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# EUROPEAN PUBLIC INFORMATION BULLETIN

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## **Conference on role of religion in violent world in Portugal**

Portuguese Bahá'ís took part in a conference focussing on religions: the challenge of peace in a violent world. The event was organised by Fundação Oriente, a cultural organisation in Lisbon, and coordinated by a well-known religious reporter. Bahá'í ideas and teachings on peace were shared with the participants and quotations from *Who Is Writing the Future?* were read during the three-day conference.

(For further information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Portugal)

## **Youth writes for UK governmental magazine**

An article about the Bahá'í Faith has been published in a British government staff magazine. The article in the Lord Chancellor's Department's publication, *Hearsay*, was written by European Bahá'í Youth Council member Mr. Dion Azordegan. The three-quarter-page article is the fifth in a series about the religions practised within the Lord Chancellor's Department, in which Dion works. The article opens with the Birth of the Báb on 20 October and features two images of the Shrine of the Báb. It offers a brief history of the Faith and a description of the activities of Bahá'ís, focussing on their work of breaking down barriers in society and promoting key Bahá'í principles. It also discusses the work of the Institute for Social Cohesion, an initiative undertaken by the Bahá'í community in the UK. The article was well-written and well-presented in a magazine that has a wide readership.

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

## **Public Information Increase in Northern Cyprus**

The Cypriot community organised several receptions and a two-hour radio interview during visits by travelling Bahá'ís.

Many prominent people were invited to a reception at the national Bahá'í centre, where Mr. Rohollah and Mrs. Shayda Rafat made a presentation. More than 50 non-Bahá'ís attended a second presentation on family, given by Mrs. Rafat at a local community centre, which was hosted by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) focussing on the value of spiritual education.

Mrs. Harsha Naggashian, a doctor of homeopathy, gave a talk on natural healing that incorporates spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects. More than 55 non-Bahá'ís attended the presentation. The talk was followed by a dinner given in honour of the guests and was initiated

by members of the NGO.

Mrs. Rafat and Dr. Susan Merter were also interviewed during a two-hour live radio programme, in which they introduced the "My Home" programme, and talked about the importance of spiritual education of children and strengthening the family. Tutors for the "My Home" programme in North Cyprus, Mrs. Suha Vakil Fanaeian and Mrs. Vecihe Bayraktar, joined the programme on air, establishing a connection between the project and North Cyprus.

Mrs. Rafat also gave a talk for Bahá'í youth and their friends about family, children's education, and marriage preparation.

(For further information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Cyprus)

## **Belarus's new Web site**

The Belarussian Bahá'í community has launched its new official Web site (<[www.bahai.by](http://www.bahai.by)>) in Belarussian, Russian and English. The site will be periodically updated and will gradually increase in scope as it includes new Bahá'í community home pages. It is aimed at a non-Bahá'í public and gives clear and detailed information on how to take part in different activities in the Belarussian community. It replaces the community's previous site <[www.chat.ru/~bahai\\_belarus](http://www.chat.ru/~bahai_belarus)>, which was launched in 1999.

The National Assembly also has a new e-mail address, [secretariat@bahai.by](mailto:secretariat@bahai.by), to replace its former address, [nsabel@infonet.by](mailto:nsabel@infonet.by), which expired 19 October 2002.

(For further information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Belarus)

## **Summer school on Ukrainian television news**

A Bahá'í summer school on family life was featured on local television news in the Ukraine. The report, pointed to the fact that 40 percent of the participants at the school were non-Bahá'ís, which was interpreted as a sign of the applicability of the Bahá'í teachings to contemporary society. Bahá'í were also interviewed.

(For further information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine)

## **Top World Federalists attend Bahá'í events in London**

Two members of the European Bahá'í Business Forum took part in the 24<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the World Federalist Movement (WFM) at Imperial College, London, and the concurrent seminar, "From Global Markets to Global Justice".

