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Special 100th Edition:

Highlights of European Public Information Activities of the Past 10 Years

This edition of the European Public Information Bulletin, which first appeared in August of 1993 and is often referred to by its readers as the EPIB, is the 100th issue of the publication.

Five years after the establishment of the Bahá'í International Community's European and Francophone Office of Public Information in Paris, in the Fall of 1988, this bulletin was created as a means of informing the European National Spiritual Assemblies and other interested institutions and individuals regarding the European activities in the field of Public Information, both as a gesture of recognition of those activities and as an inspiration for the sister communities who were just starting their activities.

This anniversary issue pays tribute to all 37 European National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies who were invited to prepare a short report regarding their most significant activities and achievements during the past 10 years. The results are most impressive.

The Office would like to take this opportunity and thank Ms. Jessica Dacey, who as an editor of the EPIB has faithfully and untiringly made possible, together with the OPI editing team in Paris and Haifa, its regular and timely publication, no matter where she has been physically dwelling.

We apologize, that some contributions of the National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies had to be edited or shortened in order to fit space constraints.

Albania

Public information has played a prominent role in the expansion of the Albanian community – today the largest Bahá'í population in Europe, with approximately thirteen thousand believers.

From the start of the country's development, the most learned and prominent Albanians, including politicians, professors, doctors and famous cultural and media personalities have embraced Bahá'í ideals and many have visited the Bahá'í World Centre. They have also attended Bahá'í seminars on various issues of national concern.

A key objective of public information work is to ensure that the Faith is recognised as one of the major religions in Albania. To aid this effort, important strides have been made in developing and strengthening relations with various religious leaders over the last decade. During the last year, these efforts were rewarded with fruitful results stemming from the dissemination of the Universal House of Justice's message to the world's religious leaders in the country. Of note are the receptions accorded to the bearers of this message by the leaders of the Albanian Roman Catholic Church and Bektashi Order of Sufis.

Other activities have included relations with the government leading to victories for the Cause, distribution of the *One Country* newsletter, four open letters published through the national print media that received some dramatic responses, and the Bahá'í Cultural Centre becoming an unmistakable feature of the main square of the capital Tirana, attracting a steady

stream of inquiries.

The media has been particularly active in proclaiming the Bahá'í message, highlights being a one-hour documentary filmed in Haifa and Akká that aired several times in 2001, and televised broadcasts of the visits of Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhíyyih Khánum to Albania.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Albania)

Austria

Bahá'í activity in Austria over the past ten years has attracted strong media attention, ranging from the extensive coverage during the Holy Year to the opening of the Terraces.

Reports during the Holy Year appeared in all well-known newspapers and local media, as well as two television programmes, and a one-hour show on the Faith on Austrian ORF Radio.

More than thirty media reports on the Faith were published in 1993 and the Faith was given wide coverage during the International Congress on Human Rights in June of that year. A highlight of the congress was a gala concert organised by the National Spiritual Assembly that was attended by diplomats and other high-ranking personalities. Also during that year, press releases were distributed about the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran and ORF Radio broadcast interviews with believers.

Additional coverage resulted from "150 Years of the Bahá'í Faith" and the visit of Mrs. Olya Roohizadegan to Vienna where she presented her book *Olya's Story*.

Another highlight was the inclusion of the Faith in a commemorative booklet by the Austrian government *1000 Jahre Österreich* (1000 Years Austria) in 1997. The booklet described the history of the Faith in Austria and the activities of the community towards a peaceful society. Official registration of the Austrian Bahá'í Community as a religious community in 1998 also resulted in increased media coverage.

Austrian television (ORF) also made two films about the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb. Recently, the distribution of the message to the world's religious leaders led to a positive report on the Austrian television. Two weeks later, a report on the House of Worship in India was also broadcast on the same programme entitled *Religionen der Welt* (Religions of the World).

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Austria)

Belarus

Public information and external affairs activities in Belarus have included the visit by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánúm in 1993 and the creation of the community's official Web site. The community's first important contact was made when Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánúm met with Belarussian Ministry of External Affairs officials in Minsk and held two public meetings.

Public recognition increased in 2000, when the national Bahá'í community was registered by the State Committee for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. That same year, Mrs. Mahchid Fatio, representative to the United Nations for the Bahá'í International Community for more than 25 years, visited Minsk and Vitebsk and met with the head of the UN Office in Belarus, officials from UNICEF and the State Committee for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

Although the community does not have a public information committee at present, it was able to set up its own Web site in September 2002. The site <www.bahai.by> quickly became one of the top three most visited of the sixty religious Belarussian sites.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Belarus)

Belgium

Over the past ten years, a solid foundation for public information work in Belgium has been established and constantly developed. Bahá'ís have cultivated a relationship with the Minister of External Affairs for the defence of the Bahá'ís in Iran, and with other departments involved in international cooperation, the environment, human rights and racism. There are also contacts with regional government officials and the director of the United Nations Office for the Benelux countries, in Brussels, so that the National Spiritual Assembly is invited to activities that the UN Office organises.

An active media committee has been working for the past year, systematically informing the press of all Bahá'í activity that could be of public interest. Recently, the participation of Belgian Bahá'ís at a conference in New York led to the broadcast of four 20-minute programmes on the *Voices of Bahá* choir.

At the local level, communities have developed their public relations in specific areas, with emphasis on inter-religious dialogue and international cooperation. Activities that have attracted attention include performances by the dance workshop *Beating Hearts*, which has served as a constant tool for proclamation. The group is given regular coverage in the press every year and is often invited to non-Bahá'í sponsored events. An exhibition was organised at the national centre for the opening of the Terraces, and two important articles appeared in Francophone newspapers.

At the 1995 UN Women's Conference in Beijing, a delegation of Belgian Bahá'ís participated and have since developed active relations with the national women's counsel, parliamentary women's groups, the Minister responsible for women's affairs and different nongovernmental organisations (NGOs).

On a wider scale, a delegation of the European Bahá'í Business Forum takes part in regular discussions on the European level in Brussels, and Belgian friends have committed themselves to further developing the *Association Francophone Européenne des Études Bahá'ies* (Francophone Association for Bahá'í Studies). The Belgian community would like to congratulate, on the 10th anniversary of the European Public Information Bulletin, and especially all the work in the field of public relations with European institutions and UNESCO, as well as the training of friends that the BIC-OPI Paris has built up during this period of time.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Belgium)

Bulgaria

During the last two years in Bulgaria, external affairs activities included a high-ranking official visiting the national centre, a daily newspaper publishing a one-page article about the Faith, and a book about the Bahá'í teachings being presented to the media and academics. At the end of 2001, the publishing house of the University of Sofia printed *The Search for a Just Society*, written by John Huddleston and translated by Theodore Bourilkov. The book, which presents the Bahá'í teachings to an academic audience, was presented four times: in Sofia in the city library during the 9th International Conference on Moral and Ethical Principles in a Social Market Economy, at one of the universities of Sofia, and on two private television channels. Presentations of the book continued in universities around the country. In April 2002, daily newspaper *24 Hours* printed a full-page interview with Maria Milosheva, Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, which focused on many aspects of the Faith. The following July, Bahá'ís welcomed the Director of Religious Affairs at the

Council of Ministers of Bulgaria, Mr. Ivan Zhelev. The meeting with Mr. Zhelev, who is also an associate professor and Dean of the Theological faculty in Sofia, was the first official visit to the national Bahá'í centre. (Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Bulgaria)

Canary Islands

The Spiritual Assembly of the Canary Islands created its first Office of Public Information about ten years ago. It began with a single office for all of the Islands that was later divided into two, with one serving the province of Las Palmas and the other serving Tenerife. The offices have three main areas of responsibility: dealing with the media, relations with public authorities, and public information.

