

# AUSTRALIAN Bahá'í Report

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A newsletter  
of the  
Australian  
Bahá'í  
Community

## Nationwide events to mark 50th anniversary

A nationwide series of events in November will mark the 50th anniversary of the passing of a woman who made a significant contribution to Australian religious history in general and to the national Bahá'í Community in particular.

Clara Dunn (1869-1960) introduced the Bahá'í Faith to Australia in 1920 with her husband, Hyde Dunn (1855-1941).

An historian of the Australian Bahá'í Community, Graham Hassall, said that Clara Dunn was "an historic and exceptionally intriguing figure".

"She was one of those rare individuals who can be identified as the first to bring an independent world religion to a continent," said Associate Professor Hassall, of Victoria University in New Zealand.

Clara Dunn's pioneering work is also of special interest because she took a leading role at a time when women were far less prominent than men as innovators in religious thought and practice in Australia, Professor Hassall said.

From just two Bahá'ís 90 years ago, the Australian Bahá'í Community has become a thriving religious community, present in all States and Territories and in virtually all towns and regional areas.

### National event

A national event will be held at the University of New South Wales on 13 November, where Bahá'ís who knew Clara Dunn will recount their memories of her.

The following day, a memorial service will be held at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney to commemorate the life and service of Mrs Dunn. Archives associated with her life will be on display.

Four days later, on the anniversary of her death, there will be a devotional event at the grave of Mr and Mrs Dunn in Sydney.

Bahá'í communities in every State and Territory will also commemorate the anniversary by arranging a variety of functions and activities,

and by dedicating services they provide to the wider community to Clara Dunn's memory.

### Spiritual capacities

Clara Dunn devoted herself to nurturing individuals, fostering Bahá'í communities, and public speaking.

She educated the early Australian Bahá'ís about the unique democratic administrative system of the Faith, leading to the establishment of local governing councils and the election, in 1934, of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand.

Mrs Dunn played an important role in the foundation ceremony of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney in 1958, shortly before her passing.

Clara Dunn's spiritual capacities and experience were recognised by the then Head of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi (1899-1957), when he appointed her in 1952 as a "Hand of the Cause of God". Mr Dunn received the same honour, bestowed on only fifty Bahá'ís worldwide who played a special role in inspiring and advising the Bahá'í community.

In a history he has written of the Dunns, Professor Hassall says Clara "combined a charitable nature with a gentle but determined manner.

"Through her own suffering, she had developed a sense of compassion for those close to her and for others whose plight she came to know. Friends have described her as warm, humble but self-assured, graceful, serene, and fun-loving."



Clara Dunn

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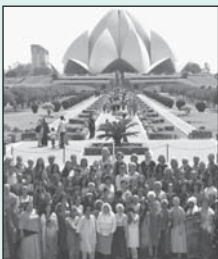
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# Peace workers call for involvement in local initiatives



From left: Natalie Mobini-Keshel, Ernie Friedlander, Biannca Pace and Abraham Quadan

Three prominent peace workers have called for more people to become involved in peace initiatives at the grassroots level.

Ernie Friedlander, Biannca Pace and Abraham Quadan made the call during a UN International Day of Peace event held in the Visitors Centre at the Bahá'í Temple in Sydney on 19 September.

The event attracted a capacity audience comprised of members of various faith-based and peace organisations and interested individuals.

## Peaceful dialogue

Mr Quadan, who grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan, said he was born in a place of conflict but had chosen the path of peace instead of war.

"The fact that a Muslim and a Jew can have a constructive discussion about peace in the grounds of a Bahá'í place of worship shows that peaceful dialogue is possible," he said.

Mr Quadan described the establishment of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney, where he teaches mediation.

He said the centre started with 30 postgraduate students and now has an enrolment of 700 people from many different countries.

## Stereotypes

Mr Friedlander, regarded as the driving force behind the successful NSW-wide Harmony Day Poster Competition, said his experience as a Holocaust survivor provided his motivation to promote mutual understanding and the

elimination of stereotypes.

"I am here today thanks to the kindness of a German guard who looked the other way and allowed my mother and me to escape," said Mr Friedlander, the president of the Alfred Dreyfus Anti Defamation Unit of B'nai B'rith in NSW.

"It taught me that we should never generalise about an entire group of people, because there is good and bad in every group," Mr Friedlander said.

"We need to look ahead to the future, not back to the past," he said.

## Language of war

Ms Pace, the main organiser of the Sydney Peace Festival, invited those present to attend the event in Martin Place on 21 September.

