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BIC-OPI Paris has new team

The Office would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Varqa Carlos Jalali for his devoted and precious services to BIC-OPI Paris. Carlos was offered a professor position at the University of Cape Verde and left the office in early September. We are delighted to have Ms. Diana Khadem from Canada filling the programme coordinator position. Diana holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communications and a Master of Arts Degree in Consultation and Conflict Resolution, and works on a variety of projects at BIC-OPI Paris. We are very pleased to have Ms. Nadia Vitali continue devoting her time and energies, volunteering at the office during her year of service.

The Office wishes to congratulate Ms. Gunilla Kerrich, a Political Science student from the University of Geneva, on completing her internship at BIC-OPI Paris, which resulted in an outstanding grade for her internship from the University of Geneva. The staff is sincerely grateful for her collaboration with the Office during her stay in Paris. Also, from early September to late November, Ms. Fareena Mahmood from Guyana completed an internship at the Office for her studies in business management in Germany. She assisted with various projects during her time with the Office, for which we warmly thank her.

(For further information please contact BIC-OPI Paris)

Bahá'í speaks out at Portuguese seminar

The Bahá'í view on globalisation was presented during a seminar organised by a Portuguese non-governmental organisation, the Oriente Foundation. The seminar, held from 12 to 15 October, was also coordinated by well-known religion journalist António Marujo. A representative of the Bahá'í community presented the Bahá'í teachings related to globalisation during the consultation and quoted from *Who is Writing the Future?*. (For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Portugal)

Women's group at international conference in Germany

Bahá'ís were among the panellists at an international conference in Germany. More than 1,700 people attended the conference on 2 and 3 November, organised by a committee of several non-political feminist organisations.

The German Bahá'í Women Forum (BWF) was one of the religions on a panel on religion and spirituality made up of representatives of seven faith groups, including

Islám, Wicca, and Falun Gong. Participants showed a remarkable interest in the issue, with people staying for up to four hours. During the conference plenary, the moderator of one of the sessions noted that women were suppressed by all religions except the Bahá'í Faith. The BWF also hosted a stand called “market of options”, which was attended by various organisations of social, political, ethnic, humanitarian, and religious backgrounds. The book *Advancement of Women: A Bahá'í Perspective*, by Drs. Peter and Janet Khan, was among the books sold at the stand.

(For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany)

Bahá'í visit leads to public relations in Bulgaria

Bulgarian Bahá'ís met with prominent people from political and educational fields during a recent visit in November by Dr. Arthur Dahl, a Bahá'í who is a senior advisor to the United Nations in Geneva. His 11-day programme in Sofia included a meeting with Bahá'ís and the national security and sustainable development advisor to the Office of the President of Republic of Bulgaria. Other presentations included talks at three universities and a local school, a lecture and discussion on the Earth Summit in Johannesburg with leading scientists and specialists in sustainable development, and a meeting with the editorial board of the journal *Eco-World*. He gave a press conference about the Earth Summit and took part in an interview for the national radio station Horizon.

(For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Bulgaria)

EBBF holds devotionals for business leaders

The European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF) hosted a devotional space as part of a “Motivation at Work” conference on 7 November, attended by more than seven hundred executives, managing directors and human resource managers in the Hague. The conference programme consisted of two plenary sessions, workshops, an “inspiration square” with booths and the Bahá'í-run Tranquillity Zone.

Members of the EBBF and Bahá'ís from the Hague used Persian carpets, roses, and candles to create a space that was meant to resemble a tent Bahá'u'lláh might have used. Inside the tent, participants enjoyed a ten-minute meditation programme, which included music, prayers, and a religious text.

Over 75 people visited the Tranquillity Zone and many of them took literature about both the Faith and the EBBF.

Many visitors indicated that this was a very special experience for them and some of them called or e-mailed the conference organiser to tell him how much they had enjoyed the Tranquillity Zone. One Ministry official said, "I was again very much enchanted with the Tranquillity Zone, as I was the first time. The way the Bahá'ís manage to bridge the different religions and create peace and tranquillity in the midst of all the hectic activity on such a day is fantastic. It also neatly fits in with one of my ambitions, namely to contribute to a worldwide inter-religious TV station at some point."