On average, there are about five reports on the Faith published every year. The community has maintained a good relationship with the media, especially with the newspapers. Friendships with journalists have been a determining factor in the success of this part of media relations. The Bahá'ís have also fostered good relations with radio stations, and the community receives phone calls several times a year, inviting them to participate in radio programmes. A weekly one-hour programme with the title "Spiritual Vibrations" included a dialogue between a non-Bahá'í and a Bahá'í. Recent television coverage reported on a Bahá'í ping-pong team from Las Palmas that participated in the finals of the Spanish League of Honour. Interviews with Bahá'ís who were visiting the islands, or news of activities organised by a local Bahá'í community, have also been aired.

Relations with the authorities, both local and regional, are amicable and external affairs activities have included events throughout the islands that have proclaimed the Faith and built relationships with other organisations. A Day for the Environment has been held regularly over the past ten years on Las Palmas, with the support of the City Council, Town Hall, the Red Cross, firemen, schools, and several NGOs. On Tenerife, in Puerto de la Cruz Bahá'ís participate annually in the commemoration of the International Day for Peace, in collaboration with diverse organisations, and performances by music and dance groups. On various occasions, the Faith has been presented to presidents, parliamentarians and civil governors and other prominent people, attracting positive attention.

(Based on the report of the Spiritual Assembly of the Canary Islands)

Croatia

The Croatian Bahá'í community is in constant contact with the media and supplies them with information on a monthly basis. Among the press coverage has been a local newspaper reporting on the Bahá'í visit to the mayor of Pula and interviews with friends who were attending the celebration of the opening of the Terraces. Comprehensive news coverage was given to the opening of the Terraces in regional newspapers, television and radio stations. Other activities that attracted media attention included a Family Week, held in Zagreb, during

which public talks were given by visiting speakers. The week also included concerts and an exhibition at a prestigious museum. For the Earth Day celebration, the community held its first outdoor Bahá'í exhibition, which was organised by the town hall of Zagreb. A public talk, given at a forum of religious leaders, also caught the attention of the press and public Naw-Rúz celebrations in Zagreb in 2001 and 2002 were reported in the media. Also featured by the media was the project "Promoting Positive Messages Through the Media: The Happy Hippo Show", which was shown a few times on national television. Bahá'ís have collaborated closely with the Office for the Relations of Religious Communities to the Croatian Government, especially with regard to the formation of the new Law on Legal Status of Religious Communities, and a public presentation of the statement *The Prosperity of Humankind*.

(Based on the report of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Slovenia and Croatia)

Cyprus

Cypriot public information work has been helped by the creation of both an Office of Public Information and an Office for the Advancement of Women. Good relations have been established with the media, leading to wide coverage of Bahá'í events in national newspapers. The opening of the Terraces was full-page news in most national newspapers and news releases on Naw-Rúz, tree planting projects, the "Virtues Program", and performances of the *Sound of Unity Dance Workshop* all received newspaper coverage. The community has prepared a vision and action plan for an effective and systematic approach to contacting governmental officials and institutions. In the past, officials and prominent people were invited to Naw-Rúz celebrations, and twice a month receptions are held at the Bahá'í centre, providing an occasion for prominent people and local Bahá'ís to interact informally.

Ever since the establishment of the Office for the Advancement of Women, there has been collaboration with like-minded NGOs on several projects, such as International Women's Day, the initiation of literacy classes for adult women, year-long seminars on "Morals, Virtues, and Values" for women of society, year-long "Family Life" classes and "Mothers Are the Primary Educators" seminars for preschool teachers and mothers. In related efforts to promote the well-being of children, the Bahá'í community organised a UN Children's Rights Day Conference with NGOs, attended by 150 adults and 125 children. The conference was covered on national television, radio and newspapers.

The Faith also receives plenty of media coverage, especially on the radio – a 2,5 hour interview programme on the Faith was aired, and twice a month one of the principles of the Faith is discussed live on the radio, without the Faith being explicitly mentioned. The "Virtues" show is also held live on national television.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Cyprus)

Czech Republic

From the beginning of activities in Czechoslovakia in early 1990, the community has striven to bring the teachings to prominent people and state authorities. In 1990, Dizzy Gillespie introduced the Faith to President Václav Havel with a copy of *The Promise of the World Peace* and Mr. Havel was reported to have used quotations from it in his official speeches on several occasions. A very good relationship also exists with the Office of the President and its members who initiated a meeting with the Bahá'ís about "Believers in Modern Society" to discuss ethical values of faith and its benefits to the society. Other contact with high-level officials included presentations to the Prime Minister, who was approached during the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1996 and was presented with copies of *The Prosperity of Humankind* and *World Citizenship*. Over the years, good relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been maintained as Bahá'ís pursue raising awareness of the persecutions of the Bahá'ís in Iran. In the past decade, the Czech Bahá'í community has also organised and participated in a number of activities organised by NGOs, such as a symposium on tolerance and conferences on "Human Rights in Education", "Racism and Racial Discrimination" and "Tolerance and Human Rights". On the local level, the Bahá'í community of Brno contributed with its presentations of the World Citizenship Project, organised by the association People Against Racism.

A national press conference was held in Prague on the occasion of the opening of the Terraces and the events were followed by the Czech media, especially after the return of the Czech representatives. The media campaign also resulted in two television appearances, and one interview was the first presentation of the Bahá'í Faith on state television news. Further coverage included ten broadcasts by various radio stations, nine articles in daily newspapers and journals on both national and local levels, and three articles published in electronic media. The community also organised a reception for state officials, which was attended by more than forty prominent guests, the diplomatic corps, representatives of major churches and religious communities, as well as representatives of NGOs and the media. The ambassador of Israel, who was the guest of honour, addressed the gathering with very positive remarks on the Bahá'í teachings.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Czech Republic)

Denmark

The Danish Bahá'í community has developed its public information and external affairs work through the protection of the Faith in Iran and active participation in the 1995 United Nations Social Summit in Copenhagen. Its protection work started with the Islamic Revolution in Iran, when the community met with the Foreign Minister about the persecution of the Iranian Bahá'ís and developed close contact with government officials. Over

the past ten years, this contact has been cultivated through meetings with the Foreign Ministry and there have been numerous articles in newspapers about the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran.