She said the festival would bring together people from many faith backgrounds, the peace movement, school children, the diplomatic corps, and others interested in building peace.

Ms Pace, a businessperson, said that the language of war had become prevalent in many fields including politics, marketing and commerce.

"Corporations target markets, engage in hostile takeovers, crush competition, undertake guerilla marketing and even viral marketing," she said.

"We need to change our language if we are to accomplish the task of bringing about a culture of peace.

"This is why I have taken on the task of campaigning for a Minister of Peace and a Department of Peace to be established in the Australian Federal Government."

## Promise of world peace

Natalie Mobini-Keshel, who chaired the event on behalf of the Bahá'í community, drew the attention of the gathering to a major peace statement issued by the world governing body of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice.

*The Promise of World Peace* calls for a new commitment to addressing issues not usually associated with the pursuit of peace, such as racism, the gulf between rich and poor, the emancipation of women and universal education, Dr Mobini-Keshel said.

# Peace activities described at UN Day function

Bahá'ís are actively fostering peace in the world at local and global levels, a prominent Australian Bahá'í, Dr Peter Khan, said at an event on the Gold Coast marking the UN International Day of Peace.

Dr Khan was the keynote speaker at the event held in the Palazzo Versace Hotel on 20 September 2010.

The 500-strong audience included representatives of religious communities, city councillors, other VIPs and local residents. The event opened with a welcome to country by Kombumerri Gold Coast clan elder, Uncle Graham Dillon.

"There is no greater or more pressing need than the establishment of peace," said Dr Khan, a recently retired member of the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice.

"That noble idea has animated the hearts of humanity for thousands of years," he said.

"It gains added pertinence at a time when humanity is confronted by mass destruction," said Dr Khan, who described the destructive power of modern weaponry and the inability to control its proliferation.

## Study circles

At a local level, Bahá'ís provided study circles open to all people interested in unity and harmony, Dr Khan said.

Through discussion in the study circles, participants gained enlightened understandings of issues crucial to the development of world peace, he said.

Dr Khan said that among the topics examined in the study circles were promotion of religious

understanding, the implications of the oneness of humanity, the equality of the sexes, education of children, non-adversarial methods of interacting, and collective decision making.

The study circles were taking place on the Gold Coast itself, throughout Australia and in 190 countries worldwide, Dr Khan said. There were already 10,000 under way and the numbers were rapidly increasing.

## Global activities for peace

Dr Khan said that Bahá'ís were also active in global activities for peace, for example through a very active NGO at the United Nations, the Bahá'í International Community. It had proposed revisions of the UN charter, and was known for promoting the role of international institutions, justice and the oneness of humanity.

The program for the International Day of Peace included prayers recited by representatives of the local Bahá'í, Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities.

The president of the UN Association of Australia (Qld), Virginia Balmain, delivered the UN Message for the International Day of Peace.

Recording artists Louie Shelton, Shadi Toloui-Wallace and Shidan Toloui-Wallace presented music on spiritual themes.



*Dr Peter Khan*



*Guests at the International Day of Peace celebration on the Gold Coast*

## Celebration marks success of a Soul Food diet

A popular public devotional meeting, Soul Food, celebrated its ninth anniversary in September at the State Library of South Australia in Adelaide.

The anniversary program, dedicated to the United Nations International Day of Peace, attracted a big audience, who heard inspiring quotations followed by music from a bluegrass band, the Cherry Pickers.

Soul Food is organised by the Bahá'í Community of South Australia to stimulate thought and positive action and to promote unity in diversity.

The programs, held on the third Sunday of every month, feature live musical and artistic performances as well as thought-provoking quotations from diverse religions, leaders of thought, writers and philosophers.

Soul Food's successful recipe has been exported to Melbourne and Hobart.

In Adelaide it showcases some of the best musicians in the State such as harpist Emma Horwood, guitarist Alain Valodze, singer-songwriter Delia Olam, violinist Alex Permezal, the In Unitate Choir and the Cherry Pickers.

One of those who regularly attends the events, Victor Bilderson, said the diversity of the program is matched by those who attend.

"They converse in a variety of languages and come from a multiplicity of backgrounds," Mr Bilderson said.

"Often, the discussion doesn't stop at the closing music - it continues into refreshments, where over cookies and coffee, people from different walks of life exchange ideas and learn of one another's opinions."

The event is open to the public. Visit [www.soulfood.com.au](http://www.soulfood.com.au).



