



Office of External Affairs

World Conference against Racism

United Nations World Conference Against Racism UK Bahá'í Community Campaign



The South African city of Durban will host the United Nations World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) from 31 August to 7 September this year. The Baha'i International Community's UN Office is already heavily involved and has asked this and other National Spiritual Assemblies to undertake their own supporting initiatives at national, regional and local levels.

The World Conference represents a unique opportunity for the Baha'i Community in the UK to support the eradication of racial prejudice in our community and to uphold the principle of the oneness of humanity.

The National Spiritual Assembly asks you to consider undertaking an activity in support of the World Conference in the coming months, in the lead up to and during the World Conference. There are a number of important factors to bear in mind when you consult about what you might do:

As a Baha'i community we always take a positive approach to issues. So we will focus on building unity, on nurturing harmonious relationships and on developing world citizenship. We shouldn't get involved in any activity that attacks or blames people.

The international process leading up to the conference has become very controversial and divisive. You may find that this is reflected in what other groups are doing in your locality.

In some places, especially larger towns and cities, there will already be very active groups and organizations working to combat racism. There may be a network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the local authority may be facilitating or even leading work against racism. It is really important to find out what is going on before you make plans. Do not assume that the Baha'i community is the only group interested in the World Conference or planning supporting activities.

In other places there will be little interest or even knowledge of the World Conference. If you live in that kind of place, then you have a great opportunity to raise people's awareness.

* You will need to consider your human and financial resources and your commitments. You may also need to think about the impact of the changes in Local Assembly boundaries (if they have affected your community).

Any activities should be done with sincere motives. This is part of our service to the wider community and also part of our external affairs work.

Suggestion for Activities

You could build on or adapt activities that you already do and links that you already have with other organizations. For example:

- world citizenship project
- inter faith activities and links with local inter faith group
- links with your local Race Equality Council, UNA branch, Amnesty
- links with women's groups, cultural groups

You could dedicate a Nineteen Day Feast or part of the consultation at a Local Assembly meeting to what you might do to build unity and to eradicate racial prejudice in the wider community.

You could hold a public prayer meeting or Tranquillity Zone for the World Conference.

Think about activities that focus on the double discrimination faced by the women of ethnic minority groups. The Office for the Advancement of Women can advise you about this.

Consider holding a one-day or half-day seminar or forum on building social cohesion. For example, you might focus on the importance of educating children to understand the oneness of human nature, to feel the interconnectedness of all humankind deep in their hearts and to live by this. You might want to do this in partnership with your local authority, with other voluntary organizations or other faith groups in your area. The Office of External Affairs can advise.

Think about holding some special activities for children or youth (Baha'i and non-Baha'i). These might be arts-based - using drama, video, music, posters - and could be done in partnership with a local community arts organization.

Talk to your MP and MEP about the World Conference and about the Baha'i approach to community building. Invite him/her to relevant activities. (It will be important to co-ordinate this with any other Baha'i communities in the same parliamentary constituency, so that the MP is not bombarded with invitations from Baha'is.)

Host a dinner or other social event, perhaps with a speaker, and invite the MP, the Mayor, local dignitaries and people from relevant voluntary organizations and community groups.

Find out what your local authority is doing and see if there's anything you can support.

Contact your local media and use your plans and activities as the basis of a story that will convey the importance of the World Conference and of Baha'i involvement in building unity in diversity.

These are just some suggestions. No doubt there are many other things you could think of.

Please let us know

It's vital that you let us know what you're planning and what you've achieved. We need to advise the Baha'i International Community, which will be presenting the work of the Baha'is around the world to the UN World Conference. And we can share information about your local efforts with the national government agencies and national NGOs we're working with.

Please ask

We have a statement which you can hand to your external affairs contacts. Please email oea@bahai.org.uk and request this. You can have it as a PDF or RTF file or in hard copy.

We also have a feedback form we'd like you to complete and return to us so that we can let BIC know what's going on in the UK. Please also request this by email. We'll send it in one of the usual formats.

The Office of External Affairs (020-7590 8792 / oea@bahai.org.uk) and the Office for the

Advancement of Women (zarin.hainsworth-f@virgin.net) are happy to assist with any queries and to give advice. We look forward to hearing of your plans and activities in the near future.

