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# EUROPEAN PUBLIC INFORMATION BULLETIN

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## **The 14th European Public Information Management Seminar in Romania**

The Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, Paris, in cooperation with the NSA of Romania, is finalising preparations for the 14th European Public Information Management Seminar, which will be held in Bucharest, Romania, from 28 June to 1 July 2007.

The main theme of the conference will be "Challenges and Changes in Media and Public Information Management," with a focus on the common goals and harmony of all activities related to the Five Year Plan and the External Affairs Strategy. The programme will include sessions on working with the media, particularly electronic media, in a constantly changing environment with regard to new technologies and challenges.

New training techniques will be introduced for team-working and evaluation throughout the seminar with assigned facilitators.

To date, 32 European National Spiritual Assemblies and one Administrative Committee have registered their representatives.

Presentations will be given by some 20 distinguished speakers from Europe and the Office of Public Information - Haifa and Paris. Interested individuals are requested to coordinate their participation at the seminar with their respective National Spiritual Assemblies before closing the registration.

*(For further information please contact the BIC-OPI, Paris)*

## **Participation at youth conference in Turkey**

The Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information - Paris was invited by a Turkish non-governmental organisation to send a group of youth from France to an environmental youth conference titled "Young Eco Heroes" from 13 to 18 April 2007 in Turkey. The exchange programme was sponsored by the European Union and took place in Ankara with the participation of 29 young people representing different environmental and youth organisations from 6 countries.

The Bahá'í group gave a presentation on the moral dimension of the environmental question and universal human values that are practical preconditions to finding solutions to the critical problems facing humanity. Both the participants and the organisers appreciated the Bahá'í contribution throughout the conference and the content of the presentation. They encouraged further cooperation for exchange programmes. This was the second time that the BIC-OPI, Paris was invited by a Turkish non-Bahá'í NGO for youth exchange.

The Bahá'í team had the opportunity to visit the Office of External Affairs of the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkey in Ankara.

*(For further information please contact the BIC-OPI, Paris)*

## **Professor's visit opens doors**

Talks and seminars given by a visiting Canadian professor to Cyprus were attended by about 2,000 people and covered in national media.

Dr. Esfandiar Ghadirian and his wife Shahla were in Cyprus from 26 February to 27 March 2007 for a project on AIDS prevention.

During their six-week stay, the Ministries of Health, Education and Cultural Affairs hosted more than 20 seminars and workshops at universities, schools, health institutions, community centres in cities and villages, youth centres and teachers' associations. The talks were aired on national television news and two stations interviewed Dr. Ghadirian for an hour and repeated the show. Almost all the local news papers reported the seminars and published interviews with Dr. Ghadirian.

The Ministry of Health presented Dr. Ghadirian with a thank you plaque at the end of the visit.

A representatives of the Bahá'í Community said the project reflected the positive and effective relations that have been built up with prominent people and the media.

Cyprus' Naw Ruz celebration was also attended by the Ministry of Educational and Cultural Affairs, other prominent people and friends of the Faith. The Ministry of External Affairs and

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the Vice-President sent congratulatory cables, and two prominent MPs and political party presidents sent flowers to the event.

Good relations with the Ministry of Education are also leading to a systematic Peace Education programme scheduled to begin before the end of the year. A similar project based on Bahá'í principles is also being offered year-round to teachers and civil servants.

*(For further information please contact the NSA of Cyprus)*

#### **Business award attracts media coverage**

Bahá'í businessman Mr. Abbas Rafii was named Ernst & Young 2006 Entrepreneur of the Year in Luxembourg in October 2006 for his pistachio export firm.

In the second edition of the prize that was established last year, Mr. Rafii's firm Ireco was one of 26 companies in Luxembourg to put themselves forward for the award.

The award recognised Ireco's financing policy, strategy and sense of innovation and creativity.

The media reported on the founding of Ireco by Mr. Rafii in 1971, which is now said to be responsible for a fifth of the European market supply of pistachio nuts. Of particular note in the media coverage was an item on the popular evening news programme of RTL TV which featured interviews with Mr. Rafii.

Mr. Rafii and his family pioneered to Luxembourg in 1967. The media also reported the fact that Mr. Rafii was a Bahá'í who had left his country as he was not able to "live up to his ideals" there. In every interview, Mr. Rafii spoke about the Faith and related how he had been guided in his daily life by its principles. His success, Mr. Rafii was quoted in one magazine as saying, stemmed from what he had learned as his religious identity: "...a sense of service towards my clients and a sense of equality in the treatment of all of my co-workers ... My co-workers come from many different nations with diverse religious backgrounds."