The WFM has been at the forefront of NGOs advocating

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a world federal authority and a world parliament and it recently worked at the helm of a coalition of more than 1,000 NGOs in support of the establishment of the International Criminal Court.

The Bahá'í community of the United Kingdom also hosted a seminar during the WFM Congress, followed by a reception at the National Centre. The events were attended by WFM President Sir Peter Ustinov, Executive Director William Pace, and former Canadian Minister of Trade and Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy, who supported minority rights issues, including matters regarding defence of the Bahá'ís in Iran. The seminar's talks explored topics related to world governance such as national sovereignty versus implementation of human rights, given by Nazila Ghanea-Hercock (her paper can be downloaded from <[www.juxta.com/main.cfm?SID=22](http://www.juxta.com/main.cfm?SID=22)>); interdependence, cooperation, and the emergence of global institutions, given by Augusto Lopez-Claros; and the Bahá'í perspectives on collective security, given by Prof. Danesh Sarooshi. Many WFM officers and congress participants commented very favourably on the seminar's contents and the visionary – yet logical – Bahá'í perspectives.

Bahá'ís reported that the WFM meetings provide a good opportunity for networking and learning new concepts about world governance or providing a system of justice, accountability, and the institutional and legal framework. (For further information contact the EBBF and the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom)

#### **Spirit in Business conference in Switzerland**

Bahá'ís were invited to a meeting in Switzerland about the Spirit in Business (SiB) Global Institute, an organisation founded in the United States in 2001 that seeks to bring spiritual values to global business practices. The SiB aims to aggregate knowledge, to facilitate learning, to spread information and knowledge, and to build a global community of 100,000 business leaders and 100 business partners.

The some 100 individuals who attended the conference consulted on the business plan, principles, and practices of the SiB and on how to build commitment to this new network. The Bahá'í participants took part in their capacity as members of the boards of the Global and European SiB Institutes and the EBBF.

Future conferences are planned for 2003 in Australia, Bangkok, Brazil, Europe, and the United States, and it is anticipated that a partnership agreement will be developed between SiB and EBBF.

(For further information contact the EBBF)

#### **Local British community helps set up university inter-religious centre**

A local community is giving its input to a new inter-religious centre at the university campus of the town of Derby, United Kingdom. The University of Derby decided to construct a centre on the campus for the various religious communities, with rooms and spaces to be shared by the different religions to aid consultation

and the exchange of ideas. It would also include a library, meditation room, and common areas for celebrations, prayer services, courses, talks, and debates.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom gave the first financial contribution from a religious community for the construction of the centre. The contribution, to be paid over five years, is significant to the committee, since the Bahá'í community in the UK is not as large in number as other religions, while other communities have made offers more in proportion to their size. The Bahá'í contribution is being managed by Mrs. Pamela Sutton who is also on the Committee for Religious Services and Pastors of the University. (For more information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom)

#### **Visit leads to external affairs meetings in Ukraine**

Numerous contacts were established thanks to a visit by Mrs. Mahshid Fatio to the Ukraine. Mrs. Fatio, a former representative of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) to the United Nations, took part in a round table discussion for academics and representatives of the media on the message of the Universal House of Justice to religious leaders, and met with representatives of the State committee on religious affairs. During the visit, she also met with students of the psychology and sociology faculties of the National Ukrainian University and leading religious scientists of the Institute of Philosophy. Bahá'ís reported very positive responses to the meetings.

(For further information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine)

#### **Spain's weekly radio time for *Virtues Guide***

The Spanish Bahá'í community will air a weekly radio programme on the *Virtues Guide*. The twenty-minute section of the "Barbará Magazine" programme is aimed at families, and will present perspectives on children's education, and moral education in particular, in a participatory, diversified, practical – and yet entertaining – fashion. Each week a new virtue will be discussed, and guests will include other individuals with experience using the *Virtues Guide* in different contexts such as families, schools, or professions. Children who have been engaged with the guide will participate, as will professors and other professionals from the field of education.