Committees and Departments 

Bahá'í Information Office

New Statements

The National Spiritual Assembly has made a statement, on behalf of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom, to the forthcoming UN World Conference Against Racism. It is available by post on request from the Bahá'í Information Office. The statement is also available on the National Assembly's Website at <http://www.bahai.org.uk/dp/racism.htm> or electronically from BIO (bio@bahai.org.uk) in the following formats (specify which) – plain text, RTF, PDF.

Human Rights

In observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, observed 21 March each year, the Baha'i International Community released the following statement, which was presented to Mary Robinson, the High Commissioner for Human Rights. This paper seems very apposite. The Baha'i Information Office has prepared it in European (A4) format and is making it available.

Disability and Discrimination.

The National Spiritual Assembly has issued a new stance paper "Disability and Discrimination". It is particularly appropriate at a time when the Baha'i community in the United Kingdom is, like others, having to move to full compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

The paper has been placed on the national Website www.bahai.org.uk. It is available on request from the Baha'i Information Office, on paper and electronically in RTF and PDF formats.

Committees and Departments 

Bahá'í Agency for Social and Economic Development (UK)

Hondurans take Oxfordshire by storm

Logistics. Ever had any nightmares about this word? No? Well, some members of BASED-UK almost did! Logistics was THE key word before and during the visit of a group of 18 Honduran Bahá'ís on their way to Haifa. Delegates included Santiago Martinez, the Founder of the Tierra Santa Orphanage for Abandoned Girls, and staff from Bayan which manages the SAT Rural Education Project.

The visit got under way with a flying start (i.e. delay), but eventually all Hondurans, their luggage and 3 friends got into a coach. Tea and a guided tour awaited us at Rutland Gate and the first pictures of the day were taken of Abdu'l-Bahá's chair. Many hands touched Bahá'u'lláh's prayer carpet, and then we were off to New Southgate Cemetery. The tourist tour of London was dropped, because we were late for our lunch at the house of the Custodian of the Guardian's Resting Place. A delicious pizza lunch was provided by the Mahboubi family and local friends. After lunch, the sun decided to welcome us while prayers were sung and spoken at the Guardian's Resting Place. Everybody was moved, and no-one cared about missing the planned afternoon nap. The drive back to Abingdon was fairly swift and the only problem was not remembering the Spanish word for rapeseed field. A quick shower was followed by a 'typical' English meal of chips, sausages and baked beans, before joining the evening programme at the Guildhall.

The historic Guildhall was full of happy faces as the leader of the Council Vernon Butt

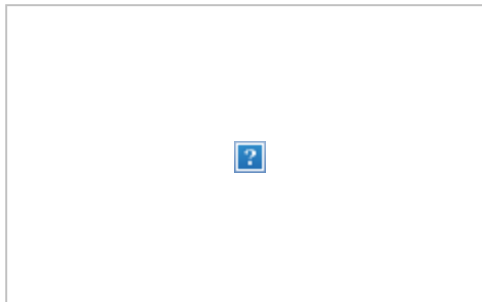
joined friends from the surrounding areas and supporters of BASED-UK, including two YOS volunteers who had served in Honduras, as well as two Aboriginal believers from Australia, two from Iceland and another from Guyana.

We were charmed by music and dance (with borrowed African drums) from members of the Garifuna people, impressed by the successes of the Bayan project, and moved to tears by the Tierra Santa Orphanage Director, Santiago. One guest was so moved that he insisted upon doing an immediate whip-round to raise the price of a cow, having heard that the children only have milk at the weekend, and no-one had the heart to deter him by talking about accountability, Gift Aid or anything else.

Councillor Butt, having waited 40 years since hearing the word Bahá'í in America for the opportunity to find out more, rose to the occasion, seeming to register every fact that was fed to him over coffee and desert and taking in the detail of each presentation despite the decidedly 'organic' nature of the evening. He made both a welcoming address and a warm and now well-informed speech at the end of the evening, and shook hands with every Honduran before leaving the gathering, clearly impressed by the Unity in Action he had witnessed.