The community also belongs to a circle of human rights organisations, which is brought together up to three times a year by the Foreign Ministry, and has good relationships with parliamentarians dealing with human rights issues. Bahá'í participation in the 1995 Social Summit provided an opportunity to develop relationships with a number of NGOs throughout Denmark. As a member of the Danish UNICEF Committee and the UN Association of Denmark, Bahá'ís attended several meetings on human rights, sustainable development and refugee issues. The organisation of a public Islamic-Christian Dialogue Forum as well as publication and distribution of several statements on racism and social development have also raised the Bahá'í profile.

Social events such as receptions for the opening of the Terraces have also raised public awareness. Among the highlights of press coverage of the opening was a three-minute feature on Danish TV1. The community is currently engaged in distributing the message of the Universal House of Justice to the religious leaders.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Denmark)

Estonia

Public information work in Estonia has seen major growth in the past ten years, including the development of solid relationships with government and journalists. The community has earned the respect of the Department for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior and is regularly invited to meetings and conferences for leaders of religious organisations. Bahá'ís have become known by the Ministry of Education due to three educational programmes presented in several schools and kindergartens "Living and Working in the 20th Century", "The Virtues Project" and "Involvement Education" and there have been talks with ministry officials about incorporating some of these materials into official curricula.

Cordial relations were established with a senior reporter of the national television station ETV who interviewed Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm during her 1993 visit and a popular women's magazine also published an interview with her. In 2002, the same journalist arranged to show excerpts from the video on the opening of the Terraces and an interview with a Bahá'í who attended the event.

Reports on special events, interviews, and highlights regularly appear in the press, due to good relations with the local press in five Estonian cities. The "Virtues Project" initiatives have also received news coverage several times. Visits to mayors of cities where Bahá'í schools or other events were taking place have been effective in proclaiming the Faith, and bookstores in several cities have agreed to distribute Bahá'í literature. (Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Estonia)

Finland

The Finnish community set up its National Office of Public Information towards the end of 1996. Even though it took many years for OPI Finland to become well acquainted with the External Affairs Strategy of the Universal House of Justice, and to find the necessary resources, the first systematic plan was ready for the Four Year Plan and the Bahá'ís gained valuable experience preparing information, fact sheets and press releases. During the last year of that Plan, Bahá'ís took part in the European-wide Citizen's Agenda 2000 NGO Forum, arranged a national public information campaign on Human Dignity-Global Responsibility, informed the media about the Bahá'í connection to the Millennium Forum and set up a national Web site. These activities were followed by preparations for the opening of the Terraces. Several articles were published about the opening, the fruit of nearly four months spent translating press releases issued by the Office of Public Information in Haifa. Other materials are routinely supplied to the press and during the past decade over twenty Bahá'í International Community statements have been translated into Finnish. Recently, there have been repeated positive developments, including articles about the Faith using exact wording from fact sheets and press releases.

The Five Year Plan has started with new long-term plans that include an extensive training programme for local public information officers, which is given by OPI Paris, and material from OPI Haifa, both of which are valuable in national public information efforts.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Finland)

France

Achievements in France over the past ten years have included colossal work with the media and the consolidation of a large network of contacts. Today, the community can count on a large reservoir of journalists and friends of the Faith, as the expanding work with the media has been pursued systematically.

The centenary celebration of the Faith in France, in 1998, produced unprecedented results and was widely covered in the media – positive articles were published, and radio and television broadcasts were made throughout France. At the national level, the mailing list of the press service of the National Spiritual Assembly of France covers over five hundred journalists, including foreign media correspondents in Paris, who receive press releases, invitations, etc. Regular contact (i.e. visits and phone calls) is nurtured with some one hundred journalists and about half of them have become friends of the Faith.

Work with associations and NGOs, the business world, prominent people, artists and the public at large has developed significantly due to the activities of the Women's Association, the European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF), the Bahá'í Radio Fréquence 19, the interreligious circles, an artistic association, the

participation of the National Spiritual Assembly of France in the French Committee of the NGOs for the liaison and information of the UN and French coalition for the International Criminal Court, and the Web site <www.religare.org>, among others. All these activities have encouraged collaborations, created friendships, and carried the message of the Faith to receptive individuals. The successful distribution of the message of the Universal House of Justice to the religious leaders in France, proved to be a unique opportunity to raise the prestige of the Bahá'í Community.

Finally, the creation of the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community in Paris, its activities throughout Europe and Francophone countries, as well as the distribution of the French edition of the *One Country* newsletter around the world, have given an international dimension to the external affairs of the Faith in France, particularly in Paris.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of France)

Germany

The past ten years have been characterised by an unprecedented scale of public information activity for the German Bahá'í community. Press coverage during the past decade has included very comprehensive and favourable reports in several prestigious newspapers. The media coverage for the opening of the Terraces was especially encouraging, with more than three million people reached by print media (around sixty articles) and between one and two million through television, radio, and the Internet. "The Earth is But One Country", an exhibition of paintings by two Bahá'í artists accompanied by quotations from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh toured the towns and exhibition halls of many German and neighbouring countries, and was covered by local press in many of the places it was displayed. In 1992, a commemoration of the Holy Year, with high-ranking guests, was followed by a documentary on the Faith by Germany's major television channel, ZDF. Other media coverage included a thirty-minute studio interview followed by an outstanding television documentary "The Bahá'í Religion on the Way to the Land of Unity", in which the journalist, a former Christian theologian and priest, succeeded in giving a glimpse of the life, work, and station of Bahá'u'lláh. For its 75th anniversary, the National Spiritual Assembly issued a statement entitled *Integration-Both Challenge and Chance*, which was published in one of the major national newspapers, *Die Zeit* (The Times).

There has also been remarkable progress in interfaith dialogue. Notably, the Bahá'í community has collaborated with the World Council on Religion and Peace and was invited to the interfaith workshop of the *Interkultureller Rat* (Intercultural Council), a prestigious association of different social organisations, federations and religious communities.

Unprecedented was the Bahá'í participation in the World's Fair EXPO 2000, a public event of the highest

international standards. Some three hundred volunteers worked for the 153-day event and the Bahá'í International Community was represented in a well-designed stand in the Global House, a pavilion dedicated to exemplary development projects of EXPO 2000. About 730,000 visitors came to the stand. Valuable contacts were made with NGOs, institutions, prominent people, journalists, and teachers, among others.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany)

Greece

Public information work in Greece became more systematic from the Holy Year onwards, with highlights of the past ten years including strong media support and contacts with like-minded organisations. Events organised by the community have led to developing relationships with journalists, have provided opportunities for news coverage, and have enhanced the image of the Faith in certain circles of society, such as universities and international agencies.