*Delia Olam and the Global Grooves Ensemble perform at Soul Food in Adelaide*

## Overseas youth serve at Temple and beyond

Young people from around the world are spending their gap year based at the Bahá'í Temple in Sydney from where they carry out volunteer work and serve the nearby community.

Every year about a dozen youth base themselves at the Temple for what Bahá'ís call a "youth year of service". Many others serve for a

shorter period during the summer months.

Human resources coordinator at the Bahá'í National Office, Mona Momtazian, said the work of the youth is characterised by energy, vitality and devotion.

"Their work is highly valued by the permanent staff and visitors to the Temple," Ms Momtazian said.

Among those involved this year is Andre Kepner from Bolivia.

"I am giving six months of my life to serve and grow spiritually, which follows Bahá'u'lláh's teaching to 'let deeds, not words, be your adorning'," Andre said.

"My focus in this service is on children's classes in Pittwater public schools. As I teach the students scripture classes, I feel I grow spiritually too."

Brook Michael from Eritrea previously served in Sudan.

"I have been an eyewitness to the love and unity in diversity of our group of youth - serving the community is a blessing and it's fun," Brook said.

*Young volunteers at the Bahá'í Temple in Sydney*



Saori Matsumoto from Japan said the five months she has spent at the Bahá'í Temple have taught her patience and how to focus on a task to complete it.

"Prayer and reflection in the serene atmosphere of the Temple has also helped me to have a clearer idea of what I want to do with my life," Saori said.

Alex Jamshedi from the United States also looked ahead: "So far I have learned a lot of life skills which will help me in my future."

Australian Bahá'ís also carry out their year of service based at the Temple.

"A part of my service has been to help

organise interfaith devotional meetings as well as help with children's classes," said Arezou Afshari from Baulkham Hills, Sydney.

"We hold a prayer and meditation meeting every Monday night," she said.

"I am hoping that more local people will come so we can have fellowship with them. The program is really beautiful and we all consult on spiritual themes afterwards."

Bayan Fanaeyan from Narraweena, Sydney, said: "Even though I have only been here a month, daily prayer and meditation in the Temple have made me more mature."

## Artist interweaves cultures in colourful performance

Australian families will soon be participating in a unique show created by a Bahá'í storyteller and musician Clare Kuolga Meere, who describes herself as a "child of two tribes but a woman of one world".

As an artist using the performance name Klare Kuolga, she draws on her personal background of being born in the Papua New Guinea Highlands and then moving to Australia where she was adopted by Irish-Australian parents.

In "2 Pela Island", Ms Kuolga involves her audience in a true story of cultural diversity that portrays the cultures of the Nebilyer Valley in the Western Highlands of PNG and of indigenous Australia, showing their similarities and differences.

The show, which premiered at the Redcliffe Cultural Centre in Brisbane in October, employs storytelling, dance, music, theatre and multi-media. It is presented against a colourful backdrop in the dot-painting style of Aboriginal Australian artists.

Audience members are invited on to the stage to dance and to wear colourful PNG character masks that enable them to fully participate in the story, which explores the concept of personal identity.

Described as "an innovative, captivating and uplifting musical journey presented in the dance, pop and ballad genres", the show

concludes with songs selected from Klare Kuolga's debut album, *Bend Down a Little*, which recently was made available on iTunes.

Co-written with Colin Webber, the album covers such topics as the equality of men and women, spiritual search, the unity of mankind, prayer, happiness and meditation.

Ms Kuolga, who lives in Bellmere, Queensland, says she has been blessed to be part of two very distinctive and diverse cultures.

"This experience and a life long journey to find an understanding of myself led me to develop the production," Ms Kuolga says.

"Being a part of two cultures has enriched my life experience in understanding diversity," she says.

"At the same time it has also made me aware of the profound similarities that we all share as members of the human race.

"My big question was where did I belong and where did I come from. The man who answered that question was an Aboriginal elder, Uncle Ray Wymarra, a Bahá'í who told me quite simply that I belonged to the human race and that my country was the world.

"Today I identify as a world citizen linking cultures through education and the arts".

To see an excerpt of the show, visit [www.wanpelamusic.com.au](http://www.wanpelamusic.com.au).



Clare Kuolga Meere

# Australians perform with international choir in India



*Australian singers who performed with the Voices of Baha choir*

*Back: Loretta Safajou, Homeira Aryanpad, Melanie Price and Natasha Tidman*

*Front: Angela Bryan, Linda Safajou Dunn and Lorraine Price*

Nine members of the Australian Bahá'í Community were among 120 singers from some 18 countries who recently toured India as members of the Voices of Baha choir.