Our Honduran friends slept at 4 different locations and rejoined in Abingdon the next day (after a late brunch) to go to Oxford for a visit to St. John's College. However, poor Santiago had to stay behind for a meeting with several members of BASED-UK to discuss fundraising issues. We all met late afternoon in Oxford for 'tapas' at Club Latino, before occupying a nearby pavement with over 20 people and lots of luggage waiting for the bus to Heathrow.

One week and many phone calls later, several friends met at the airport to greet the passengers from the Tel Aviv plane and be hosts to a few Hondurans for one night. It was a great Bahá'í gathering outside terminal 4 with many hosts waiting for their guests, not just from Honduras, but also from Trinidad, Jamaica, etc. A banner on the Bahá'í Faith received a lot of attention and we must have greeted almost all Bahá'ís from that plane. Sunday morning did see the last airport gathering of our Honduran friends and then they were really gone. Leaving behind a tremendous feeling of friendship and being touched by the fragrance of the Spirit, as well as a sign of relief from the 'logistics department'. BASED-UK would like to thank all those who made this visit such a success.



Santiago martinez (on the left) with the Honduran delegation to Haifa. Counsellor Butt is back row middle.

If you would like to support the Tierra Santa Orphanage and/or the Bayan project, please send your contribution (using Gift Aid if possible) to BASED-UK. We can also lend you the new video about the Orphanage.

BASED (UK)

Susan Howard (Secretary): <mailto:secretariat@baseduk.org>, Fax: 01235 533278

Committees and Departments 

Committee for International Pioneering and Travel Teaching

Teach in Greece ...

Would you like to teach at the international school (Pinewood School) in Thessaloniki? Every summer there are certain vacancies at the school for qualified teachers.

Any Bahá'ís who would like to pioneer to Greece and are teachers (English: native-

speakers) could get more info about the school from its website, which can be found at http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/schools/othessaloniki.html. The school cannot afford to bring anyone from overseas, so pioneers would have to move themselves. But it is a golden opportunity to get a job at a school in Greece which is a priority pioneer destination for UK Bahá'ís. Especially for people with children, who can save a big part of their tuition! Sometimes there also is an opening for kindergarten assistants, who don't need to be qualified teachers, but get a very low pay. Still, it's a good beginning for a pioneer!

Travel Teach or Pioneer to Poland

The Polish summer school (July 26 to 31) is in Cieszyn and promises to be terrific. Counsellor, Nicola Towfigh and her husband will be present. The Polish Bahá'ís would love to have visitors, travel teachers or pioneers. If anyone is interested, please contact Sara Crowley at crowley@medianet.pl.

Summer Camp in Hungary

The Hungarian Bahá'í community would like to invite you to an English conversational camp in Hungary near Lake Velencei. The camp will start with a training for the teachers from July 16th 2001 to the 21st commencing with two six-day-long camps from the 21st of July to the 2nd of August. The participants who are non-Bahá'ís will arrive on the 21st of July. The purpose of this camp is to acquaint Hungarian youth with Bahá'í social and spiritual issues using English and having fun! Apart from just talking there will be other activities e.g. sports, games, singing, and bonfire! If you play an instrument or you have an artistic talent, this will be an excellent tool for our evening programs.

We need 15-20 native English speaking youth from all over the world who are on fire and want to teach the Faith!

The friends from abroad should try to arrive on the weekend of July 14th to 15th so that they can attend the program on the 16th. If you are thinking of coming, please inform Babak Ebrahimzadeh (ebabak@hotmail.com), the member of the National Teaching Committee so we can reserve your accommodation and also inform us how you can participate and enrich the evening programs!

Living costs are relatively cheaper in Hungary compared to most European countries. For both camps accommodation on the campsite will cost approx.100 US\$ and about 10-15US\$ for food per day. There is also a Hungarian Bahá'í summer school following this project (August 6- August 12).

Or Teach in Finland

Teachers, Assistants (with Education) and a School Manager are required in Finland for an English Playschool in Tampere (2 hours north of the capital Helsinki) Positions open are for: three Teachers; two Assistants (with some kind of higher education); one School Manager (who can also work as a Teacher). The starting date: August 1,2001. The school is run by American pioneers who have been living in Finland for the past 12 years. Please contact Scott and Shawn Rizzo, English Language Playschool of Tampere, email: shawnr@sci.fi. The school's website is at <http://www.englishplayschool.com>

Would you like to come to Africa?