*(For further information please contact the NSA of Luxembourg)*

#### **Assembly anniversary a time to celebrate**

The 25th anniversary of the Spiritual Assembly of Schwaz in Austria was an opportunity for the local Bahá'í community to celebrate the Faith with the 13,000 inhabitants of the town.

Former members of the community, friends from neighbouring communities, Bahá'ís who served as speakers in public seminars, friends of the Faith and local prominent people were invited to the celebration, which was held in a beautifully decorated hall.

The celebration featured a piano recital by Mr. Michael Neunteufel from Bregenz and readings from the Writings. The town Mayor welcomed the gathering, expressed his appreciation of the Bahá'í participation in the town's cultural life and passed on the congratulations of the town council.

The celebration speech was given by Mrs. Otti Kaefer, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly, who emphasised the importance of the Schwaz Spiritual Assembly, gave an overview of the activities of the Bahá'í community in Schwaz as well as the Bahá'í International Community and presented the book, "History of the Austrian Bahá'í community" to the Mayor as a gift.

A number of photos from the past 25 years were shown. The celebration closed with conversation and supper. As the celebration was an official event it was also mentioned in the local press.

All guests at the celebration were able to take home a well-presented anniversary booklet.

Overall, the celebration enhanced the reputation of the Bahá'í community and provided its members with momentum for new activities.

*(For further information please contact the NSA of Austria)*

#### **Presidential meeting follows India visit**

The President of Slovenia requested a meeting with Bahá'í representatives in his country after visiting the Bahá'í House of Worship in India.

The 30-minute meeting with President Janez Drnovšek took place on 19 February 2007 at his official meeting room in Ljubljana.

Members of the Slovenian Bahá'í Administrative Committee attended the meeting in which the community, its activities and the state of the world were discussed.

The members felt that the meeting was very positive and pleasant and Dr. Drnovšek seemed impressed by the topics and ideas presented by the friends.

During the meeting the President said he wished to collaborate with the Bahá'í community, and appeared pleased with the activities of the Slovenian Bahá'ís including the Ruhi sequences of courses and children's classes, at local and at international level.

The 2002 message from the Universal House of Justice "To the World's Religious Leaders" was presented to the President, along with leather-bound copies of "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era" and the "Hidden Words."

The Bahá'ís thanked the President for Slovenia's support of the UN resolution on Iran against the oppression of the Bahá'í community and presented him with a copy of "The Bahá'í Question."

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The friends also offered the President their help to which he answered, "Please continue with your activities."

*(For further information please contact the Administrative Committee of Slovenia)*

### **Slovak registration becomes mass proclamation**

The Slovakian Bahá'í community collected more than 20,000 signatures from members of the public to support an application to officially register the Bahá'í Faith in Slovakia with the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic.

The effort was undertaken by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Slovak Republic, following guidance from the Universal House of Justice.

It followed a change in the law on Registration of Churches and Religious Communities that could make the registration of the Bahá'í Faith possible, in a way similar to Christianity or Judaism.

If approved, the incorporation of the Faith would lead to changes, including tax free contributions, the right to disseminate literature, teach the Faith in schools, own property, run a publishing trust and do service work in public organisations.

In an intense drive, the community collected the required signatures in just one month.

To support their efforts, 8,000 copies of a leaflet about the Bahá'í Faith were printed, as well as 3,500 sheets about the registration process and 2,700 signature sheets.

Letters were sent to the community, like-minded organisations, and contacts together with instructions for collecting signatures. Information was also published on the official website [www.bahai.sk](http://www.bahai.sk), including a downloadable signature sheet.

In the end 24,320 valid signatures were collected and an estimated 90,000 people were approached in relation to this project.

The community said people now recognise the name of the Faith because of this project and the media attention.

There were reports on television and in newspapers about the new bill and the efforts of the Bahá'í Community to register.

Another positive consequence of this effort was a strengthened relationship with the Ministry of Culture, with several meetings held with officials. As a result, the community was also invited to submit a 10-page paper for the Ministry's book about Women and Religion.

Notwithstanding the introduction of the new law on 20 March 2007, which aims at making it more difficult for new religions to be registered, the Bahá'í Faith gained official recognition in Slovakia on 19 April 2007.

