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New team at BIC-OPI Paris

BIC-OPI Paris is very happy to announce the arrival in Paris of its new collaborator, Varqá Carlos Jalali from Portugal and the United Kingdom. Carlos will shortly be defending his doctorate in political science at Oxford and working on various European projects at BIC-OPI Paris. The Office would also like to wish a warm welcome to Jasmin Reyhani from Germany, who is offering a year of service at OPI. Jasmin graduated from the Townshend International School in the Czech Republic.

The Office wishes to warmly thank Natascha Reeder Brugiroux and Nathan O'Neill for their services both of whom were very familiar to the participants of the Public Information Management Seminar in Acuto. Natasha is attending the Institute of Social Development in The Hague and Nathan is pursuing a specialisation in translation and interpretation in Dublin.

(For further information contact the BIC-OPI Paris)

9th Public Information Management Seminar to contribute to European collaboration

Hungary will be hosting the next European Public Information Management Seminar from 29-31 March 2002, in Budapest. The seminar will launch consultation on European public information projects, and offer practical training for public information officers and members of National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies in Europe. European Bahá'í-inspired associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) will be the main topic in the programme, and it is hoped the seminar will serve to establish links between Bahá'í institutions and associations seeking to promote Bahá'í principles in wider society, generating synergies in the process of public information management. General and specific subjects of interest to the current and future public information programmes in Europe will be featured, in particular the utilisation of contacts with the media following the opening of the Terraces. The National Secretary of External Affairs of the National Assembly of Brazil has been invited to share the exciting experiences there, and representatives of the Office of Public Information from the World Centre and Paris are also to be present, as well as a group of experienced individuals from different countries. The Office of Public Information strongly encourages all European National Spiritual Assemblies to consider sending a representative to this seminar. Please inform the Office of the number and names of your country participants by 15 February 2002.

(For further information contact the BIC-OPI Paris and the Office of Public Information of the National Spiritual Assembly of Hungary)

Switzerland: Chapter on the Bahá'ís included in new book for schools

A new inter-faith book is being introduced in French-speaking schools in Switzerland, with the section on the Bahá'í Faith approved by the National Spiritual Assembly of that country. The book, "Panorama of Religions: Traditions, convictions and practices in French-speaking Switzerland" was published by Editions Enbiro and presents each religion in the same format, providing general information and statistics on the religion, and a section related to students, with details about such topics as marriage, nutrition and the age of maturity. An accurate presentation of the Faith by a non-Bahá'í publisher represents a victory for the Swiss community, and is the result of long-term collaboration between the Spiritual Assembly of Geneva and the Inter-religious Platform of Geneva, and of the Spiritual Assembly of Pully with the Arzillier House of Dialog in Lausanne.

The Swiss Bahá'ís reported that such courses are becoming more widespread as dissatisfaction with denominational teaching grows and as schools look for more objective ways of presenting humanity's diverse spiritual heritage to youth.

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

Bahá'ís assist 9th business and ethics conference in Bulgaria

Eleven national and foreign organisations held the ninth International Conference on "Moral and Ethical Principles in a Social Market Economy: Sustainable Development" this November in Bulgaria, with financial and logistical support from the European Bahá'í Business Forum. Over one hundred people gathered in the Sofia Commodity Exchange for the two-day event, representing businesses, academia and banks. Areas focussed included "Ethical Principles and Sustainable Development" and "Good Practices in Micro-financing and Social Responsibility in Small and Middle-sized Businesses", with presentations including the responsibility of business for the spiritual growth of nations, by Professor Ivan Kalchev, PhD; the influence of morality on economic changes in Eastern Europe, by Duhomir Minev, PhD; spiritual dimensions of sustainable development; and "Social Responsibility of Business", by Bahá'í academic Theodore Bourilkov. A round table on micro-finance included representatives of six banking institutions and about thirty entrepreneurs from small and mid-size

businesses. Students gave several presentations during the conference, and it is noteworthy that while only two higher education institutions in Bulgaria offered classes in business ethics at the time of the first of these international conferences, this number now exceeds fifteen. For materials on the conference visit the Web site: <http://www.web.bg/nmzh/sustainable/sustainable.htm>.