If you would...

... the National Teaching Committee under the auspices of The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Botswana would like to invite energetic, motivated, self sacrificing and preferably self-sufficient individual Bahá'ís to travel teach or be short term pioneers in Botswana. Accommodation and transport will be provided.

Botswana is a small country situated in the southern hemisphere of Africa, approximately 450 kilometres from Johannesburg in South Africa, with an approximate population of nearly one and a half million people. It is a peaceful, English speaking, but relatively hot country

For more information please contact:

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Botswana
P.O.Box 466, Gaborone, Botswana
Fax: (+267) 304504, e-mail: cyrus@global.bw

Please notify the CIPTT, ciptt@bahai.org.uk, of your interest in any of the above posts.

Committee for International Pioneering and Travel Teaching

Peymané Adab (Secretary): <mailto:peyman@onetel.co.uk>

Website: <http://www.bahai.org.uk/pioneers/>

Committees and Departments 

Association of Bahá'í Women

Dearest Bahá'í handmaidens of Bahá'u'lláh, I send all of you my love from Scotland. I want to share an incredible journey that I went on as a Bahá'í woman with you. I was asked by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the UK to join a group of Bahá'ís from four countries (Hawaii, USA, Canada and the UK) under the auspices of the Bahá'í International Community, to represent the faith as a member of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) attending the United Nations (UN) session on The Commission on the Status Of Women (CSW).

I travelled to New York, "the city of the covenant", my first ever trip to America, and went into the UN building as a representative of Bahá'í women. It was unlike anything I have experienced before.

There were women from all parts of the world working on issues relating to women and girls. We formed small working groups which discussed different topics on the agenda of the UN, which we fed back to our respective government representatives. For example, I would sit every evening with the British Consulate staff, who are the official delegates at the UN, and help formulate statements and ideas to be presented to the main Assembly of the UN.

I had to think as a Bahá'í, with a Bahá'í perspective at all times, and put forward Bahá'í concepts and beliefs in these discussions. In the NGO gatherings, women would introduce themselves and say something about who they represented, which for me provided an excellent opportunity to introduce all these diverse women to the healing medicine of Bahá'u'lláh.

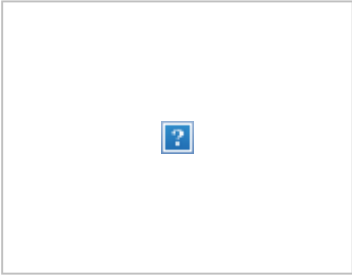
Do you know what was so moving about this? In every group that I was a part of, women would respond to me by saying how wonderful the Bahá'ís were that they had encountered in their own countries - how kind, loving, helpful, radiant and giving they appeared.

The UN had three main sessions under discussion by government delegates: HIV and AIDS, racism (relating to gender issues), and the next five-year plan for the CSW. We Bahá'ís went there with an holistic attitude and I was inspired by the dedication and effort of women all over the world. It gives real hope to mankind and we can work with them in lots of service projects, giving and sharing the Bahá'í principles. The world is ready for Bahá'u'lláh's message.

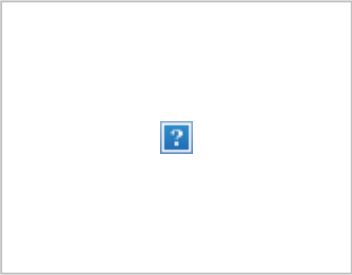
I cannot express adequately in words the overwhelming feeling I had during that week, to be an instrument of Bahá'u'lláh in such a global environment. I was continuously calling on the Concourse on High for support and assistance.

I end this in the hope that we can all arise and become transformed from gnats into eagles when we are called to serve. Our capacities are unlimited - they just need a bit of developing.

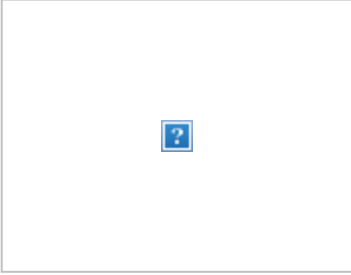
Mona Helmy



Lois Hainsworth, Mona Helmy, and Zarin Hainsworth



The Bahá'í representatives to CSW



Mona at her desk in the UN