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# EUROPEAN PUBLIC INFORMATION BULLETIN

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## **Message from former President of Hungary read at Bahá'í Centre opening**

The new Hungarian national Bahá'í Centre was formally opened with a congratulatory letter sent by the former President of Hungary, Mr. Árpád Göncz. The letter was read as part of a reception for prominent people to mark the Centre's opening in Budapest. More than 550 invitations were sent to all members of Parliament, high-ranking officials, religious leaders, ambassadors, and the media, with fifty people who attended the ceremony, including guest of honour Dr. István Szalay, the Secretary of State for Religious Matters in the Prime Minister's Office. Other attendees included two members of Parliament, a representative of the Minister of Interior, famous talk show host Ms. Monika Show, and a representative of the Club of Budapest. Two well-known television reporters, a crew from the national TV2 station and several newspaper reporters were also present. Each guest was given a copy of "The Hidden Words" with a bookmark, as a gift to remember the day.

The ceremony for the Centre included music from the Bahá'í Community Band, and a talk by Dr. László Farkas on the history of the Bahá'í community in Hungary.

The Bahá'í community currently operates two social projects from the Centre. The first is a dance workshop for youth, exploring community problems such as drug abuse, violence, and racism. The second, "Storytelling Mothers", is a programme to help mothers from the Hungarian Roma minority better understand and navigate disadvantages from a spiritually-informed perspective.

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

## **Conference in the United Kingdom advises: "Girls Speak Up"**

Thirteen-year-old British Bahá'í Miss Anisa Fadei was one of several young women to make a presentation at "Girls Speak Up", an annual conference on women's issues sponsored by the British Association of Bahá'í Women. The event attracted more than 100 women and men from around the United Kingdom. Miss Fadei presented a paper titled "Prosperity", which drew on the Bahá'í teachings and other research. This statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, voiced by Miss Fadaei in her talk, became the clarion call of the conference: "Until the reality of equality between men and women is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible."

Other young Bahá'í women speakers included Miss Holly Twiname and Miss Fiona Young, who gave talks on

"Citizenship" and "Partnership" respectively. Miss Helen Elliott, an engineering student from Gloucester, gave a passionate and well-researched presentation titled "Information Technology".

Among the other presenters were Soroptimist member Ms. Valerie Evans CBE, a former elected chair of the Women's National Commission and current chair of the UK Gender Statistics Users Group, Ms. Roz Osborne of the Royal College of Nurses and a member of the Women's National Commission Steering Group, and Dr. Val Singh, Senior Research Fellow into diversity on top corporate boards and lecturer associated with the School of Management at the University of Cranfield.

The conference was enhanced by a bookshop provided by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust; exhibitions by the Bahá'í Office of Social and Economic Development together with the Bahá'í Agency for Social and Economic Development-UK, Soroptimist International of Bedford, and the YWCA, paintings by women artists displayed at the art gallery, and entertainment by two young Indian dancers.

Support for the conference was provided by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Bedford County Council, the Cranfield Centre for Women Business Leaders. Jordans Cereals and the Marks and Spencer's national chain store also sponsored the event.

(For further information please contact the Office for the Advancement of Women of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom)

## **Spanish Bahá'ís present House's message to local religious leaders**

The message from the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders was distributed to local evangelical pastor Diego Morenal, who then spread the message to other pastors in the area. As a result, the Bahá'í Community of Jaén was invited by an evangelical pastor to speak to his congregation in a Roma village. In collaborative work with the Roma community outside Alicante, two Bahá'ís in Jaén attended their celebrations of "Day of the Anadalucian Roma". Mrs. Gloria Pastor, a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly, addressed the villagers—the first time the Bahá'ís had done so—to express the love and admiration that Bahá'ís have for the Roma people and the conviction that they will attain their true place in society within this epoch. A respected speaker at the event, Valentín Suarez, spoke about the relationship between the Bahá'í community and the Roma people, and recognised the work the community

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was doing for the Roma village in Alicante and in other cities. The villagers were later invited to devotional meetings held by local Bahá'ís.

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

### **Portuguese Bahá'ís participate in interfaith meetings**

The Bahá'í community of Lisbon was invited to two interfaith meetings at Lisbon's mosque by the Muslim community in Lisbon. The Bahá'ís gave presentations on "Ethics" and "Plurality of Religions in Portugal" at the meetings, which took place during the period of Ramadan.