(For more information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain)

#### **11 September official service of remembrance in London**

The National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom was represented at an official Service of Remembrance and Commemoration in St. Paul's Cathedral in London for the victims of the 11 September terrorist attack on the United States and for the emergency services that were called to action during that time.

The service took place in the presence of HRH The Prince of Wales, HRH Prince Harry of Wales, the Prime

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Minister, other senior government officials, and HE the Honourable William Farish, the Ambassador of the United States of America to the Court of St. James's. The Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the UK joined representatives of other non-Christian faiths in processions through the cathedral before and after the service.

The Bishop of London delivered the sermon, and referred to the coming together today of the major faith traditions to mourn and to look ahead. He also cited Revelation 21:1–7 and 22:1–5, which refers to the “new heaven” and the “new earth” and the coming of the “new Jerusalem” and contains a number of familiar phrases, such as, “See, I am making all things new”, “the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations”, and “there will be no more night”.

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

### **Belgian radio interviews Bahá'í expatriate**

A Belgian radio station dedicated an episode of the show *Les Belges du bout du monde* (“Belgians at the End of the Earth”) to an interview with Christine Jaminon, a Belgian Bahá'í who lives in India. In the interview on RTBF International radio, she was asked to speak about her motivations for leaving, her new life in India, and the NGO for education that she founded with her husband.

(For more information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of the Belgium)

### **Virtues Guide authors tour Spain**

The authors of the *Virtues Guide*, Linda Kavelin and Dan Popov, met with media and high-ranking officials during a recent visit to Spain. Among the events attended by authors was a presentation of their work sponsored by United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) and introduced by former Director General of UNESCO in Paris, Prof. Federico Mayor Zaragoza.

They also presented their work in Madrid, in the company of Mrs. Consuelo Vázquez, Director of Programmes of the Spanish UNESCO Commission.

The same day, a conference was held on teaching virtues in the Education Faculty of the University Complutense of Madrid, with Vice-Dean of Alumni and International Relations, Prof. José Cervelló.

Later that week, the authors went to Barcelona where they were interviewed by “La Contraportada”, an important section of the newspaper *La Vanguardia*, where they spoke alongside Mrs. Tareixa Enríquez, director of the magazine *Dietética y salud* (“Diet and Health”) and Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain. Another newspaper published an article about the authors, saying that they “wrote the book so that parents may educate their children and to arouse the virtues of the soul”.

Before leaving they gave a course for facilitators in the techniques offered by the guide, which was attended by individuals from communities throughout Spain. Mrs. Kavelin explained, “a native community in Canada was

the first to express interest in the work, which during two months was distributed to twenty countries, only in photocopy version and without marketing. Now the federal government of Canada has declared that this is the first educative programme welcomed by the native people, and in the United States 300,000 people are using it”.

(For more information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain)

### **Landegg presents Bosnia project as an option for Israel**

A Landegg International University programme was presented to 26 Israeli and Palestinian educators working to promote harmony and understanding among the younger generations of their country. The seminar in Geneva was hosted by the Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA), whose Web site can be found at <[www.mecaforpeace.org](http://www.mecaforpeace.org)>. The directors invited representatives from Landegg to make a presentation on the Education for Peace (EFP) programme after attending a keynote speech on peace education by Dr. Hossein Danesh at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem last May.

The university's EFP-Bosnia project was used as a model of successful postwar interethnic reconciliation, which the seminar participants could relate to and draw hope from. The consultation and collaboration with like-minded organisations and institutions is part of Landegg's practical conflict-resolution and peace-building work.

Seminar participants first learned of the philosophy and methodology of EFP in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina over the past two years. The participants then divided into mixed nationality consultative groups to establish strategies for an integrated approach to peace education in their respective communities. The Israeli and Palestinian representatives were moved by the anecdotes of the struggles and successes of Bosnian participants – which paralleled the increased tension and violence in their own country.