Voices of Baha is a Bahá'í choir of auditioned singers which has performed in more than 35 countries since it was founded in 1992.

Australia has a close connection with the choir through its founder and conductor, Tom Price, who lived in Sydney from 1971 to 1988, and his

Australian-born daughters Emily, the assistant conductor and soloist on the 2010 tour, and Rachael, also a soloist.

"You can see on stage people from all over the world singing together - it shows how diverse the world is," Emily said.

Among the Australian singers on the tour was Angela Bryan, a singer from Hobart who chose a costume inspired by Aboriginal designs.

"Though it has never been proven, I believe my mother's family has Tasmanian indigenous ancestry," she said.

The other singers from Australia were: Natasha Tidman (Perth), Lorraine Price (Hawkesbury), Linda Safajou Dunne, Loretta Safajou, and

Melanie Price (Sydney), and Homeira Aryanpad, Steve Aumua and Denzil Aumua (Brisbane).

On the tour of India from 12 to 26 June, Voices of Baha performed a blend of Indian, Western, Persian and Arabic songs to capacity audiences in major venues in Mumbai, Lucknow and New Delhi.

The choir sang at the Bahá'í information centre auditorium in the grounds of the spectacular lotus-shaped Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi.

The final concert was an acapella performance in the House of Worship, a dramatic event set against the sunset and rising full moon.

Among the songs performed at the concerts were Hindi ragas originally composed by legendary Indian musician Ravi Shankar for the dedication in 1986 of the House of Worship.

The program also included African-American Gospel music and jazz, a challenge well met by the Indian band members, who included award-winning musician Atul Raninga.

Gospel composer and Voices of Baha soloist, Van Gilmer, said musicians have the ability to embrace diversity in music.

"The power of music is a unifying force that can touch hearts," Mr Gilmer said.



*The Voices of Baha choir at the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi*

## Gender equality a theme at major UN conference

The pivotal role that equality of men and women plays in advancing global health was the theme of many discussions at a major UN health conference held in Melbourne recently, according to a Bahá'í participant, Dr Farnaz Sabet.

An official representative of the Australian Bahá'í Community, Dr Sabet was one of 1600 participants from more than 70 countries at the "Advance Global Health; Achieve the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals)" conference.

The event, held from 30 August to 1 September, was the first time the annual UN Department of Public Information/ NGO conference has been held outside North America.

Dr Sabet, who has worked in medicine, research and public health in Africa, the Middle East and in indigenous communities in Australia, is a former Rhodes scholar and holds a Masters degree in Global Health from Oxford University.

Dr Sabet said another important theme of the discussions was the key role of the community

in research and development programs.

She said the emphasis on the role of the community was interesting to her in the light of the work that Bahá'ís are doing globally in community building at the grassroots level.

"Stemming from recognition of the inherent nobility in each person, Bahá'ís see each person as a protagonist in their own and their community's development," she said.

"This requires an increased level of consciousness about each of our roles in development.

"Therefore a discourse on global health moves beyond 'actors' and 'recipients' to recognising the fundamental role of all in development.

"Bahá'ís are engaged in this discussion in many communities globally, bringing the voices of those often not heard clearly to the discussions about community development."



*Farnaz Sabet with American Bahá'í representative to the UN, Carl Murrell, at the Advance Global Health conference in Melbourne*

## Spiritual education emphasised at indigenous conference

The embrace of traditional spirituality is essential for indigenous social and economic development, healing of relationships and 'closing the gap', a Bahá'í speaker, Annaliese Hedrick, told an international conference in Darwin.

Ms Hedrick emphasised the importance of spiritual education in her presentation, "Reconciling indigenous spirituality with this modern age", delivered at the World Indigenous Women and Wellness Conference held from 22-25 August 2010.

Annaliese Hedrick, a member of a distinguished Maori family in the Tai Tokerau region of New Zealand, came to Australia in 1993 and runs a Bahá'í children's class with the indigenous children of Milgarri Community (Knuckey Lagoon) in outer Darwin.

