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International News 

International News

City Montessori – The World's Largest School

FRESH OUT OF college and newly married, Jagdish Gandhi knew some 42 years ago that his main goal in life was to serve humanity. And he felt educating children would be a good way to do that.

So he borrowed 300 rupees (the equivalent of less than \$10), rented a couple of rooms, and founded City Montessori School (CMS) in Lucknow an historic provincial capital in northern India. The school's first class consisted of five students.

City Montessori School has a high academic reputation

Little did Mr. Gandhi imagine that it would one day become the largest private school in the world – or that it would also become widely known for its distinctive emphasis on teaching students the value of world citizenship and religious tolerance.

“There are hundreds of other well-established schools here,” said Mr. Gandhi, 66, who founded CMS with his wife Bharti Gandhi in 1959. “So we never realised we were going to be the biggest school in the world – or that we would be so focused on imparting educational globalism.”

With an enrolment of 22,612 students in 1999, CMS, as the school is commonly known, won a place in the 2000 Guinness Book of World Records as the world's largest school by enrolment. It now has over 25,000 students, in grade levels ranging from preprimary to college.

According to parents and faculty here, the high enrolment statistic is not a fluke or the anomalous reflection of something like exceedingly low tuition fees or a high achieving sports team. Rather, they said, CMS has been supremely successful at attracting students largely for two reasons: 1) its reputation for academic excellence, and, 2) its distinctive programme of moral education.

In terms of academics, CMS students consistently earn top rankings in government examinations and places in prestigious colleges and universities throughout India. For the

year 2000- 2001 school year, for example, out of 1,192 CMS students taking the national standardised Indian school certificate examination, 1,179 passed and 1,099 of those passed in the “first division,” with aggregate marks over 60 percent, which is considered to be “honours.” Some 79 students secured 90 percent marks and above.

Beyond academics, however, parents also say they choose to send their children to CMS because of its singular effort to provide students with the intellectual, moral and spiritual tools for success in an increasingly globalised world – a world in which the ability to get along in harmony with people from all religions, ethnic groups and nationalities will be of supreme importance.

“Exposure to globalism”

The school’s emphasis on this mission is clearly apparent. Its prospectus advertises “international interaction and exposure to globalism,” while banners and posters at CMS’s various school buildings proclaim slogans like: “Every child is potentially the light of the world.” Other banners emphasise principles of interfaith harmony and acceptance.

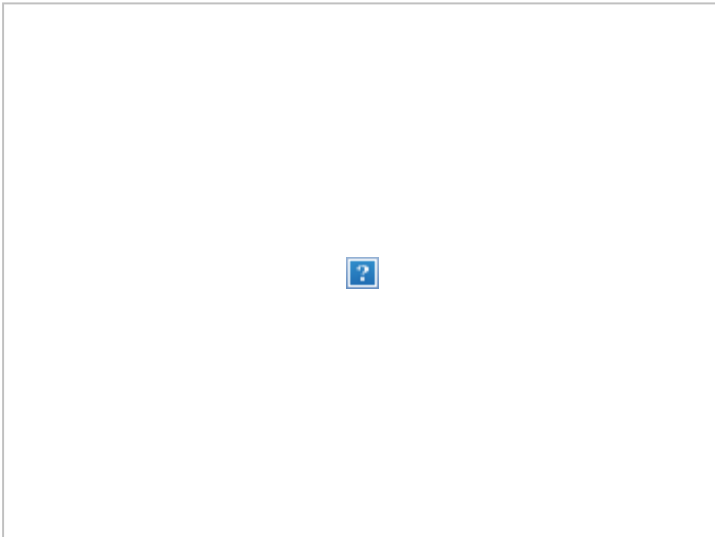
“Why do so many parents send their children here? The reason, I feel, is that parents want their children to be good,” said Mr Gandhi. “Yes, they want them to have a good education. They want good results. And we give that. But they also want them to have good morals. And we strive to give that, too.”

“Parents also know that their children will be exposed to an international atmosphere,” Mr. Gandhi added, noting that one distinct feature of the school is its hosting of various international conferences, on topics ranging from music and culture to computers and robotics, which bring many visitors from overseas. Technically speaking, CMS is not so much a school as a school district, with some 20 branches spread throughout Lucknow. Each branch is a small, self-contained campus, usually with a main school building and several auxiliary structures. On the average, each branch hosts about 1,250 students.

Windows on the world

BWNS

Fire in the Pacific conference celebrates 100th anniversary of the Faith in Hawaii



Honolulu,
Hawaii,
USA,
28th January,
2002 (*BWNS*)



MORE THAN 1,000 Bahá’ís from at least 53 nations joined with the Bahá’ís of the Hawaiian Islands in December for a four-day celebration of the centennial of the establishment of the Bahá’í Faith in Hawaii. Titled “Fire in the Pacific,” the conference featured music, dance performances, workshops and speeches that commemorated the

Conference participants came from more than 53 nations, representing a wide diversity of cultures and ethnic groups.

history of the Faith in Hawaii and looked ahead to its future here

and in the Pacific region.