One such event, a piano concert series given by Marc Ochu in 1992, held to publicise the Bahá'í Holy Year and the World Congress, resulted in media coverage throughout Greece. Over the years, various individuals have been invited to give talks as honorary guests, leading to newspaper and magazine articles being published, an interview on Athenian television, and improved relations both with NGOs and the public. Dance workshops, concerts and other artistic presentations have taken place throughout Greece, resulting in articles and interviews by the media and full coverage of performances on local and national television. Local and national press releases expressing Bahá'í viewpoints on a number of different subjects have been distributed on UN commemorative days, and they have often been published or led to radio interviews and even a short report on the evening news on national television. There have been articles in the national television magazine, with one journalist encouraging people to follow the Bahá'í teachings. Press releases have also been sent regularly to the press about the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and national television station aired a two-minute news report on the opening of the Terraces.

The community has good relationships with media and like-minded groups. Many journalists are good friends of the Faith and are ready to defend it at any time with some even participating in Bahá'í events. In 1995, the community collaborated with other NGOs in organising a reception on human rights and, in 1998, held events on the UN, ECOSOC and the World Wildlife Fund. The community also took part in the first NGO fair held in Athens in 2001.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Greece)

Hungary

The Bahá'í Faith was officially recognised as a religion in Hungary during the Holy Year, and has been featured

extensively in the media since then. Hungarian National Television (HNTV) prepared a 30-minute documentary about the Bahá'í Faith in the late 1990s and recently, HNTV asked the Bahá'í community to produce a 30-minute report about the Hungarian Bahá'í community. The report, which has been aired twice so far, features ex-president Mr. Arpad Goncz, Mr. Otto Von Habsburg, and Prof. Erwin Laszlo all commenting favourably about the Faith, and has created great public interest.

Since the opening of the Terraces, the Faith has been mentioned some 25 times on national and commercial television stations through interviews, news, and reports, including a thirteen-minute interview and commentaries about the recent message of the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders, which was broadcast twice.

In memory of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Budapest in 1913, a marble plaque with the inscription, "We are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch" was placed in the garden of the national museum in Budapest in 1996. Two years later, a franking stamp was issued by the Hungarian post office, in commemoration of the 85th anniversary of the Bahá'í Faith in Hungary. Bahá'ís have also visited the President of the Republic of Hungary, with a Roma Bahá'í in the delegation. One year ago, the first Bahá'í youth started his civil service instead of the obligatory military service. This year, the Bahá'í community of Hungary began its partnership projects with UNESCO, working to support the International Decade of a Culture of Peace through projects such as the *Puzzle Dance Workshop*, the MESED project for Roma mothers and the Colourful World Circle.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Hungary)

Iceland

The Icelandic community has maintained a high profile over the past ten years through media coverage of activities, the activities of well-known Bahá'ís, and even a fire at the national centre.

Ten years ago, a Bahá'í was the representative of the Icelandic government at the UN Earth Summit. Media coverage of the Summit included mention of the Bahá'í project: soil being taken from the most holy place in Iceland (Thingvellir, where the oldest democratic parliament in the world was founded) and placed in the peace monument in Rio. The main television station aired an interview with a Bahá'í and a famous Icelandic caricaturist drew a picture of the event.

As part of its collaboration with the UN, the Bahá'í community held a preparatory meeting for the United Nations Women's Conference in Beijing, together with other NGOs, and the Icelandic representative wrote articles for the country's main newspaper about the UN Social Summit in Copenhagen. The BIC statement *The Prosperity of Humankind* was published in Icelandic for that conference. *Turning Point for All Nations* was also translated, for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. The community has additionally

been active in interfaith activities and some Bahá'ís have been recognised because of their activities working against prejudice, for the promotion of education and in other related fields.

Other coverage over the past decade included newspapers printing several articles about the Faith and a state radio programme series about Tahirih. There has also been considerable media coverage on the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran by television, radio, and newspapers. The most important media coverage was the broadcast, on the main national television station, of Icelandic dubbed version of the documentary "Jewel in the Lotus". This had an excellent response with many people purchasing the video documentary. The Icelandic community has also sought to increase its profile through the creation of a Web site of the national Bahá'í community.

Bahá'í artists have also drawn attention to the Faith through their work – Bahá'í Einar Ágúst Viðisson was a member of the most popular pop band in Iceland and was often interviewed about the Faith. Recently, Bahá'í composer Salbjörg Hotz produced a CD with songs based on poems about the history of the Faith, which received media coverage.

When the national centre burned down, there was wide media coverage making almost every Icelander aware of where the Bahá'í centre was located. Although a notable loss, it offered the Bahá'ís with the opportunity to draw public attention to the Faith and its long history in Iceland.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iceland)

Ireland

The Irish Bahá'í Information Office, has established an objective of creating and promoting a public image of the Faith as being open and accessible, as opposed to "foreign" and exotic, during the past ten years. To foster this image, the National Spiritual Assembly adopted a goal of trying to familiarise a greater percentage of the population with the Faith. In 2000, a professional survey showed that around 13% of the population had heard the word Bahá'í, of which 4% knew something of its teachings. Part of the plan was to make the community more accessible and to expand the dissemination of information, which included launching a Web site <www.bahai.ie> and setting up a toll-free phone number. Media coverage at the national level tends to fall into the following categories: persecutions of the Iranian Bahá'ís and refugees; religious television and radio programmes or discussions; press releases leading to coverage of events; editorial-type coverage and purchased advertising. While some events received national coverage, it has not proved easy to obtain it. The Bahá'í Information Office provides guidelines and material for local areas.

The National Spiritual Assembly also continues to foster positive relationships with various governmental departments and people of prominence and over the years, Bahá'í representatives have been regularly invited

to state events, providing opportunities to meet and network with Government officials and other invitees. In 1993, former President Mary Robinson received a delegation from the Assembly and was presented with the statement on Bahá'u'lláh. Current President Mary McAleese was the guest of honour at the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Dublin LSA in Dublin Castle. Another highlight was a conference held by the Association of Bahá'í Women on "The Challenge of Race Unity" attended by a number of NGOs and women's associations. Numerous United Nations thematic days are held at the local level every year.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Ireland)

Italy

The creation of the National External Affairs Committee in Italy marked the beginning of a systematic development in consciousness for the entire country. The committee has invested its energy into training and working to safeguard the accuracy of the Faith's public image. Guided by the Strategy for External Affairs outlined by the Universal House of Justice, activities included national training workshops, distribution of statements from the Bahá'í International Community, national campaigns in defence of the Iranian Bahá'ís and consolidation of relationships with prominent people. The Committee's work was bolstered by the opening of the National External Affairs Office in Rome in 1999, and when an experienced director in public relations was appointed to the Office, the Italian National Spiritual Assembly delegated the Office to handle both diplomatic and public information work.

Friendly relations with prominent people in the Vatican City and various associations has led to the appointment of the External Affairs Officer as member of the national boards of the Club of Budapest and the World Conference of Religions for Peace. The officer was also asked to join a commission that created a school programme on education for peace, in collaboration with the University of Florence.

Other contacts with universities include those made by the Italian branch of the European Bahá'í Business Forum. The EBBF has been asked to speak to university students about ethics in the work environment, and obtained a higher level of recognition last year with the establishment of a regular study course at the University of Bari.