(For more information visit <[efp.landegg.edu](http://efp.landegg.edu)> or write to [efp@landegg.edu](mailto:efp@landegg.edu))

### **French Internet magazine recommends Bahá'í religious site**

A Bahá'í Web site about religions of the world was rated one of the best 500 sites by a French Internet magazine. The site, *Religare* (<[www.religare.org](http://www.religare.org)>), was part of the magazine's “Rentrée 2002” religious listings for the year. The site presents the features of seven major religions: the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. More than 80 holy texts are available on the site and the magazine noted that the site allows for research in a precise subject through an internal search engine. It also reported that links are offered to the main Web sites of each religion. The report concludes with the assessment that “this site wishes to be a call for unity in diversity.”

(For more information visit <[www.religare.org](http://www.religare.org)>)

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### **Bahá'í NGO to give leadership seminars to Kosovar government**

The Kosovar government has asked a Bahá'í-inspired NGO, Global Perspectives, to host moral leadership seminars. The invitation of the government was based on the success of its first seminar – of the first activities of Global Perspectives – that brought together 35 people from diverse (and mostly antagonistic) ethnic groups in the region. Although participants started the seminar by avoiding contact, they ended with warm embraces. After the event, the group received a telephone call from the government, requesting moral leadership seminars for the personnel of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The programme was initiated by the Global Motion Social Dance Theatre, a group that aims to generate a youth movement to raise awareness of social problems and dedicated to advancing education of their peers through the arts. The group is particularly relevant to the Kosovar population, which is 60 percent youth. The dance group takes youth aged between 15 and 18 through a twenty-session process of psycho-social, moral, and artistic training, which will establish them as active agents of personal and social change.

The Global Perspectives project is subsidised and supported by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Embassies of the United States and Germany, and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Kosovo.

(For further information write to the following email address: [gpd\\_c\\_kosovo@yahoo.com](mailto:gpd_c_kosovo@yahoo.com))

### **Faith listed on BBC online encyclopaedia**

The Bahá'í Faith was included for the first time on the Web site of the BBC's Encyclopaedia of Religions (<[www.bbc.co.uk/religions/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religions/index.shtml)>). Alongside other religions, the encyclopaedia presents an objective and accurate description of many aspects of the Faith, describing its history, beliefs, holy days and what it means to live a Bahá'í life. Bahá'ís note the inclusion in the encyclopaedia reflects the consideration being given to the Faith in the United Kingdom and that it is also a sign of increasing recognition by the media.

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

### **In Paris UNESCO awards peace prize to City Montessori School in India**

The City Montessori School in India was awarded the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education in Paris. The founders of the school, a Bahá'í couple, Mr. Jagdish and Mrs. Bharti Gandhi received the prize in September on behalf of the school in recognition of their work to influence public opinion and mobilise consciousness in favour of peace. The school is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the largest privately run school in the world and is distinctive not just for its size, but also because the students systematically score higher on exams than the national average, and because of its

philosophy, which is based on tolerance and peace. Inspired by the non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi (to whom they are not related) and the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith on education, the oneness of religion, and service to humanity, the Gandhis developed their school on four fundamental pillars: universal values, excellence, global understanding, and active service to the community.

The Director-General of UNESCO, Ko'ichiro Matsuura, presented the 30,000 U.S. dollars award to the school's founders at the organisation's seat in Paris. Members of the Bahá'í International Community Office of Public Information in Paris, the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of France, and relatives of the Gandhis were present at the award ceremony, which took place before about 400 people.

During his speech at UNESCO, Mr. Gandhi told of the Faith's influence on their philosophy and its emphasis on "the oneness of God, oneness of Religion, and oneness of Mankind." "These teachings," he said, "emphasize the abandonment of all forms of prejudices, the unity of the world, and service to humanity." He then read a quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, about children, which was also read during the press conference. Mrs. Gandhi touched on the importance of integrating ethical and spiritual values, such as coexistence and tolerance, in education. She also mentioned the Faith in her address to the public, explaining that the Bahá'í perspective considers a meaningful child education one of the greatest services.

