives in conditions further removed from peace and prosperity than ever before.

"The Promise of World Peace", a statement to the people of the world issued by the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith for the International Year of Peace, examines why peace has not been achieved, and the issues that must be confronted before a peaceful world can be realised.

Peace is not only possible, it is inevitable, the statement says. The choice facing us all is whether peace is to be achieved "after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour" or is to be

embraced as an "act of consultative will".

In 2002, we have entered a new millennium, yet this choice remains before us.

The insights offered by "The Promise of World Peace" have never seemed more relevant – insights about human nature, about the role of materialism in human affairs, and about the nonetheless hopeful signs in the history of the twentieth century. Racism, economic inequality, unbridled nationalism, religious conflict, the inequality of men and women and lack of universal education are identified as core challenges that must be overcome before peace can be realised.

Painting for us a vision of a world in which human divisions have been overcome, the statement calls on us to summon "the courage, the resolution, the pure motive, the selfless love of one people for another" to generate the will to act.

The Australian Bahá'í community is currently undertaking a campaign to distribute "The Promise of World Peace". Copies can be obtained from the Office of Public Information by calling (02) 9877 5826 or email [opi@bahai.org.au](mailto:opi@bahai.org.au). The full statement can also be found on the web at [www.bahai.org/article-1-7-2-1.html](http://www.bahai.org/article-1-7-2-1.html)