The Buddhist community in Portugal also organised an interfaith meeting to celebrate the first visit of the Dalai Lama to Portugal. The Bahá'í representative to the meeting gave a talk on "Resolution of Conflicts—The Idea of Bahá'í Consultation" and was the only female religious representative present. Bahá'ís also attended a meeting at the Catholic University in Lisbon to mark the publication of seven books on religious history by a Portuguese publishing house. The third book in the series includes the Bahá'í Faith.

(For further information please contact the Office of External Affairs of the Bahá'í Community of Portugal)

### **European religious leaders meet in Norway to call for peace**

The newly-formed European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) has released a statement made during its inaugural meeting in Oslo in November. The ECRL, which incorporates all the major religions in Europe, serves as a European liaison for the World Council on Religion and Peace (WCRP).

The European Bahá'í community was given a seat on the body that will be occupied for the first year by Mr. Louis Henuzet, a former Continental Counsellor. The aim of the Oslo meeting was to confirm the willingness of European religions to live in harmony and mutual respect, to condemn the use of religion for political purposes or terrorism, and to actively promote peace.

Mr. Henuzet attended the Oslo meeting, where observers and guests included Ambassador Mokhtar Lamani, from the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to the United Nations, Dr. Michael Weniger, representing the president of the European Commission, the General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, and the General Secretary of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community.

The Council's statement, "Standing Together For Peace" said the establishment of the ECRL builds on a common rejection of the misuse of religion and signals a commitment to work together for peace.

"As European religious leaders, we are committed to working together to end conflicts, to re-affirm religious condemnations of terror, and to promote justice and peaceful coexistence among the diversity of peoples, religions and traditions in Europe..." it reads. The Council

notes that it had been set up at a "crucial time", in which "the process of European integration must lead to a united continent, built upon and respectful of its diversity, not a mono-cultural uniformity... We commit ourselves to the clarification of shared values that respect diversity and support the common good, and we hereby call on politicians on the national and continental levels for a serious, systematic and ongoing dialogue, as we work together to build Europe as our common home." It calls for the engagement of the deep moral resources of religious traditions for peace, justice, truth, and reconciliation. "As political fundamentalists attempt to misuse our religious traditions, we recognise our responsibility to demonstrate the capacity of our religious communities to work together for the common good."

The statement also condemns attempts to solve conflict with violence and terrorism. "We are committed to providing a multi-religious European platform to advance needed efforts for peace and reconciliation among our religious believers and in the political arena."

The Council was created at the initiative of the WCRP in March 2002, when five religious representatives of the WCRP and the Moderator for WCRP Europe met in Paris and decided to call a European meeting to form the European Council with the three historic European Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions and other new faiths, Hinduism, the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. Established in 1970, the WCRP brings together the major religions of the world and has a Bahá'í, Dr. Elizabeth Bowen, seated on its International Governing Board.

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

### **Interfaith dialogue panel on social issues in Germany involves the Faith**

The German Bahá'í community is taking part in a prestigious project enabling religions to speak out on current issues. The project was set up by three respected German organisations: the Federal Office for Political Education, the Intercultural Council of Germany, and the Alliance for Democracy and Tolerance.

Launched at a Berlin press conference in October, the project is called "What They Have to Say: World Religions in Discourse" and aims to overcome prejudice against less well-known religions and to emphasise the points of agreement between the religious communities.

The project will work on a "request system" in which an organisation that wishes to hear different religious views on a subject can choose representatives of three faiths to come and make presentations on that issue. Six religions—Christianity, Judaism, Islám, Buddhism, the Federation of Alevites, and the Bahá'í Faith—will be among those invited to explain their positions on the current political and social issues and the organising body will also try to ensure that lesser known faiths are also well-represented. Religious speakers are encouraged to

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use lively presentations.

The Bahá'ís gave their first presentation on the role of women at the Office for Political Education in Saarbrücken in December, alongside female representatives from Judaism and Islám.

The project, because of the extensive resources at its disposal, offers new possibilities for social involvement and hopes to attract interest from different sectors of society, including schools, factories, trade union meetings, club and society meetings, the police and the armed forces, and evening classes.

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

#### **Spanish Web site adds *Noticiero* newsletter**

The Spanish Bahá'í community has made improvements to its news Web site. A new page on the site <[www.bahaiibalea.com/noticiero.htm](http://www.bahaiibalea.com/noticiero.htm)> now provides access to all sixty-six editions of *El Noticiero*, the Spanish public information newsletter that has been published since June 2002. New editions will be available as they are produced. People can now search by date, number, or topic, and news is available in both MS Word and html format, with pictures. The site has links to related sites and a Catalan version of the news is also included on the site.

(For further information please 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 25th of each month (25 January 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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