



**LEAVES, A Newsletter of the
INTERNATIONAL
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International Environment Forum A Baha'i inspired organization addressing
the environment and sustainable development

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General Secretary Emily Firth
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From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters

This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on climate change action. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to newsletter@ief.org.

Please share the *Leaves* newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

Values-based Leadership Course at the UN Rio+20 Conference

Twenty years after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and 10 years after its follow-up in Johannesburg, another major UN conference in Rio on sustainable development, Rio+20, will provide organizations the opportunity to offer courses during the conference, and the IEF has developed a **course based on the Moral Leadership Practice of Nur University in Bolivia**. This course is being offered in close cooperation with the European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF), Wageningen University, and PERL (Partnership for Education about Responsible Living).

The course description reads in part: Implementation has always been the greatest challenge in following up major UN conferences (UNCHE, UNCED, WSSD and now UNCSD), and there is often a lack of political will to adopt the policies and actions that have been agreed upon. Motivation to change, whether individual behaviour or institutional direction, requires both intellectual understanding and emotional commitment. The strongest foundation for these is an attachment to ethical or moral principles that foster attitudes and qualities that can be expressed in practical terms in a number of well-defined personal capabilities. Acquiring such capabilities within a conceptual framework for moral leadership is an essential means of implementation and particularly important for anyone in a position to be a leader for change.

The public can vote via the internet until 13 April for its favourite course to be held at the Rio+20. You are warmly invited to take part in this voting through the following web address:
<http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=700&nr=120&menu=23>.

Please also see the story about this course, which has posted on the IEF website at <http://iefworld.org/node/555>

PERL 2nd International Conference held in Germany

The Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL) held its 2nd International Conference at the Technical University in Berlin, Germany, on 19-20 March 2012, on the theme "**Beyond Consumption: Pathways to Responsible Living**". The International Environment Forum is a partner in PERL and participated actively in the conference. Keynote speakers at the conference included:

- Victoria Thoresen, PERL Project Coordinator (and IEF board member), speaking on "*Concern, Compassion and Commitment: Keys to Responsible Living*";
- Tim Jackson, author of *Prosperity Without Growth*;
- Helen McCallum, Director General of Consumers International, and
- Jochen Flasbarth, President of the Federal Environment Agency, Germany.

Sixty presentations were given, including one by IEF President Arthur Dahl on "[Alternatives to the Consumer Society](#)". Arthur also presented a poster on "[Enabling Action at Rio+20](#)". Both are available on the IEF web site. There were also panel discussions allowing a deeper exploration of the issues.

The conference explored the value-action gap between an understanding of the issues and action to change behaviour in response to the issue. Tim Jackson described consumption as meaning, where people consume because of the hope for satisfaction in a product (even if short-lived) in a secular society resulting from the erosion of religious commitment. He said we should build a new economy that is fit for purpose and does not rely upon growth. He defined prosperity as the ability to flourish as human beings within ecological limits, connecting with what is truly human within us. The conference programme and abstracts are available on the PERL web site at <http://www.perlprojects.org/Project-sites/PERL/PERL-International-Conferences>.

PERL now has 200 partners around the world, and is collaborating with IEF in plans for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. Victoria Thoresen is co-leading a thematic group on sustainable consumption and production in preparation for Rio+20. Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and Arthur Dahl have been active in the PERL working group organizing forward-looking expert think tanks to guide PERL's further development.

Have you received your copy of:



Marking **100 days** until world leaders gather in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to negotiate for a sustainable future, this special issue is dedicated to the transformative power of social media.

"Small actions taken by each of us, multiplied across communities, can create a better world." – UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Rio+20 Registration Now Open www.uncsd2012.org/registration

Thinkers discuss ethical responses to climate change

Australian Bahá'í Report – February, 2012

International and Australian speakers addressed the theme "ethical responses to climate change" at a conference held in the Bahá'í Centre of Learning for Tasmania.