*(For further information please contact the NSA of Slovakia)*

### **Organisation shares best practices at UNESCO workshop**

A Bahá'í-inspired organisation attended an International Experts' Workshop on Faith-Based Organizations and Education for Sustainable Development organised for UNESCO by UNESCOcat, the Catalanian Centre for UNESCO, in Barcelona, Spain, from 22 to 24 March 2007.

The International Environment Forum was represented by its president, Dr. Arthur Dahl of Switzerland. The workshop aimed to encourage support from faith-based organisations for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

The workshop was composed of a diverse group of distinguished international experts. Prof. Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-founder of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, was the keynote speaker at the opening session.

In addition to UNESCO staff, there was one representative of Judaism from USA, two for Islam from UK and France, four Christians from India, Romania, Guatemala and Kenya, Buddhists from Thailand and Japan, a Hindu, a Bahá'í, a Gandhian from South Africa, two representing indigenous traditions of Peru and New Caledonia, and experts from the Alliance for Religions and Conservation (UK), the Earth Charter (Sweden), and the University for Peace in Costa Rica.

There were detailed discussions and exchanges of experience in formal and informal education, strategies to reach communities, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, spiritual and ethical values, good practice and procedures, and linking grassroots to policy levels.

There were some good examples of successful action at the local level, and the experience of the International Environment Forum attracted considerable interest. The need for a great transition away from materialistic society was addressed, and the convergence on viewpoints was very close to those of the Bahá'í Faith.

The event is expected to initiate inter-faith collaboration in this area which will be followed up by both UNESCO and the Earth Charter Initiative.

*(For further information please contact IEF at [www.bcca.org/ief](http://www.bcca.org/ief))*

### **Bahá'í Faith joins German inter-faith project**

The National Spiritual Assembly of Germany has been granted membership to the Abrahamic Forum in Germany, a project of the National Intercultural Council.

The Abrahamic Forum has existed in Germany since February 2001 and fosters cooperation between Jews, Christians, Muslims and Bahá'ís

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through dialogue, joint events, festivities and youth conferences, and works together with foundations, scientists and experts.

In support of the membership, the NSA explained the Bahá'í teachings on Abraham as a divinely chosen messenger of God and precursor to the founders of later religions.

Following extensive consultation, the Abrahamic Forum admitted a representation from the Bahá'ís of Germany. The Intercultural Council in Germany announced the move in a press release on 2 March 2007.

Dr. Armin Eschraghi of the University of Frankfurt/Main was nominated as the Bahá'í representative.

The Forum is a project of the Groeben Trust of the Intercultural Council in Germany.

*(For further information please contact the NSA of Germany)*

### **Naw Ruz attracts widespread media coverage**

Naw Ruz was covered widely in the Hungarian media this year.

A few days before the Holy Day, an article was published online about the Faith and Naw Ruz following a press release by the community and a public relations firm. The online newspaper had already published in the past articles about the Faith, the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran and social and economic project MESED. The reporter has become a good friend of the Faith and joined the Naw Ruz celebrations.

Hungarian National TV also came to a Naw

Ruz event and interviewed several Bahá'ís. A day later, there were two live prime time interviews with Bahá'ís on Hungarian National Channel 2. The first 16-minute interview was repeated later in the evening on Channel 1, where they also showed the Naw Ruz event. The interviews were very positive, informative and colourful.

RTL-Klub, a national private television station aired another interview with a Bahá'í about the Faith end of March on the occasion of Naw Ruz which was very positive and dignified.

Also around this time, a magazine, "Sikeres Nők" (Successful Women), published a special edition on Easter celebrations in which celebrities were asked to explain what they do at Easter and to share a food recipe. A Persian Bahá'í couple was interviewed and the reporter found parallels between Naw Ruz and Easter and mentioned the Faith as well as the fast and elaborated on the significance of fasting.

There was also a 15-minute documentary on the Hungarian National Television about the Faith and the MESED project in which the reporter visited the city of Jaszakohalma and interviewed Roma mothers and children as well as friends who dedicated their services to the project. This documentary was very positive and informative. The programme was broadcast on 2 April 2007 on Channel 1 and repeated on 8 April 2007 on Channel 2.

*(For further information please contact the NSA of Hungary)*

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*The EPIB reports on recent Public Information activities in Europe. Please send all news concerning Public Information to be published for the next issue directly to BIC-OPI, Paris (no later than 25 May 2007 for the next issue) to the attention of Jessica Dacey. The Office of Public Information may edit articles received and decides on the publication of all submitted material.*

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