

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

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The first full, authorised English translation of a collection of letters addressed by Bahá'u'lláh to the kings and rulers of the world has been published.

The letters were written in the 1860s when Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, was exiled for His religious teaching in Adrianople and subsequently banished to the fortress town of Akka.

The collection includes the Suriy-i-Haykal, which incorporates messages addressed to Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III, Czar Alexander II, Queen Victoria, and Nasiri'd-Din Shah; the Suriy-i-Ra'is and Lawh-i-Ra'is, both addressed to Ali Pasha, the Ottoman Prime Minister; the Lawh-i-Fu'ad, on the subject of the former Ottoman statesman Fu'ad Pasha; and the Suriy-i-Muluk, addressed collectively to the kings of the earth.

Clearly setting out the character and purpose of His mission, these writings introduce some of the themes that were to figure prominently in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh for the remainder of His life.

These themes include the obligation of rulers to institute the reign of justice, the necessity for the reduction of armaments and the resolution of conflicts among nations, and an end to the excessive expenditures that were impoverishing these rulers' subjects. These themes are illustrated in the following extracts.

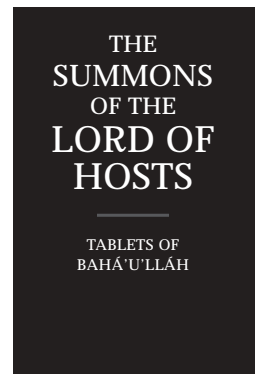
The Summons of the Lord of Hosts will be available through the Bahá'í Distribution Service on 1800 251 022.

"Lay not aside the fear of God, O kings of the earth, and beware that ye transgress not the bounds which the Almighty hath fixed. Observe the injunctions laid upon you in His Book, and take good heed not to overstep their limits. Be vigilant, that ye may not do injustice to anyone, be it to the extent of a grain of mustard seed. Tread ye the path of justice, for this, verily, is the straight path."

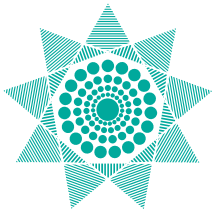
"O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof, if ye be of them that scan heedfully."

"O kings of the earth! We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust ... Your people are your treasures. Beware lest your rule violate the commandments of God, and ye deliver your wards to the hands of the robber. By them ye rule, by their means ye subsist, by their aid ye conquer. Yet, how disdainfully ye look upon them! How strange, how very strange!"

"Know ye that the poor are the trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust, that ye deal not unjustly with them and that ye walk not in the ways of the treacherous."



Bahá'í artist Kath Podger constructed a portrait of Effie Baker, the first Australian woman to join the Bahá'í Faith, as part of Peoplescape, the finale event for the Centenary of Federation. The portrait was one of thousands that were installed on the slopes surrounding Parliament House, Canberra in December 2001 to depict individuals who had significantly affected our lives, our community and our country.



# AUSTRALIAN Baha'i Report

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## Call for religious leaders to act against prejudice

The international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith has called on the world's religious leaders to act decisively against "the rising fires of religious prejudice".

In a seven-page message released in May, the Universal House of Justice, the elected governing body of the Bahá'í community, said, "organised religion, whose very reason for being entails service to the cause of brotherhood and peace, behaves all too frequently as one of the most formidable obstacles in the path".

"To cite a particular painful fact, it has long lent its credibility to fanaticism. We feel a responsibility, as the governing council of one of the world religions, to urge earnest consideration of the challenge this poses for religious leadership".

The message observes that although prejudices of race, ethnicity, gender and nation have been widely discredited, the same reorientation has not occurred in relation to religious prejudice. The consequences have been "ruinous" - from the religious wars of past centuries to the horrors caused today by "outbursts of fanaticism that shame the name of religion".

The message asserts that governments alone cannot overcome the danger posed by religious prejudice.

"Nor should we delude ourselves that appeals for mutual tolerance can alone hope to extinguish animosities that claim to possess Divine sanction".

Rather, it is religious leadership, still a uniquely powerful force in the lives of uncounted millions, that has a vital role to play.

Citing the call of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, to "cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you", the message calls on religious leaders to give confirmation to the growing realisation that the essential truth



Seat of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Israel

underlying all religions is one.

"God is one and ... beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one".

The House of Justice stresses that it does not call for abandonment of faith in any of the world's great belief systems.

"The primary task of the soul will always be to investigate reality, to live in accordance with the truths of which it becomes persuaded and to accord full respect to the efforts of others to do the same".