The conference organiser presented all the Tranquillity Zone volunteers with a bronze figure and stated that he saw the Tranquillity Zone as one of the pillars of the conference. The EBBF was invited to organise it again in 2003. (For further information please contact the EBBF at ebbf@fr.inter.net and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Netherlands)

Interfaith events in France cultivate good relations

Bahá'ís in Nice, France have strengthened their interfaith relations after holding a series of conferences at their Bahá'í centre. The Catholic clergy has been particularly involved in the initiatives and in the past year three Catholic priests have visited the centre. In January, a priest chaired World Religion Day celebrations. Another priest (also working as a university lecturer) gives regular presentations at the centre every three months and a third priest took part in a conference on the sources of monotheism, at which he respectfully accepted a copy of two Bahá'í prayers. Cordial links established with the clergy have also led to an invitation for Bahá'ís to take part in a 30-minute interview on a Catholic Radio in France programme called "Encounter with the Bahá'í Faith". A local rabbi also gave a talk at the centre on "What does it mean to be Jewish in the 21st century?"

(For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly of France)

Lotus temple featured in European design magazine

In its October edition, *Wallpaper* magazine named the Indian House of Worship as one of the top four sacred spaces by the quality of design and lifestyle. The House of Worship was featured under an article on "Pray Stations".

The article noted: "Some of the finest buildings of the late 20th century can be seen on the spiritual circuit, so if you're in need of an architectural fix or an emergency service, these are our favourite sacred spaces". Four houses of worship were featured: a mosque, a Buddhist temple, a synagogue, and the Bahá'í Temple. The magazine read: "Derived from Islam, the central tenet of the Bahá'í Faith is a belief in one, unifying God, with all global religions ultimately originating from a single source".

(For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom)

Strong Bahá'í presence at international women's conference in Turkey

Bahá'í women were noted for excellence in their approach and speeches at a recent Women Parliamentarians Conference on World Peace and Cooperation, held from 17 to 19 of October. It was the third such international conference organised by the Marmara Group Foundation, a prominent Turkish NGO supported by the First Lady of the Turkish Republic, Mrs. Semra Sezer. The speakers and attendants were selected women representatives, women parliamentarians, academic professors, Turkish and Foreign office members of embassies and many representatives of NGOs from neighbouring countries such as Azerbaijan, Israel, Romania, Hungary, Albania, Russia, Georgia, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Cyprus (North and South).

One of the Bahá'ís present was Dr. Violet Bağçuvan, a television reporter who made many high-level contacts during her coverage of the event. Bahá'ís were also able to network with officials, including a Member of Parliament of Bulgaria, who said she knew about the Bahá'ís and admired their activities. A video of the event, shot by a Bahá'í, will be sent to the organisers and to a United Nations delegate who was present at the conference.

(For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkey)

Moldova's biggest news agency publishes information about a round-table for religious leaders organised by Bahá'ís

A news release about the round table discussion by religious leaders was printed in a Moldovan newspaper. The release (www.infotag.md/?id=2513&record=541264) reported that Bahá'ís organised the meeting to launch discussions about collaboration in interfaith dialogue and the danger of religious prejudice.

Representatives of NGOs and other public organisations were invited in September to join the discussion with Mrs. Mahchid Fatío, a former representative of the Bahá'í International Community as a special guest for the event.

The release also reported that the event would be used to study "a special document issued by the highest administrative organ of the Bahá'í International Community, the Universal House of Justice, addressed to all the world's religious leaders. In this message it calls for a common vision amongst all the religions and an effort to think of strategies to reach the identified goal". It quoted a response from the Archbishop of Canterbury and head of the Anglican Church, George Carey, and noted that the message had been given to 35 leaders of religious organisations in Moldova.

(For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Moldova)

Indian women's institute presented to HRH Queen Elizabeth II

On 13 November 2002 Bahá'ís participated in an interfaith celebration on the environment honouring

Queen Elizabeth II and her Golden Jubilee. During the event, a number of environmental projects were presented to the Queen and to Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, as well as a programme of performances of music, dance and sacred art by the representatives of each religion. Leaders from the other nine world religions were present to celebrate the significant role that religions can play in relation to the environment.