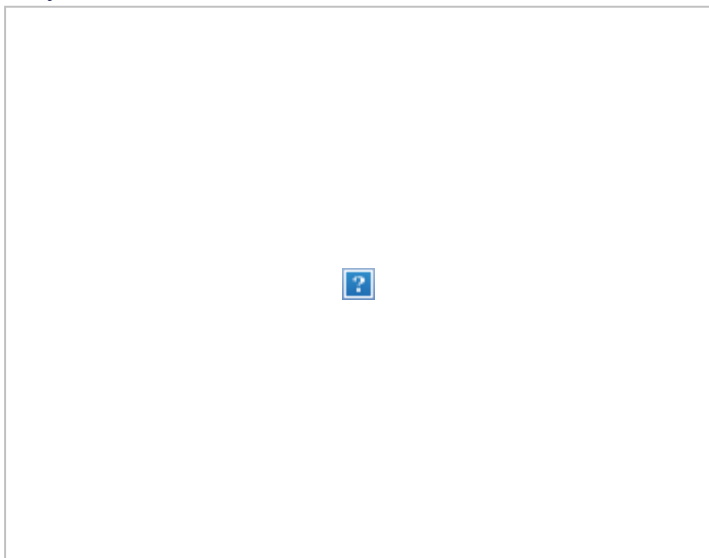
Among other things, conference sessions focused on social issues of concern to the region, including moral and spiritual education for youth and children, the potential contribution of indigenous peoples to world civilization, the use of drama and the arts for positive social change, and diversity training.

The December 20-23, 2001 event received extensive media coverage and was attended by a number of prominent people. Princess Tooa Tosi Malietoa of Samoa extended greetings at the opening session on behalf of her father, His Highness Susuga Malietoa Tanumafili II, the Head of State of the independent nation of Samoa. Ka'ulu Kukui Thomas, retired Hawaii State Court Judge and trustee for the Queen Liliuokalani Trust, welcomed the participants on behalf of the Hawaiian people. And Honolulu Mayor Jeremy Harris was greeted by conference attendees during a plenary session on Saturday morning.

“A highlight of the gathering was the permeation of all events with a spirit reflecting the cultures of the entire Pacific region,” said Chris Cholas, Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Hawaiian Islands, the governing council for the Bahá'í community in Hawaii. “There was a great prominence given to indigenous speakers and artists.

There were representatives and performers not only from Hawaii but also from the Polynesian, Melanesian and Maori peoples. And many attendees remarked that this great display of diversity and respect for different cultures created a powerful spirit of joy and unity.”

Dance performances, representing the cultures of the Pacific, were an integral part of the programme of the Fire in the Pacific conference



Among the highlights of the conference was a parade on December 20, by some 600 participants, to the resting place of Agnes Baldwin Alexander.

Among the highlights of the conference was a parade on December 20, by some 600 participants, to the resting place of Agnes Baldwin Alexander, who first brought word of the Bahá'í Faith to the Hawaiian Islands in December 1901. Born in Hawaii, the granddaughter of missionaries, Miss Alexander first heard about the Bahá'í Faith while on a trip to Europe. Returning to her native Hawaii on December 26, 1901, she devoted the rest of her life to spreading the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh on the Islands.

For Emily Chew, a Bahá'í from Australia, visiting the resting-place of Miss Alexander “felt right because it showed respect” to those who first brought the Faith to the region. “It was a humble but wonderful way to begin this historic conference.” Honolulu’s top-rated television station KHON gave extensive coverage to the parade, which proved to be a showcase of humanity’s diversity.

The conference featured more than 80 workshops, lectures, and performances. Attendees could choose from sessions on topics ranging from a presentation on the successes of a Bahá'í vocational schools in Kiribati to discussions on how to better use consultation, a nonadversarial form of decision-making, in Bahá'í community life.

There were also numerous presentations by Bahá'í artists. Musician and Grammy Award winner K.C. Porter and other local Bahá'ís “jammed” in one of the smaller conference rooms; Australian actor Philip Hinton presented Portals to Freedom, the story of Howard Colby Ives; and Nadema Agard, a community service outreach specialist of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, presented a workshop on the sacred feminine presence in the arts of Native Americans.

In plenary sessions, the focus was largely on how the Bahá'í teachings – such as the equality of women and men and the recognition of humanity's essential oneness – can be used to benefit communities in the Pacific region.

In a session on December 21, for example, Dr. Sirius Naraqí, Professor of Medicine and Associate Dean, Western Clinical School, University of Sydney, spoke about the Bahá'í writings concerning the Pacific and the similarities between the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and traditional beliefs of the Pacific Islanders. These similarities can easily be used to promote unity and cooperation, he said.

On Sunday, December 23, the conference sponsored a traditional outdoor Ho'olaule'a, or festival, at the McCoy Pavilion in Ala Moana Beach Park. The Ho'olaule'a featured top local entertainers Amy Hanaiali'i, Hapa's Barry Flanagan, Martin Pahinui, Sean Na'auao and Ernie Cruz, as well as Mr. Porter, a performer on and the producer of Santana's Grammy Award Winning album "Supernatural". The event also featured entertainment by dancers from other Pacific Islands, along with arts, crafts and food booths, and Hawaiian plate lunches.

Attendees came from throughout Hawaii, the Pacific region, the United States, Canada, Alaska, Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa for the conference.

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Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations in Zambia

January 17, 2002

DEARLY LOVED FRIENDS,

We send once again our heartfelt love to you all. This letter is written to inform you of some of the developments regarding the planning of the 50th Anniversary celebrations.

There has been a slight change in dates. The celebrations in Lusaka will be held from Saturday 29 – Sunday 30 June 2002. The celebrations in Mwinilunga (North Western Province) will take place a week after that, from Saturday 6 – Sunday 7 July 2002. We hope that this change does not pose any inconvenience to any of you.

We are in the process of compiling pictures and video footage of the history of Zambia. If any of the friends in your country have relevant material, we would be most grateful if it could be sent to us. Please note that in order for us to be able to use materials, we would need to receive them in advance of the event.

We would be most grateful if friends could let us know in advance whether they plan on attending the event. This will give us an early indication of the numbers we should be expecting, which is vital to selection of a venue and catering services.

We look forward to joining you in celebrating this very special occasion and pray that it will be a success, filled with His blessings.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
For the 50th Anniversary Task Force,
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Zambia.