The message is a plea for religious leaders to respond, for the sake of the wellbeing of humankind, to this historic challenge of the 21st century.

The message to the world's religious leaders will be shared with heads of religion by the Bahá'í community around the world, including in Australia. A copy of the full message is available on the Web at <http://www.bahai.org/article-1-1-0-1.html>.



Patsy Mudge and Sue Obah from north Western Australia address the National Convention

## Convention held in Alice

Alice Springs was the historic venue for the Bahá'í National Convention held in late April this year.

It was the first time the event had been held in Alice Springs, and recognised the town's significance as the spiritual and geographical heart of the continent.

About 90 delegates from around the country came for the annual election of the National Spiritual Assembly -- the governing council of the Australian Bahá'í community.

The delegates consulted on the affairs of the community and provided suggestions and recommendations to the incoming National Assembly.

Bahá'í elections are held in a prayerful atmosphere and nominations and electioneering are strictly forbidden.

Any adult member of the Bahá'í community is eligible to be voted for. Voters are required to consider those who combine qualities of devotion, loyalty, ability, experience, and a well-trained mind.

The National Spiritual Assembly has been elected annually since its formation in 1934. Members elected in April were 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).



## Equality Office gets started

The new Bahá'í Office for the Equality of Women and Men held its first meeting with members of its regional network in Melbourne in June.

The network was established to help the Office promote the principle of gender equality in the Bahá'í community and beyond.

The Office replaces the National Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women.

The Office and the network include both men and women, a feature settled on after extensive consultations in every state and territory and consideration of a report on the advancement of women in the Australian Bahá'í community.

The Bahá'í community believes any effort to promote improvement in the status of women in a comprehensive way must involve changes in men's thought and behaviour.

Improving the status of women is not only a women's issue, it is a human issue -- and it is time to call men into action in this arena.

The Office will work through the regional network to carry out transformative education programs, develop and implement specific projects, and to promote regular innovative forums to evaluate progress on this issue in the Bahá'í community.

The Office will also develop relations with Government agencies and NGOs, engage in appropriate forums, and develop and promote position statements.

The equality of women and men is a fundamental teaching of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'ís believe that the achievement of full equality between the sexes is one of the most important, though less acknowledged, prerequisites for peace in the world.

The Bahá'í Office for the Equality of Women and Men can be contacted at [equality@bahai.org.au](mailto:equality@bahai.org.au) or at the ACT Bahá'í Centre, 18 Hickey Court, Weston, ACT 2611.

# Australian Bahá'ís at UN Special Session

Two representatives of the Australian Bahá'í community attended the United Nations Special Session on Children in New York from 4-8 May.

Alice Springs GP Dr Mania Yazdani-Zonozi and Sydney lawyer Shirin Mohebbaty were at the event which was devoted to an end-of-decade review of the follow-up to the 1990 World Summit for Children.

The Session was postponed from its original date in September 2001 due to the New York terrorist attacks.

Government leaders, NGOs, children's advocates and children explored long-standing obstacles to young people's wellbeing and development, as well as new challenges to the promotion and protection of their rights.

The Session culminated in the adoption by the General Assembly of an Outcome Document, "A World Fit for Children", containing a declaration and plan of action for the promotion of children's rights into the 21st century and beyond.

## Children's voices

27-year-old Ms Mohebbaty said that one of the highlights was hearing children speak about their own experiences.

"In one forum, girls under the age of 18 were invited to speak about their personal and national situations related to girls' rights", she said.

"A Columbian girl said, 'We women have been taught to be silent, we are human beings and have dreams too.' A Pakistani child spoke about projects in her country to empower young girls living in the slums.

"A child delegate from India representing the Bahá'í International Community also spoke at this forum. It was an incredibly moving event".

For the first time in UN history, two children, representing the Children's Forum, were permitted to address the UN General Assembly.

"We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone", said 13-year-old Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta from Bolivia.

"We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them",

added Audrey Chenynut, 17, from Monaco.

"We are not expenses; we are investments. We are not just young people; we are people and citizens of this world.

"We are the children of the world, and despite our different backgrounds, we share a common reality. We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all. You call us the future, but we are also the present".

## Commitments for action

All governments and NGOs were invited to make commitments for action in the following years. The Bahá'í International Community committed its agencies around the world to seek effective ways to promote the well-being of all children, continue to advocate for universal child education and to provide moral education to children in schools, seek to protect children from sexual exploitation, promote healthy lives and combat HIV/AIDS, and encourage participation of children and youth by empowering them through material, spiritual, physical and intellectual education and through service opportunities.