Five journalists attended the press conference, where the Gandhis shared the history and background of their Faith and that of the City Montessori School, which they founded in 1959, with a class of only five students. The evening at UNESCO ended with cocktails and congratulations offered to the couple and a celebration of their accomplishments.

Among the past prize recipients were Mother Teresa and Rigoberta Menchu (Guatemala).

(For more information contact the BIC-OPI Paris and the National Spiritual Assembly of France)

### **Bulgaria holds architectural exhibition featuring Terraces project**

Prominent people were invited to a high-profile exhibition on the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb at the Architectural Union in Sofia, Bulgaria, in September. Approximately 125 people attended the opening and up to 20 people attended the exhibition each day.

The audience seemed to appreciate the quality of the display, which included a video tape showing the progressive work on Mount Carmel. With the approval of OPI Haifa, pictures from the CD "Terraces" and photographs taken by youth who had attended the event were enlarged, framed, and displayed with an individual description for each exhibit. An information brochure about the Terraces was given to the press and participants highlighting the contribution made by various architects involved throughout the Terraces

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projects, together with an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith. Due to the great success of the official opening, other invitations were prepared and sent for another formal evening several days later. Dignitaries, religious leaders, the mayor, officials of the municipality of Sofia and the press were among the people who received invitations to the exhibition. Prior to the opening, interviews were organised with the television station BTV, Radio Station DARIK, and many newspapers including *IMOTH* and *Nash Dom* ("Our Home").

(For more information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Bulgaria)

#### **Bahá'í hosts talent show for foreign press in Paris**

Mrs. Brenda Abrar, the press attaché of the National Spiritual Assembly of France, was the main hostess at an evening talent show for the Foreign Press Association (FPA). During the evening, the journalists sang an African Bahá'í song along with Mrs. Abrar and she was accompanied by a small orchestra composed of journalists, including Peter Gaskell of the British news service *The Guardian-The Observer*. The evening began with a piano concert by a Russian journalist and continued informally at the association's bar. Representatives of the BIC-OPI Paris also participated in the event and supported Mrs. Abrar in her efforts.

The attaché, and representatives from *One Country* and BIC-OPI are regularly invited to the activities of the FPA, which is used by about 500 correspondents from 63 countries working in France.

(For more information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of France)

#### **Faith added to Spanish teaching materials**

The Bahá'í Faith has been included in a notebook for teachers and alumni of public schools in Cataluña, Spain describing the teachings and characteristics of seven world religions. The book was prepared by the UNESCO group for inter-religious dialogue in Barcelona, in collaboration with Generalitat de Cataluña, Ajuntament de Barcelona, and Centro UNESCO de Cataluña. The section for teachers contains information about Bahá'í holy days and their significance, the teachings and laws, a brief historical summary of the lives of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and their most significant writings.

The part for students includes two quotations, from Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, an educational game where 25 virtues (based on the *Virtues Guide*) have to be identified, and a multicultural game with photos of the Shrine of the Báb and the Temple in India, images that also serve as the basis for three other exercises about their designs, symbols, and images of diversity.

Mr. Torradeflot, secretary of the Cataluña UNESCO Association for Inter-Religious Dialogue, commented that the aim is "to offer the secondary level students a panoramic vision of religions present in Cataluña, and to diffuse for the schools a spirit of dialogue, tolerance and respect for both cultural and religious diversity".

The guide compliments the inter-religious calendar that has been published since 2000 by the UNESCO association for inter-religious dialogue, the Cataluña UNESCO Centre, and the Universal Forum of Cultures Barcelona.

(For more information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain)

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*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 25<sup>th</sup> of each month (25 November 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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