"Spiritual education reconciles the sacred and secular and empowers young indigenous people to develop a strong sense of identity as survivors in this modern age to overcome the

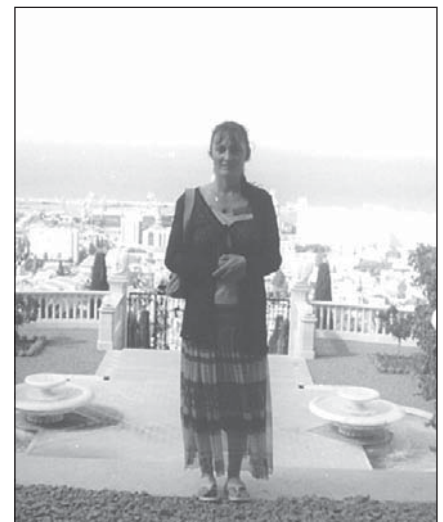
intergenerational cycles of discrimination and disadvantage impacting on indigenous societies," she said.

Ms Hedrick drew on her life experiences and described her traditional Maori worldview in the context of being a Bahá'í.

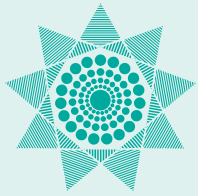
"The Bahá'í world view is that we share a common humanity, and all religions, including indigenous belief systems, come from the same divine source," she said.

"The world is progressing toward an advanced civilisation, a world without borders where all belief systems are respected."

The conference was hosted by the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, which represents Larrakia people (the "salt-water people"), who are the traditional owners of the land and waters of the greater Darwin area in the Northern Territory.



*Annaliese Hedrick*



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*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) 9998 9223

Email:  
opi@bahai.org.au

World Wide Web:  
www.bahai.org.au

Editor:  
Natalie Mobini-Kesheh

Staff Writer:  
Michael Day

Graphic Design by  
Simon Creedy  
www.creedy.com.au  
(02) 9427 0632

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**Ten year sentences for leaders as jailings increase**

Seven Bahá'í leaders in Iran were sentenced to 10 years in jail in September as the authorities moved to imprison more Bahá'ís throughout the country.

Australian Bahá'í Community spokesperson Tessa Scrine said justice demanded that the leaders, who have been in jail since early 2008, should be released immediately and unconditionally.

"They have completely and categorically denied all charges against them, including propaganda activities against the Islamic order and the establishment of an illegal administration," Ms Scrine said.

"There has been no evidence produced to justify these charges or the detention of dozens of other Bahá'ís in Iranian prisons," she said.

Ms Scrine said widespread international condemnation greeted the news in August that the leaders had received 20 year sentences, later reduced to 10 years.

**Statements**

On 17 September, Australia made the following statement to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva: "We are concerned about the treatment of minorities, including Bahá'ís, particularly seven Bahá'í leaders sentenced to 20 years' jail. We urge Iran to respect and guarantee the human rights of all detainees, including foreign citizens; to ensure all trials are conducted fairly and transparently; and to abide by its international human rights obligations."

Ms Scrine said that the Governments of Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S.A. have been among those speaking out against the sentences. They have been joined by the European Union and the President of the European Parliament.

Ms Scrine said that in Australia, the diverse religious communities have expressed concern via a statement issued by the Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations.

The APRO members supporting the statement include the National Council of Churches in Australia, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the Federation of Australian Buddhist

Councils, the Australian Sangha Association, the Sikh Kirtan Prachar Mission of Australia, the Australian Bahá'í Community and the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia.

The seven Bahá'ís - Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm - were all members of a national-level group that, with the Iranian government's knowledge, helped see to the minimum spiritual needs of Iran's 300,000-strong Bahá'í community.

**Media**

In September, *The Australian* newspaper published a story quoting Mr Tavakkoli's Adelaide-based brother, Amin, who described his sibling as "an angel" for his many years of working as a psychologist with the physically and mentally handicapped.

The newspaper also published an account of the fate of Rozita Vasseghi, a sister of a Melbourne Bahá'í.

The report said the extremely severe conditions in which Ms Vasseghi has been jailed in Iran, including more than six months in solitary confinement, have damaged her health, leaving her in an extremely weakened state.

Ms Scrine said that in addition to Rozita Vasseghi, there was the case of three young Bahá'ís, Haleh Rouhi, Sasan Taqva, and Raha Sabet, who have been held for more than three years in "dreadful conditions" despite an official report that completely exonerated them.

"The authorities are imprisoning other Bahá'ís in a systematic yet gradual way, seemingly to try to avoid drawing international attention to the widespread incarceration of Bahá'ís in Iran," Ms Scrine said.



*Held in solitary confinement for more than six months: Rozita Vasseghi*