"We believe that the Special Session went a long way towards painting an accurate picture of the plight of children around the world, and, more importantly, creating a united will to address the problems identified", said Ms Mohebbaty.



Shirin Mohebbaty with a child delegate at the Special Session

Clown Nine is a Melbourne-based performing arts group set up to bring happiness into the hearts of children, wherever they may be: hospitals, festivals, youth centres. The five Bahá'í youth use the Virtues program and Bahá'í principles as a base for all their shows



# Religion, cultural diversity and social cohesion

Faith communities have the ingredients to underpin Australia's well-being and social and moral capacity.

That's according to the Australian Bahá'í community's recent submission to the inquiry into Religion, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion in Contemporary Australia.

The submission says that faith communities collectively represent the majority of Australians and share in common the eternal spiritual principles of love, justice and unity.

The inquiry is being conducted by the World Conference on Religion and Peace in association with the Australian Multicultural Foundation together with RMIT and Monash Universities.

There is tremendous potential for joint action by the various faith communities on social and moral matters of shared concern, according to the submission, which cites the example of the former Advisory Group on Faith Communities to the National Council for Reconciliation (now Faith Communities for Reconciliation).

"The underlying spiritual principles of all the religions are the same. Inter-faith cooperation and activity should be based on the many principles and concerns that we share in common", it says.

"Faith communities should emphasise that the individual's spiritual fulfilment and well-being are tied up with the collective progress of the entire community.

"Through service and an active commitment to justice and unity, religion can bring an enormous, positive force to bear on Australia's social development."

## Religion and state

On the subject of the relationship between religion and state, the submission argues that in the current context, in which Australians hold diverse religious beliefs, it is not appropriate for any religion to be accorded special treatment or status by the state.

"At the same time", it continues, "religious communities and the state can cooperate with each other, in an environment of tolerance and friendship between all religious beliefs, for the welfare of the community as a whole.

"The unique contribution to be made by the religious communities is to voice the need for the spiritual aspects of life not to be neglected by government. The health of the community depends on achieving a balance between spiritual and material aspirations, and it is unhealthy for the processes of government to be regarded as a purely material pursuit focussed on competing self-interest, or even pursuit of limited concepts of 'national interest'.

"Accordingly, we would support the holding of multi-faith services to mark important national occasions and the establishment of a commonwealth interfaith council."

According to the submission, the areas of most serious concern to the Bahá'í community in contemporary Australia are the eradication of racism through recognition of the oneness of humanity; the need for religious leaders to overcome traditional differences and work together for the advancement of understanding and peace; and reconciliation with indigenous Australians.

It also expresses concern about attacks made on members of the Jewish and Muslim communities, including attacks on their places of worship.



Representatives of nine faiths and Indigenous communities joined guests at a dawn function to open Griffith University's Multi-Faith Centre on 23 May.



The New Era Bahá'í Choir, pictured above on the South Perth foreshore, performed at Perth's Government House on 3 June to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II and Foundation Day. Comprising members of diverse ages and backgrounds, the aim of the choir is "to uplift the spirit and promote equality and harmony through soul-stirring, thought-provoking music and loving joyful performance."

## Racism “an affront to dignity”

A submission on the ACT Government's discussion paper Facing up to Racism describes racism as "an affront to human dignity" which "retards the development of its victims, corrupts its perpetrators and blights human progress".

The submission, prepared jointly by the ACT Bahá'í community and the Bahá'í Council for NSW and ACT, offers the oneness of humanity, unity in diversity and the equality of women and men as foundational principles for the development of effective strategies to address issues of racism and discrimination.

Seven recommendations are offered for action towards eradicating racism. They are:

- review of school curricula to integrate concepts of global citizenship
- consideration of the role moral education can play in addressing programs of racism
- piloting of race unity groups
- development of a human rights education plan of action
- establishment of an advisory interfaith committee to the ACT government
- commissioning of a study on the special impact of racism on women
- development of a program to encourage individuals to take personal responsibility to overcome barriers across racial and cultural boundaries.

Copies of the submission can be obtained by emailing [tessa.scrine@bnc.bahai.org.au](mailto:tessa.scrine@bnc.bahai.org.au)

### New Working Group on Racism

The new National Bahá'í Working Group on Racism held its first meeting in May.

The working group will promote Bahá'í principles that combat racism and build unity amongst people, address the internal challenges of the Bahá'í community with regard to racism, and engage in social and economic development projects to support healing and community building.

Its first priority is to develop an educational program to be implemented through community-based "study circles" at which participants have an opportunity to share experiences in order to heal racial relationships.

