

PRESS RELEASE

OPENING OF SACRED TERRACES TO BRING THOUSANDS TO ISRAEL IN MAY

HAIFA, Israel (28 February 2001) – In a celebration expected to draw more than 3,500 people from almost every country, on 22 May 2001 the Bahá'ís of the world will open a series of majestic garden Terraces on Mount Carmel, demonstrating their commitment to building world peace.

The opening ceremony at dusk will feature an open-air world premiere concert at the base of the mountain, to be broadcast live by satellite. Original music by contemporary composers from Norway and Tajikistan will be performed by a full symphony orchestra, a choir and well-known soloists, climaxing with the spectacular lighting of the kilometer-long Terraces.

On the morning of 23 May following the opening, indigenous musicians will perform, and thousands of celebrants, many in colorful national dress, will walk up the Terraces for the first time. The week's festivities will end with a public opening, after which visitors and tourists of all faiths will be able to enjoy the gardens, every day, free of charge.

At the heart of the Terraces is the gold-domed Shrine of the Báb, one of the most important holy places for Bahá'ís. The Shrine, a well-known symbol of the city of Haifa, contains the remains of one of the two Founders of the Bahá'í Faith, known as the Báb. The Terraces are designed to surround the Shrine like the setting of a precious gem.

The architect, Fariborz Sahba, also designed the famous "Lotus Temple" in New Delhi, which now attracts more visitors than the Taj Mahal.

"It has not been our aim just to build beautiful architecture, or merely beautiful, landscaped gardens," said Mr. Sahba. "There are so many beautiful gardens in the world. The whole aim was to create beautiful, spiritual gardens; gardens that touch the spirit, so that a visitor may pause and think, 'This place is different, there is something special about it'."

The arrival of thousands of representatives from nearly every ethnic group and nationality to consecrate this holy place stands in sharp contrast to the turmoil and uncertainty in the region. Bahá'í spokesman Douglas Samimi-Moore said, "Bahá'ís have built these structures because we are confident in the peaceful future of humanity. The power to unite is one that the world desperately needs."

The Terraces and gleaming white marble administrative buildings nearby have transformed the face of the mountain. The project was completed over a 10-year period at a cost of US\$250 million, funded by voluntary contributions from members of the worldwide Bahá'í community, who now number over five million. The Bahá'í Faith is one of four world religions with significant holy places in Israel.

With the completion of the Terraces, the number of tourists to Haifa is expected to triple to 1.2 million annually. The city has made the project a key element in its urban renewal campaign, incorporating the restored German Templar colony and the Louis Promenade along the crest of Mount Carmel. Together with the Terraces, they create a 3-kilometer-long pedestrian walkway – one of the most attractive urban developments in the Mediterranean region. Israel's Postal Authority has designed a special 9-centimeter stamp to mark the completion of the Terraces.

About the Bahá'í Faith

In just over 100 years, the Bahá'í Faith has grown from an obscure movement in the Middle East to the second-most widespread independent world religion after Christianity, with over five million members in 235 countries and dependent territories. Embracing people from more than 2,100 ethnic, racial, and tribal groups, it is probably the most diverse organized body of people on the planet today. Its Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, teaches that there is only one God, that there is only one human race, and that all the world religions have been stages in the revelation of God's purpose for humankind. As Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens." The Bahá'í International Community is a non-governmental organization with consultative status at the United Nations, working at the grassroots in the areas of peace-building, human rights, the advancement of women, education, health and sustainable development.

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