There has also been recognition of the Bahá'ís by some non-Bahá'í publishers. Among these was the inclusion of the Faith in a Catholic encyclopaedia on religion. The most important Catholic publishing trust, Elledici, published *La Nuova Enciclopedia delle Religioni* and *i Bahá'í* by Margit Warburg, but first asked a Bahá'í to proofread all the work. The importance of the Bahá'í community was acknowledged by the authors of *Enciclopedia delle Religioni* and sociologists at the public presentation of *i Bahá'í* in Rome.

Among other achievements were the participation of the Bahá'í Publishing Trust at the book fair in Torino, national

newspaper and magazine coverage of the opening of the Terraces, and the distribution of the Universal House of Justice's message to the religious leaders.
(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy)

Latvia

The first regional assembly was elected in 1992 and the year that followed in Latvia was a very busy one. One day before the National Convention, then-Counsellor Paulin Rafat gave an interview with national television, which preceded the showing of the video "Prisoner of Akká". Later that same year, André Brugiroux gave a presentation during a ten-minute interview broadcast on the Latvian national television channel. A twenty-minute interview with Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum, during her visit to the country, was also broadcast on national television.

Most commonly, the Bahá'ís approach the media when particular Bahá'ís come to visit and publicity is sought, and whenever possible there are publications in Latvian newspapers.

When Hartmut Grossman and David Hofman visited Latvia, they met the governmental officials. The Bahá'í community has also established positive relations with the government officials regarding the persecutions of the Bahá'ís in Iran. The relationship with the Director of the Department of Associations and Religious Affairs, who is responsible for the registration of the Bahá'í community, is being nurtured.

(Based on the report of the Bahá'í Community of Latvia)

Lithuania

Although public information work in the Lithuanian Bahá'í community is still in its infancy, last year saw a great step forward in this field and witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of articles published about the Faith. Twelve articles related to the Bahá'í Faith were published in national and local newspapers, two local television programmes, a national television news broadcast, and a radio interview all drew attention of the public eye, to the Faith. Meetings with government officials have also raised the profile of the Bahá'í community. The increased attention is related to the opening of the Terraces and related proclamation projects, with a beautiful exhibition of the photos of the Terraces, which took place in five communities and attracted both seekers and press.

Visits by Counsellor Hartmut Grossman and Mrs. Mahchid Fatio, the former representative of the BIC at the Geneva UN office, were other major contributors to publicity. Successful meetings were also arranged with the mayors or vice-mayors of four cities, UNICEF officials in Lithuania, the head of women's organisation, as well as representatives of the New Religions Research and Information Centre, with some of the visits reported by the media.

Additionally, several local communities have attracted the interest of the media through such activities as

performances by the *Diversity Dance Theatre* and a public prayer meeting for the victims of the September 11 tragedy, held by the Kaunas community, which was reported by one newspaper.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Lithuania)

Luxembourg

During the past ten years, the Luxembourgish community has developed solid interfaith connections and set up its own Office of Public Information, adding to its long history of public relations activities. Due to the small size of the nation, public relation activities usually function on a national scale and NGO activity is covered by the media mainly at this level rather than a local or regional one. Public relations in Luxembourg are effective in areas when there is systemisation, continuity, and a long-term perspective.

The creation of an Office of Public Information in Luxembourg was a turning point for the activities in this field. The office has also arranged training for local public relations officers with the help of OPI Paris. The European public information seminars organised by the OPI Paris over the years have played a major role in adding to the understanding of the nature of public relations and provided the necessary training to the Public Information Officers in Luxembourg. A willingness to collaborate in events led to many invitations from other NGOs, especially those working in human rights and integration.

Good relations have been created with UN agencies and contacts made with the government, following the wave of persecutions of the Bahá'í community in Iran. The Office also sends BIC statements to NGOs and the government, and has received positive responses from these. The Bahá'í centre has also been used as a venue for public activities and conferences and the community has a regular presence at festivals and information fairs. Coverage on national television in the last two years has been a major breakthrough.

Contact with other religious communities was sporadic until a prayer for peace initiative evolved in 1992 from the war in former Yugoslavia, which turned into an annual interfaith event and invitations to an increasing number of interreligious activities followed.

Through the creation of a Bahá'í Women's Association, the community was able to establish very close relations with the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, responding to invitations and collaborating in activities.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Luxembourg)

Moldova

The National Spiritual Assembly of Moldova started its external affairs work after its formation in 1996. That year, the community organised a reception for government dignitaries and Members of Parliament. As a token of peace and solidarity, the councillor for the Speaker of Parliament handed over Moldavian soil to a

representative of the Bahá'í International Community to be sent to Rio de Janeiro for the peace monument. The community's support of the UN also included a charity concert for the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1997, organised in cooperation with UNICEF, during which the Voices of Bahá choir performed. The funds received from the ticket sales were donated to an orphanage and the choir gave free performances at places such as children's homes and health centres. A press conference was held with the director of the choir, Tom Price, and the representative of UNICEF. In the winter of 1999, the Office of External Affairs (in co-operation with the CHOROBIL and UNICEF) organised a press conference, also dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, on "Human Rights of Spiritual and Physical Health", which was attended by twelve journalists, including representatives from different journals and one from national television.

Recent events include last year's official reception to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Chisinau, the capital city of Moldova, with around forty people attending. This year, the National Spiritual Assembly delivered the message from the Universal House of Justice to religious leaders in nearly thirty-five religious communities and to many educators and scientists. Most recently, the Office of External Affairs organised a round table conference for the religious leaders, held on 17 September 2002. The event attracted some fifty people from twenty-five different confessions, including the Roman Catholic University, the chief of the Gypsy community, the Academy of Science and the Union of Journalists of Moldova.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Moldova)

The Netherlands

The past ten years have perhaps been the most important years in the history of the Dutch Bahá'í community. Enormous advances have been made in raising the level of awareness of the Faith through the concerted efforts of the public information department and the Bahá'í community in general.

Building on activities in previous years, the Holy Year helped raise the Faith's external profile. The Faith has been the subject of extensive news coverage between 1992 and 2002, mostly in newspapers and magazines, but several radio and television stations also broadcast programmes on various aspects of the Faith.

In addition to media contacts, the relationship with the Dutch government has developed through contact regarding the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. Dutch society is also beginning to see the Bahá'í community as an NGO with a clear vision when it comes to global issues such as human rights, the status of women and sustainable development. Working with other NGOs, Bahá'ís have been invited to attend conferences and participate in various intercultural and interreligious dialogues. Among the activity highlights has been the Bahá'í community's support for the Hague Appeal for

Peace, as well as the graduation ceremony at the Catholic University of Brabant on the history of the Faith in the Netherlands, attended by several religious leaders. Thanks to these developments, more people from different backgrounds – and at all levels of society – are becoming increasingly aware of the Faith.

Visits to the official Web site show that an increasing number of people are becoming interested in the Faith and many questions are being asked. There is also an increase in the number of students who want to know about the Faith.

