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Bahá'ís make major contribution to interfaith conference in Rome

A Bahá'í participated in a significant interreligious conference, held in November in Rome under the title: "Rome, city of peace: the contribution of religions". The mayor of Rome had invited all government-recognised faiths to attend the event, to offer their practical contributions to peace in the city.

The importance of the event was reinforced by the choice of the prestigious Protomoteca Room at the Campidoglio Palace as the venue. Bahá'ís, Buddhists, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Orthodox Church, Protestants, Sikhs, Soka Gokkai and Jehovah's Witnesses were present. Women were official representatives for the Bahá'í and Buddhist faiths.

Approximately 100 people attended the conference, which the mayor called a "starting point of a path to peace". Eleven speakers from different faiths then gave 10-minute presentations. Few gave any positive or practical suggestions on contributing to peace, aside from the Bahá'í representative, who proposed creating a consultative body on peace, ending the application of laws on religious buildings, monitoring and approving information about religion in school text books, and improving burial rites for believers of non-Christian faiths. Other speakers supported the Bahá'í proposals in their presentations.

Bahá'ís were the only religious group invited to take part in the organisation of the meeting, together with a professor of sociology of religions from the University La Sapienza, a high official from the Ministry of Interior and three councillors of the Municipality of Rome.

At a preparatory meeting, suggestions by the Bahá'í representative, Lucia Ricco, for the structure of the conference were unanimously accepted.

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

Spain launches first public information newsletter

The National Public Information Office in Spain has launched a new public information newsletter, "Noticiero", targeted to all local communities. The newsletter is intended to be an encouraging source of information regarding achievements, events and plans implemented by local or regional public information offices, communities and individual believers in the field of external affairs and public information.

The newsletter will be sent by email, and hard copies will go out to all Bahá'ís with the national Bahá'í magazine.

(For further information contact the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í community of Spain)

Interview on Hungarian national TV

A Bahá'í couple were interviewed about their faith on national Hungarian television on 6 November. The morning show on channel mt1 asked the friends about the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, the community in Hungary and its connections to other religious communities. Clips from a previous television report on the Faith were included in the show. The Bahá'ís were asked to talk about any upcoming events taking place and were able to give an open invitation to the forthcoming Birth of Bahá'u'lláh celebration. Immediately after the show was aired, the Bahá'í national office received a telephone call from a local television director who had been watching and was interested in doing another programme on the Bahá'í community.

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

Bahá'ís sign Oslo protocol with other religions

Bahá'ís joined different religions and organisations in signing the protocol of the Oslo Declaration on Freedom of Religion and Belief in Norway recently. Twenty-five representatives from religions and life-stance communities signed the document in a dignified ceremony, in front of an audience of diplomats, prominent people and government officials. The event was interspersed with two artistic performances by Bahá'í musicians Trond Schau and Maiken Schau.

In his speech, the coalition president, Gunnar Stålsett said it was important to work together for reconciliation and peace. The keynote speaker, Anne Sender from the Jewish Community of Norway, spoke about giving hope through concrete action in reconciliation and peaceful undertakings. Mr Stålsett said he would give a copy of the signed protocol to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan when he came to Norway in December to receive his Nobel Peace Prize.

The ceremony ended with an African drummer leading the representatives and Mr Stålsett out of the room. Bahá'ís noted that the event and presentations showed true unity of thought.

The declaration was first adopted at the Oslo Conference in 1998, an event initiated by the Co-operation Council of Religions and Life-Stance Communities and the Oslo Coalition of Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Norway, Britt Strandlie Thoresen chaired the organising committee for the event.

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

Documentary to air in January in Hungary

Hungarian national television is producing a 25-minute programme about the Faith, to be aired in January 2002. There has been strong input from the Bahá'ís both on the concept and on the pre-production of the show. After consultation with the reporter, it was agreed to include interviews with Hungarian and Roma Bahá'ís on how the Faith has changed their lives, and to talk to well-known thinkers and prominent people about the Faith.

A distinguished Hungarian Prominent Person and President of Pan Europa, Otto von Habsburg, has already agreed to take part.

The programme will also include footage of the Opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and interviews with Hungarian participants.

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

Regional Public Information Seminar in Romania in 2002

On the 9th and 10th of February 2002 the BIC-OPI Paris, in collaboration with the National Spiritual Assembly of Romania, will hold a Regional Public Information Seminar in Bucharest, Romania.

The program will include a training session on "working with the media", as well as sessions on "The link between the focus of External Affairs Strategy and current world

affairs", "Image of the Bahá'í Community", "Building Communication" and "How to create and cultivate relations with prominent people".

(For further information contact the National Spiritual Assembly of Romania and the BIC-OPI Paris)

French Bahá'ís host international women's meeting at national centre

The International Council of Women recently held their annual meeting in the National Bahá'í Centre in Paris, hosted by the French Association of Bahá'í Women. The 20 ICW members attending the 3-day meeting from around the world were either representatives to United Nations agencies or presidents of international commissions.

Founded in 1888, the ICW acts as an umbrella organisation for women's groups in 80 countries worldwide. Its president, Mrs Pnina Herzog lives in Jerusalem and was a guest at the ceremony marking the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb in Haifa.

During the Paris meeting, Bahá'ís were invited to a reception for the ICW held by Israel's Plenipotentiary Minister, Jacques Revah, in his home. Mr Revah was born in Haifa and expressed great admiration for the Bahá'í gardens during the reception.

(For further information contact the French Association of Baha'í Women)

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 December 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.

Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information – Paris

45 rue Pergolèse, 75116 Paris, France

Tel.: +33 (0)1 45 01 78 38 • Fax: +33 (0)1 40 67 15 02 • Email: opiparis@club-internet.fr