The Bahá'ís presented the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women in India. The institute, formerly known as the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women, was presented to the monarch during the Alliance for Religion and Conservation, an event held in celebration of the 50th anniversary of her coronation. The institute became an independent entity with its own committee of directors in September 2001, and has educated more than 1,300 young women and girls since its founding in 1985. The school provides literacy education to poor young women from India, as well as practical knowledge about health, nutrition, and hygiene, capacity to earn an income, and an awareness of environmental conservation in their villages. After completing the courses, the women often return to their villages and become pillars of their communities.

The event was organised by the Alliance for Religion and Conservation (ARC) and explored religions' understanding of the place of humanity in creation. In attendance were representatives of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islam, Judaic, Sikh, Tao, Zoroastrian and Jain religions.

The Duke of Edinburgh, who has encouraged religious involvement on environmental issues on an international level, offered a brief introduction explaining "we desperately need the religious believers to orient the way in which we live and how we make use of the planet...we have to learn to balance the economic and scientific realities to tenor religious proposals about our responsibility and considerations for creation".

(For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom)

German newspaper reports Bahá'í involvement in national World Religions Day celebration

German newspaper *Hamburger Abendblatt* published an article on 14 November 2002 headed "Bahá'í: what unites is more important than what separates". Another newspaper *Welt* also made reference to different religions uniting under the motto "Humans need values: religions in Germany and their common responsibilities", which included the Bahá'í religion (www.welt.de/daten/2002/11/14/1114hh368351.htm).

Parallel to the national events, sponsored by various religions, Bahá'ís held a morning session on "Integration as an Opportunity" with a video presentation about the Faith at the Bahá'í centre. The event attracted interest from schools and the public and was followed in the afternoon by two devotional programmes.

The main session took place in the evening at Hamburg

University and was attended by about 250 participants, with a panel of representatives from nine religions. Following talks, each of the religious representatives read a prayer. The devotions were interspersed with classical Arabic instrumental music and the evening closed with blessings and wishes for peace from the representatives. Aside from many media reports about the day, a dedicated Web page (www.tag-der-welt-religionen.de) was also set up.

The event was the result of a round table discussion by high-ranking representatives of the evangelical, Catholic, and Orthodox churches of Germany, and from Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Bahá'í, and Buddhist faiths. Bahá'ís were represented by Counsellor Dr. Nicola Towfigh.

Before the round table took place, the message from the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders was distributed and welcomed with interest by all organising members of the World Religion Day events.

(For further information please contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany)

Plans for exhibition at European Parliament underway

The Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information will hold an exhibition at the European Parliament in Brussels from 9 to 13 June 2003.

The aim of the exhibition will be to familiarise the members of the European Parliament with the identity, vision, and contributions of the Bahá'ís in the European Union member states, the ten candidate states, and elsewhere in Europe and the world. The Bahá'í International Community will be presented under the overarching theme of "Unity in Diversity".

The exhibition will provide a unique opportunity for members of Parliament to become familiar with their respective Bahá'í communities and for representatives of National Assemblies in EU nations to meet with their MPs at the vernissage.

(For further information please contact BIC-OPI Paris)

EBBF holds Tenth ethics in business conference

Business leaders were among speakers at the European Bahá'í Business Forum's tenth annual conference on "Moral and Ethical Principles in a Social Market Economy: Sustainable Development," held 1 to 3 November in the hall of the Sofia Commodity Exchange. The annual conference attracts wide international participation and this year participants heard from Vafa Moayed of Deloitte & Touche, Luxembourg, on ethical problems in the Auditing profession after the ENRON Scandal, and Thanos Kriemadis, from the University of Thessaly, Greece, on moral and ethical principles and practices promoted by the European Business Excellence Model.

Dr. Arthur Dahl spoke about the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, and Bulgarian presentations included topics such as leadership, tolerance, and sustainable development. Five students from the University of National and World

Economy in Sofia took part in the conference with presentations on sustainable development. Logistics for the event were carried out in conjunction with the Bulgarian division of the international student organisation AIESEC (Association Internationale

d'Étudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales).

(For further information please contact the EBBF at ebbf@fr.inter.net and the National Spiritual Assembly of Bulgaria)

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

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