The opening of the Terraces was a particular high point in media coverage – a large number of articles appeared in Dutch newspapers and a Bahá'í gave a radio interview. Dutch correspondents and the Netherlands Press Agency covered the events in Haifa for different newspapers in the Netherlands and, approximately 50,000 copies of a full-colour magazine about the Dutch Bahá'ís, the Faith and the Bahá'í World Centre were distributed nationwide.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Netherlands)

Norway

Two main events marked media coverage during the Holy Year: a conference focusing on 'Abdu'l-Bahá with a midnight concert in a museum in Oslo and an exhibition of work by Bahá'í artist Mark Tobey, attended by more than one thousand people, with prominent guests including the Foreign Minister who greeted the public on behalf of the government, and the government's UN representative to Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Throughout the years, an integral part of the external relations campaign was work by Bahá'í composer Lasse Thoresen. A series of his performances resulted in a television interview and his music, along with a Bahá'í prayer, was performed for the King of Norway at the Bergen International Music Festival. Mr. Thoresen and his wife also met with His Majesty. Media also covered a sold-out concert in a medieval castle. Mr. Thoresen introduced the concert and Bahá'í prayers were sung by the Oslo Philharmonic Choir. There was additional proclamation through local and national press for the opening of the Terraces, when Mr. Thoresen's work "Terraces of Light" was performed for the event. The performance was later featured during a 30-minute national television programme and some radio programmes.

In the mid 1990s, the Faith became one of eight major religions to sit on the newly established Cooperation Council of Religions and Life-Stance Communities. Participation encouraged mutual respect and understanding between religious and humanist communities. The Bahá'ís also helped plan the international conference on Freedom of Religion and Beliefs, held in 1998. More than one hundred international representatives, including the Bahá'í International Community, attended and Bahia Tahzib-Lie gave one of the keynote speeches. The Oslo Declaration

on Freedom for Religion and Belief was passed as a main document for further work in the field. Mr. Techeste Ahderom made a great impact with his speech on the litmus case of the Bahá'í Mr. Rawhani, who had been killed in Iran several days before the event. Representatives from the Iranian government were present and had to answer for the persecution of the Bahá'ís in a television interview, as well as at the conference itself. The Secretary of the NSA took part in a television programme on interfaith dialogue, together with Christian and Muslim representatives. The Bahá'í representative to the Cooperation Council of Religions and Life-Stance Communities was one of three people appointed members of the work, together with the state appointed Value Commission, to plan a one-year Interfaith Dialogue Project. A Bahá'í was also made a member of the board of the new Centre of Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities of Norway, which will include the Bahá'í community.

On the local level, there have been positive results in both radio and press media throughout the country. Most recently, the community has been actively working on delivering the message of the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Norway)

Poland

The National Spiritual Assembly of Poland would like to congratulate the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, Paris on the wonderful achievements in the field of public information. Though the NSA always eagerly awaits the good news that is disseminated, it is not itself in a position to contribute at this stage. Poland has a small Bahá'í community, which is still struggling to keep the basic and most essential functions of community life running. The country made a few attempts to advance in the important and delicate matter of public information, but it was not able to sustain a concentrated and coherent process. Once again the Assembly would like to express its sincere happiness for the success in Europe and wishes the next decade to outweigh achievements of the past one, while it hopes to play its part in this important field of service as the community grows in strength and number. Poland is an important country on the new European map and, as the bridgehead between the West and the East, it is destined to rise in significance. The NSA hopes that it may have more opportunities in the future to work together with OPI and the other European communities.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Poland)

Portugal

Visibility of the Faith in Portugal has been increasing through participation at events held by organisations, interfaith, and educational activities. Successful media coverage has been helped by contact with two national newspapers. Another pillar of success was the

agreement by the Minister of Education for Bahá'í teachers to give classes on the Faith, allowing for planning of activities in public schools, and coverage by the media.

Relationships with Portuguese journalists are good and there is a positive general opinion about the Faith. Press releases prepared by the Bahá'ís are published in local, regional and national newspapers. There was national newspaper coverage of the opening of the Terraces and the Bahá'í community has also taken part as an official religion in a daily national television show called "AFé dos Homens" of which seventeen shows are produced annually.

The message of the Universal House of Justice to the religious leaders provided a wonderful opportunity to improve relationships with various leaders of religions in Portugal. Cardinal D. José Policarpo of the Roman Catholic Church commented that the Bahá'ís are in a very privileged situation, able to act as a bridge between the diverse religions because they accept all manifestations of God. Among others, the message was also given to representatives of the Muslim, Jewish and Hindu religions. The Portuguese Bahá'í community also produced a special television programme about the message. These developments build on a growing network of interfaith contacts, and in January 2002, the Portuguese Bahá'í Community was, for the first time, invited as an institution by the Catholic Church to attend a special meeting for peace which was covered by the media. Bahá'í prayers and writings were recited at the event.

The Bahá'ís have been invited to attend other events throughout the years, including the visit of the Dalai Lama, and the European meeting of "Global Network of Religions for Children", organised by a Japanese NGO, the Arigatou Foundation.

The Portuguese dance workshop *Geração Viva!* has been successful and performed throughout various parts of Europe, attracting publicity and helping the community to develop partnerships with other official and non-official organisations.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Portugal)

Romania

The young Bahá'í community in Romania has had overwhelming success in public relations work thanks to the speed with which it has won the trust and respect of high-level personalities. Regular visits by representatives of the Bahá'í International Community, Mrs. Christine Samandari-Hakim and Mrs. Guilda Walker, have strengthened established contacts with dignitaries such as members of Parliament, as well as receptions and public conferences.

Effective work in the public relations department began in 1992 when the celebrations of the Holy Year were transmitted via satellite, attracting the participation of over one thousand people. Since then, collaboration in various fields such as education, human rights, and

conflict resolution has led to significant developments. Notable achievements have included the visit of Bahá'í friends, doctors, businessmen, sociologists, psychologists and EBBF representatives helping contact with the United Nations, UNICEF, the Ministries of Education, Internal Affairs, Defence, and Health, and advisers on health and education issues from the Cotroceni Presidential Palace and NGOs. This has led to conferences, receptions, partnerships and extensive media coverage.

The University of Bucharest also set up collaboration with Núr University in Bolivia in socioeconomic development projects, set into motion since 1992. In 1998, the launch of the project "Promoting Positive Messages Through the Media: The Happy Hippo Show Project" led to a meeting with the President of Romania, Emil Constantinescu, and established contacts with the advisers from the Ministry of Education, various prominent people, and radio and television coverage.

Some two hundred guests, including representatives of ministries, state secretaries, and the ambassador of Israel in Romania were invited to a satellite transmission and reception for the official opening of the Terraces. It resulted in wide national and private television coverage. The national radio station broadcast live images from the Transylvanian Choir from Cluj-Napoca as well as interviews with participants and the conductor of the choir. There have also been diverse activities in the cultural domain, featuring the works of Bahá'í singers and dancers.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Romania)

Russia

The major external affairs activities of the first ten years of the Russian Bahá'í community revolved around the official registration of the National Spiritual Assembly, the continuing crisis in Iran, and the tireless activities of prominent travel teachers.

