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International News

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### Montreal Bahá'í Youth Conference examines 20th century to inspire social transformation

MONTREAL, May 1, 2002: Bahá'í World News Service (BWNS) — More than 250 youth attended the Fifth Annual Montreal Bahá'í Youth Conference, held from 29 to 31 March, with the goal of drawing inspiration for positive social transformation from “Century of Light.” Recently released



*Some of the 250 youth at the conference.  
(Photo courtesy of Enlighten)*

by the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, “Century of Light” examines the growing prominence of the Bahá'í Faith against the backdrop of humanity's turbulent development in the last century. The document takes its name from a statement by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, who used the phrase to refer to the 20th century. Held at the Louis-Bourgeois Bahá'í Centre in Montreal, the three-day conference attracted youth from 10 countries and consisted of talks, workshops, dance and dramatic performances, audio-visual presentations, and an art exhibit, all revolving around the role of Bahá'í youth in the 20th century. The conference challenged attendees to explore the role of Bahá'í youth in the 20th century, and their responsibilities in the century to come.

“The Century of Light was a tumultuous one,” said 21-yearold Vahid Khamsi, a resident of Princeton, New Jersey. “However, we also had many amazing accomplishments. The 21st century is for the youth. It is our century. It is up to us to lay the foundations for prosperity.”

Dr. Ann Boyles, an Auxiliary Board member spoke at the conference and presented an introduction and overview of the “Century of Light” document.

“In order to become a champion of justice,” she said, “you need to know about the world in which you live, the Faith in which you believe, and the relationship between the two.”

Stressing awareness of past injustices, Dr. Boyles reminded the audience that “Bahá'ís are not people that look at the world through rose-coloured glasses. We have to be realistic. We have to look at what the dark side was, but we can't be swallowed up by it.”

In addition to talks, there were several noteworthy artistic presentations, including a spoken-word performance by Shani Carter, cultural and thematic dance performances, and a remarkable audio-visual presentation that highlighted events from the past century.

Lindsay McKye, a participant from Ontario, Canada, described her previous dread of history classes, saying that she had once found the topic quite boring. After reading “Century of Light,” she saw the importance of history in her life as a Bahá'í youth and earnestly hoped that others will see its potential as an inspirational vision for world unity. On the tonic of the contribution of Bahá'í youth to the advancement of civilization during

On the topic of the contribution of Bahá'í youth to the advancement of civilization during the 20th century, "Century of Light" states: "No segment of the [Bahá'í] community made a more energetic or significant contribution to this dramatic process of growth than did Bahá'í youth."

At the dawn of a new century, youth at the conference were anxious to contribute to the process in the same spirit as their predecessors.

"It doesn't matter how much the world around you is degraded," explained Nick Ward, a student of International Development Studies at McGill University. "You yourself can make a difference. Everyone has the ability for change in order to bring about a new global civilization."

The conference ended on its third day, with youth resolving to focus their activity in systematic action along three main lines – the establishment or strengthening of study circles, devotional meetings, and community children's classes. Others were also inspired to start community development programmes and dance-theatre workshops within their respective communities.

The annual Montreal Bahá'í Youth Conference was inaugurated in 1998 and past conferences have addressed such themes as "Hope for Humanity" and "Globalization." This year's conference took its place within the context of a series of Bahá'í conferences throughout the world – a sign of the scope and aspirations of the emerging Bahá'í Youth Movement. Through this Movement, Bahá'í youth aim to constructively channel their energy and enthusiasm towards positive social transformation through the application of the spiritual principles of their Faith.

The conference website, <http://www.enlighten.ca/conference/>, contains additional information and photographs from the conference.