The working group can be contacted through its secretary, Mr Farvardin Daliri, at [fdaliri@beyond.net.au](mailto:fdaliri@beyond.net.au)

Participants at the recent National Convention in Alice Springs



# Bahá'í Faith on the Web

Over the past five years, the Bahá'í community has embraced the World Wide Web as a means for communication and dialogue.

A search for the word "Bahá'í" on a popular search engine can bring back many thousands of sites to visit - so where should you begin to find the most accurate and up-to-date online information about the Bahá'í Faith?

The official, international Bahá'í presence on the web is <http://www.bahai.org>.

This excellent resource covers the full spectrum of Bahá'í life and activity, beginning with introductory essays about the Faith's history, teachings and principles.

Attracting well over fifty thousand visits per month from all over the world, the site also carries up-to-date statistics and the chance to read official Bahá'í statements on a broad range of social issues.

Many of these statements have come from the Bahá'í International Community, which is a recognised non-governmental organisation at the United Nations.

The BIC's site, <http://www.bic-un.bahai.org>, gives free access to hundreds of documents prepared by Bahá'í representatives for discussions and summits since the 1940s.

For more current news about the worldwide activities of the Bahá'í community, visit the site of the Bahá'í World News Service, launched in November 2000.

Containing news stories about developments throughout the Bahá'í world, BWNS offers a subscription facility and can be found at <http://www.bahaiworldnews.org>.

Another prominent site is the electronic version of One Country, the award-winning official newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community. One Country's site, <http://www.onecountry.org>, contains in-depth reports on Bahá'í work in the diplomatic and development fields.

The activities of the Australian Bahá'í community are reflected in the official site <http://www.bahai.org.au>.

A new, more comprehensive site is presently under development and should be available, at the same address, in the next few months.

And if you're looking for Bahá'í scriptures, academic works, journal and newspaper articles, the finest site on the Web is <http://www.bahai-library.org>.

This is an extensive resource library for anyone who wants to read or search through the texts of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as scholarly dissertations and articles.

Writing in 1936, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, envisioned that "a mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity".

Many Bahá'ís believe that the Internet, despite its current imperfections, may be just what he had in mind.



# Human rights education

A new Chair in Human Rights Education has been announced at Curtin University of Technology.

The Chair was named in honour of its benefactor, Dr Haruhisa Handa, and is being funded for an initial five-year period.

A Human Rights Education Resource Centre will also be established.

Activities to be undertaken through the Chair will include development of course material in human rights education; delivery of long and short courses; consultancy work; research; public education including online material, teacher training and supervision of delivery within schools; public commentary; development of international links; and development of partnerships with national, regional and international organisations

Dr Handa is an ordained Zen Buddhist priest in the Rinzaï tradition and a practitioner of Japanese

and Western performing arts, calligraphy and painting.

The Australian Bahá'í community has been an active advocate of human rights education during the 1995-2005 UN Decade of Human Rights Education.

## Dignity, Democracy, Equality

A National Strategic Conference on Human Rights Education will be held at the Australian National University on 23 August. Hosted by the National Committee on Human Rights Education, the conference will bring together people from a range of sectors contributing to human rights education with the aim of advancing human rights education in Australia.

The conference is open to the public and further information can be obtained from the Acting Secretary of the National Committee at [curtotti@ozemail.com.au](mailto:curtotti@ozemail.com.au)

# Reconciliation remains important

A special service dedicated to reconciliation between indigenous and other Australians was held at the Bahá'í House of Worship on Sunday 26 May.

Bahá'ís, members of the Manly Pittwater Warringah Aboriginal Support Group, and the public joined together in the service, which formed part of National Reconciliation Week. It featured readings from the scriptures of the major world religions and performance by the popular Bahá'í Temple Choir.

The service was preceded by a reception at which Ann Thomas, a Biripi woman from Wallaga Lake on the south coast of NSW, shared her thoughts on reconciliation.

"Reconciliation at this time means a lot", she said, "but it can only be by the spirit".

She expressed her belief that the Bahá'í Faith offered a means by which indigenous and non-indigenous Australians could come together and work together in unity. Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, was the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy of her people, she said.

The reception included reading of the prayer

distributed for National Sorry Day by the Aboriginal and Islander Commission of the National Council of Churches.

Reflecting on the importance of justice to reconciliation, the reception was closed with the following extract from the Bahá'í writings: "The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny".

The theme for Reconciliation Week this year was "Reconciliation: Walking the Talk". Reconciliation Week ran from 27 May to 3 June.



Ann Thomas speaking at the Special Service for Reconciliation