Memorable milestones of the past ten years include the publicity for the 1992 satellite conference in conjunction with the World Congress; the 1998 presentation, before an audience of 350 guests of the first official translation of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* (almost one hundred years after first being translated into Russian); and the proclamation work surrounding the opening of the Terraces.

The end to excessive restrictions on religious organisations in 1990, and the subsequent changes in Russian law concerning religion, permitted the Bahá'í community to foster contacts with government officials. This situation created opportunities to participate in meetings and consultations with prominent individuals in the field of religious studies. In 1993, the National Spiritual Assembly was registered in a spirit of good will and cooperation with the authorities.

Current dialogue and openness towards religious studies – non existent before 1990 – are very significant. Although prejudice remains, extensive work was carried out in academic circles and among professionals in this

field. Important contacts have been made and involvement with interfaith and academic conferences includes the contribution of materials, articles and dissertations.

Prominent Bahá'ís and experts in areas such as philosophy, orientalism and economics were invited for courtesy meetings with government officials and NGOs, and to give public lectures at universities and media interviews, and have been instrumental in opening doors to and consolidating friendships with more than one thousand people of capacity.

Ever-widening networks, coupled with institutional relationships, constitute the foundation on which the Bahá'ís can elaborate and refine future activities. Furthermore, Bahá'ís have worked to shed light on the plight of Iran's Bahá'í community by approaching the relevant authorities.

Throughout this ten-year period, public documents were produced and widely distributed and there was constant attention paid to accuracy of the work of journalists, authors, and organisations regarding the Faith. The distribution of the message of the Universal House of Justice to the leaders of religion is seen as instrumental in achieving future goals such as improving working relations with like-minded NGOs, promoting Bahá'í inspired NGOs such as Zipopo and EBBF, and developing human resources.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Russia)

Sicily

The Spiritual Assembly of Sicily is happy to participate in the celebration of the 100th issue of the European Public Information Bulletin. The importance and value that such a newsletter gives to the "Old European Continent" is really significant.

It is a pleasure to share, on this occasion, the contributions of the Sicilian youth on a European level. The artistic group *One Family* brought enthusiasm and the joy of service to Greece, Albania and Sardinia, helping with the creation of other artistic workshops and weaving bonds of love with the youth throughout Europe. The Assembly sends heartfelt wishes and thanks to the friends who are working for the circulation of the European Public Information Bulletin.

(Based on the report of the Spiritual Assembly of Sicily)

Slovenia

Since 1992, when the Faith first gained official recognition from the government and representatives met the Slovenian Prime Minister, the community has attracted regular media attention and collaborated in interfaith dialogues.

The Faith was presented in three interreligious dialogues organised by the Buddhist community, and most recently it presented the letter of the Universal House of Justice, to the religious leaders of the world to the heads of the Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim faiths.

The opening of the Terraces was covered in the country's biggest newspaper and local radio. The Faith has also been presented on national television, the religious magazine *Aura*, and an interview was printed with a pioneer in a women's magazine *Naša Zena*. The opening of the regional Haziratu'l-Quds was shown on television, and five appearances of the *Diversity Dance Workshop* were aired in 1999, with members shown dancing and talking about Bahá'í perspectives and social issues of the Faith.

Over the past ten years, the community also published Slovenian editions of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, *Some Answered Questions*, and *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

(Based on the report of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Slovenia and Croatia)

Slovakia

The Slovak friends involved in public information are working to build positive relationships with media and dignitaries to increase awareness and to spread the good name of the Faith in Slovakia.

The public information efforts started to develop in Slovakia in the early 1990s when the pioneers came to Czechoslovakia to set up the first Bahá'í communities.

Good relationships have been developed with television and radio stations, and individual believers have since published a number of articles in the local and national newspapers about visits by Bahá'ís, including Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, comedian Omid Djalili, violinist Bijan Khadem-Missagh and economist John Huddleston.

After the opening of the Terraces, TV Markíza aired a report and interviews on the events on local and national television stations. The national Slovak Radio has also broadcast announcements and interviews with the Voices of Bahá choir.

Bahá'ís met with representatives of various ministries and Rudolf Šuster (before he was elected president). Representative of the Foreign Ministry has been contacted regarding the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran, and all mayors of the Bratislavan cluster.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Slovakia)

Spain

Spanish public information efforts have made significant steps forward in the past ten years, from activities during the Holy Year to the recent creation of a Spanish Bahá'í news service.

Over time, media attention has focused on the inauguration of the new national Bahá'í centre in Madrid, the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Faith in Spain, the visit of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum in 1997 and the opening of the Terraces.

The opening of the Office of Public Information and the appointment of an External Affairs Secretary early in 1994 also helped bring a new culture of openness from

the Bahá'í friends and the Spanish community at large, one that was matched by increasing signs of recognition. Many of the articles, letters to the editor, and press releases sent to the Spanish media were published at local and regional levels. This assisted in raising public awareness on the nature and purpose of the Bahá'í community.

In external affairs, the Bahá'ís were invited by the Spanish government to take part in the Human Rights Conference in Vienna and soon after became an observer member of the first human rights umbrella organisation in Spain. At almost the same time, the Bahá'í community became an observer member to the social and economic non-governmental organisation platform.

The highly coordinated efforts that led to the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations at Madrid's Congress Palace, where the arts played a major role, gave over 1,200 attendants a picture of the Bahá'í community's newly-gained capabilities. A cycle of talks by well-established academics was also held at Madrid's UN venue.

Interfaith dialogues have also been important and resulted in meetings with representatives from various religions, including sympathetic theologians and religious intellectuals. The distribution of the statement addressed to the religious leaders has also contributed significantly to the expansion of the name of the Faith.

The new creation of a Spanish Bahá'í news service, *El Noticiero Bahá'í*, has become a regular feature in virtually all the Spanish-speaking countries, after a trial period of about four months. It is hoped that this service will help Bahá'í friends realise the significance and true dimensions of their work.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain)

Sweden

During the past ten years, the Swedish Bahá'í community has established a close cooperation with the associations of United Nations on a national level as well as locally in several cities. Particularly noteworthy has been the involvement of the Faith in a national network on human rights. The last few years have also seen a close cooperation with women's organisations on a national level. Cooperative relations with the UN resulted last year in the organisation of a conference on the Millennium Declaration, which was attended by some 130 participants. Interest from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs enabled the event to be held at the Swedish government's Conference Centre.