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

Peace initiatives in Iceland

Icelandic Bahá'ís participated in two peace events in November and December. The community was invited by the Icelandic University of Education to attend a seminar on religious tolerance, held as a direct result of the 11 September 2001 attacks. Representatives of six religions took part, with each introducing their religion at the beginning of the seminar and answering the question: "How do you, as a representative of your religion, believe the education system could promote more respect and tolerance towards different religions and their followers?" The Bahá'ís suggested increasing religious education, emphasising aspects common to all the major religions, and mentioned the need for children to learn to accept different customs and ways of life as natural aspects of society. They also noted the importance of teaching virtues such as love, patience and tolerance in school.

Bahá'ís were also invited to take part in a peace gathering on 15 December, along with other religions. Approximately one thousand people attended the event, which began with a general introduction by Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, the President of Iceland. Each of the religious representatives gave a short address about peace or read a prayer and sang a religious song. Einar Agust Vidisson, a well-known singer and performer in Iceland, started this main part of the program with the prayer, "Unite the hearts of Thy servants", and classical singer, Lindita Ottarsson, chanted "Alláh-u-Abhá", and was joined by the participants and the President. Ms. Ottarsson was also asked to sing "Alláh-u-Abhá" on national radio after the host of the program commented on the beauty of the song.

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

Sixty people attend launch of Bahá'í book in Bulgaria

Prominent people, media and members of the public attended the official presentation of the Bulgarian translation of the book "The Search for a Just Society" in Sofia, on 10 December 2001. More than sixty people were present as a non-Bahá'í professor gave an inspiring account of the book at the event, and the Bahá'ís noted that this marked the first time in recent

years that there had been such a high level discussion of the Faith in public. The author, John Huddleston, has worked for the International Monetary Fund for many years and written several books. The Bulgarian edition of this book was translated by Bahá'í academic Theodore Bourilkov, and is published by Sofia University Press.

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

Bahá'ís at first World Citizens Assembly

French Bahá'ís took part in the first World Citizens Assembly held in Lille, France from 2 to 10 December. Four hundred people from around the world, representing the diversity of world civil society, attended the gathering, which resulted in the formulation of a charter on human responsibilities. As stated in the charter, this Assembly was created out of the admission that it was "necessary and urgent to create a new social pact among human beings, to build collaboration to ensure humanity's survival on the planet". The Bahá'ís of Lille contributed to the preparations for the event through working with the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of France was invited to attend the opening and closing ceremonies. The event was supported by the regional French authorities and the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation. It invited 400 representatives from all around the world. For further materials on this Assembly visit the Web site: <http://www.alliance21.org/>

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

Bulgarian Bahá'ís meet European human rights representative

Representatives from fifteen religious communities in Bulgaria were invited to a 19 December meeting with the European Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Álvaro Gil-Robles, during his recent visit to the country. Although the meeting was short, it was an opportunity for the Bahá'ís to establish contact with Mr. Gil-Robles and thank the Bulgarian Director of Religious Affairs Luybomir Mladenov for the friendly relations between the federal government and the Bahá'ís since the Bahá'í Community's official registration in 1993.

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

Bahá'ís at official fair for volunteers

Luxembourg Bahá'ís made an impact at a Fair of Voluntary Work on 9 December. The fair marked the end of the International Year of the Volunteer and attracted approximately 10,000 visitors. The Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í-inspired Unity Foundation NGO were among the 200 voluntary organisations to take part. The fair was organised by the Ministry of Family. Bahá'ís joined other faiths in an interfaith celebration

at the beginning of the day. The Luxembourg Bahá'í Women's Organisation had been invited to the fair, and reported having a successful stand. Decorated with quotations from the Writings and pictures, the stand's computer slide-show presentation showed the work of the Luxembourg Bahá'í community in the field of the equality of women and men and in service to humanity. The public was invited to contribute to a piece of art, which paid tribute to the voluntary work sector, by completing a collage of written quotations onto "leaves" to be added to the piece. This artwork was to be symbolically sold in benefit of a

girls school in Tanzania, a project of the Unity Foundation, before being donated to the Ministry of Family as symbol of service to humanity. The piece garnered contributions from several Members of Parliament, among others.

The Unity Foundation also had a stand during the event and Luxembourg's largest newspaper, *The Luxemburger Wort*, covered the Bahá'í participation at the fair in its 10 December edition.

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

Note: Please send all news concerning Public Information to be published directly to BIC-OPI, Paris no later than the 25th of each month (25 January for next issue) to the attention of Jessica Dacey. The Office of Public Information reserves the right to edit any articles and decide on the publication of all submitted material. Information that is no longer recent is less likely to be published.

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