Media coverage of the Faith has included a number of articles published in national newspapers, a fifteen-minute devotional programme based on the Faith was broadcast at regular intervals on national radio. Programmes with interviews of Bahá'ís have also been broadcast on regional television on several occasions. The Faith gained more recognition when it was one of nine established religions presented at an exhibition in the City of Stockholm Museum, showing how the New

Year is celebrated by different religions, and was prominently featured in a nationwide exhibition on religious tolerance, "God Has 99 Names". Finally, the new Bahá'í centre was opened to the public just a few weeks ago with a programme called "Room For Religion," which was part of a Europe-wide programme showing houses of cultural interest.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Sweden)

Switzerland

The Swiss Bahá'í community congratulates the Bahá'í Office of Public Information in Paris on the 100th issue of the EPIB and conveys its best wishes for the future development of this vital medium of communication, extending heartfelt thanks and deep gratitude for the close collaboration that the Paris office has lovingly sustained over the past years. The realisation of such a European Office was a long-time wish and cherished dream of the Swiss community.

In its national public information campaign, the Swiss community is working in a systematic way to build trust and understanding with the public. At the first European Public Information Seminar, held at Landegg Academy in 1992, *One Country* was born. The training in public information continued and resulted in a monthly course which trained twelve German-speaking friends over twelve months in the skills needed for maintaining national public information efforts. Recently the structure has changed and a total of six press officers for the German, French, and Italian parts of Switzerland were nominated – a timely decision for the media campaign in connection with the opening of the Terraces in May 2001. Their work resulted in a considerable number of articles in the press. Members of the Swiss community were also regularly invited to give presentations at the European Public Information Seminars and several of the press officers attended these seminars. Another vital tool is the Swiss annual report, which gives the non-Bahá'í public an overview of Bahá'í activities at the local and national level. The report has provided a strong support for public relations activities, with two thousand copies sent to governmental agencies, organisations, and the media.

The EPIB continues to be a source of inspiration and encouragement while rendering a joyful consciousness of working towards the same goal. Heartfelt gratitude is extended to all the friends who, over the years, have contributed to this work.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Switzerland)

Turkey

The past ten years have seen tremendous developments in the Turkish Bahá'í community's efforts to provide public information to the media, to work with various NGOs, and to maintain international contacts. During all of this, the assistance and guidance from the Bahá'í International Community, and especially the Office of

Public Information, was important in furthering the developments. Participation of Turkish representatives at the European Public Information seminars, and preparing training seminars and teaching courses in our country, has helped increase human resources in public relations. The main objectives are to introduce and publicise the Faith and to safeguard the Cause. Within this scope of work the community has developed a range of personal contacts: government officers and intergovernmental organisations, media and NGOs. These contacts were often transformed into sustained friendships and as a result the Bahá'í community has been added to the protocol list of some embassies and has received invitations on national celebration days and receptions.

Several conferences and public activities organised by Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís have attracted extensive news coverage, including the conference for children in Trabzon and a conference on science and religion. Highlights of the past ten years include the United Nation's conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul in 1996, where the Bahá'í community of Turkey had major tasks and responsibilities. In 1994, the Adana Bahá'í Women's community representative to the Adana Women Union Organisation – a collective of some forty-one NGOs – was noted at a women's Conference for their contribution to advancement of women and peace.

More recently, the opening of the Terraces was broadcast in the news and on a special programme. Cultural performances, such as concerts in various cities with prominent Bahá'í artists like Kevin Locke, have offered remarkable opportunities for imparting the essence of the Faith and sharing interfaith ideology. Also, the "Virtues Guide" programme, which will train two hundred teachers, is the first official Bahá'í project supported by the Turkish authorities, through the Ministry of Education. Diverse charity and peace projects have also gained more attention thanks to successful initiatives of a journalist and television moderator.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkey)

Ukraine

Over the past decade the Ukrainian community has worked actively with organisations and the media to promote the profile and interests of the Faith, with media coverage coming mostly from Bahá'í-organised events and visits from prominent Bahá'ís. In 1993, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum was interviewed for national television and met with journalists during her visit to the Ukraine. In Kiev, the Committee for External Affairs and the Local Spiritual Assembly of Kiev organised public presentations of the Faith. The National Spiritual Assembly also supported the presentation of a new book of poetry by a famous Ukrainian poet, Tamara Severnyuk, whose work was inspired greatly by the Bahá'í writings. Several Members of Parliament, the Minister of Culture, and a

large number of writers, poets, and actors attended the event and round tables were organised by the LSA of Kiev and the Irex ProMedia media centre on the moral education of children, with active participation by leading philosophers from all over Ukraine. The regional television channel in Cherkassy aired a programme about a Bahá'í summer school focusing on the family and articles about the Faith have appeared regularly in journals dealing with religious issues, such as *Religious Panorama*, *Unity* and *Man and the Afterwards World*. The opening of the Terraces was also extensively aired on national and local television channels, with more programmes on the Bahá'í Faith were broadcast on regional radios.

In the field of interfaith relations, as a result of the presentation of the message to the world's religious leaders, Bahá'ís have been invited by the Embassy of Israel and the Institute of Philosophy to discuss Israel as a cradle of major world religions and interreligious dialogue. (Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine)

United Kingdom

Building on the achievements of the past and the tireless efforts of the friends, the last ten years have seen a dramatic rise in the quantity and quality of the public information activities of the UK Bahá'í community. In the early 1990s, the community was arduously working on Holy Year events, with one of the highlights being the exhibition of Bahá'í manuscripts and artefacts at the British Museum. This special year offered many opportunities to host British dignitaries and utilise media contacts. Thanks to amicable relations with the BBC, there have been radio broadcasts on various aspects of the Faith. Efforts of localities, supported by the national Office of Public Information (and its predecessor, the Bahá'í Information Office), led to much coverage in local newspapers and several television programmes featuring the Bahá'í community. The production of the *UK Bahá'í Review* has also raised the profile of the Bahá'ís with the media and other external contacts. Within the community, media work included the distribution of

information packs, training days, and computer-based training and materials. The national Bahá'í Web site <www.bahai.org.uk> also provides access to information about the Faith.

The community's work with interfaith groups has also been a factor in raising the status of the Faith within the British establishment, with events such as participation in the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the hosting of a visit by His Royal Highness the Duke of York to the national Hazíratu'l-Quds in London. Two national secretaries obtained membership on the Executive of the Inter Faith Network for the UK and currently the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly serves as Chair and Vice-Chair of the UK Chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).

The National Spiritual Assembly has worked ardently in the area of social cohesion, a field of increasing concern to governments. NSA representatives recently met with the minister responsible for community relations and were invited to nominate a representative for the national panel advising the Home Office about faith and community cohesion. NSA representatives have also participated in a number of United Nations summits and conferences, strengthening relations with NGOs and the media. In recent years, the Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women has held high profile annual conferences and has initiated a Gender Studies Forum, in addition to its high-level work with government agencies. Local communities have had a lot of success with the World Citizenship Project where children can use creativity to express an aspect of world citizenship.

It is a joy for the UK community to be able to share, through the European Public Information Bulletin, its experiences with the friends in Europe and it brings much delight to learn of the achievements of fellow Bahá'ís across our continent. Much appreciation is extended to the BIC-OPI for all their efforts in providing this invaluable service.

(Based on the report of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom)

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, 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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