A keynote speaker at the conference of the International Environmental Forum, a Bahá'í-Inspired organisation based in Geneva, was IEF president Arthur Dahl.

"Around the world, there is growing awareness that there are ethical and moral questions at the root of the climate change crisis," Dr Dahl told the conference, held 10-11 December 2011 in Hobart.

"These are questions of justice and equity that will determine the survival of cultures, ecosystems, and present as well as future generations," he said.

The conference brought together thinkers with scientific, activist, religious and artistic perspectives.

Peter Adriance, environmental liaison officer for the Bahá'ís of the United States, said Bahá'í environmental involvement is rooted in three principles:

- nature is a reflection of the Divine
- all things are inter-connected and flourish according to the law of reciprocity
- humanity is one, the fundamental truth shaping our age.

Tony Press, CEO of the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre at the University of Tasmania, spoke of humanity's joint responsibility: "We are the first generation with the capacity to see what we've done to the planet, to model the future and make choices about it."

Al Riebau, principal scientist at Nine Points South Technical, said governments had made significant achievements in recent decades and so we should not give up on the political process.

Beyond partisanship

Natalie Mobini, External Affairs Director for the Australian Bahá'í Community, said many people were understandably disillusioned with the failure of the partisan political system to address complex social challenges such as climate change.

"How can we move beyond partisanship to create innovative governance alternatives that are democratic, non-competitive, and serve the common good?" Dr Mobini said.

Peter Boyer, of Climate Tasmania, Todd Houstein, of Sustainable Living Tasmania and Gareth Johnston, of Future Ready, spoke about community-based methods that could contribute to good environmental outcomes.

Miriam Pepper, secretary of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, said climate change was not only a technological problem, but more deeply a spiritual one: "The language we [faith communities] bring to the discussion is important--we add words like love, compassion and justice into the public sphere."

Capacities

Tessa Scrine, a member of the Bahá'í Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia, outlined how the Bahá'í community is responding to climate change by translating the Bahá'í teachings into practice in daily life.

She described the global process of learning, known as the training institute, by which individuals learn to apply the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith to the transformation of society, and are helped to walk an individual path of service to humanity.

The conference presentations are available online at <http://iefworld.org/conf15>



Peter Adriance



Conference participants, Natasha Homsey and Neil Podger

The New Zealand Baha'i Film Unit has posted on YouTube the trailer for its two-part film on the 15th IEF Annual Conference in Hobart, Tasmania, last December

It can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pU-BWKO8_00&feature=channel

The 15th International Environment Forum (IEF) Conference took a deeper look at the ethics and science needed to cope with adverse climate change. It explored creative responses that individuals, communities and institutions can make to preserve our planet while living the principle of the oneness of humankind to save our world. The conference was held in the Bahá'í Centre of Learning for Tasmania. This location was selected because the building is a model of environmental sustainability.

In Morocco, symposium explores religion, spirituality and education

<http://news.bahai.org/story/894>

MARRAKECH, Morocco, 2 March 2012, (BWNS) – What is spirituality? How can religious education encourage it? And what role do both religion and spirituality play in fostering human well-being?

Those were among the questions considered by a group of educators, academics and theologians from the world's religions – including the Baha'i Faith – at the "International Symposium on Religion, Spirituality, and Education for Human Flourishing," held here 24-26 February.

The event – co-convened by the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace (GHFP) and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations – encouraged discussion about how young people can be better educated about religion and spirituality, in order to address such present-day issues as economic injustice and environmental degradation.

"The world today is facing a series of unprecedented challenges," said Scherto Gill, secretary general of GHFP and convener of the symposium. "At the same time, we are also faced with tremendous opportunities, where humans can unite and live together in global solidarity with each other, within a greater global community that works towards the common good."

To meet such challenges and maximize opportunities, she said, the world needs to redefine its concept of "human flourishing" away from a purely economic growth model to one that includes concepts of justice, spirituality and an understanding of wider community.

"Meaning, connectedness, and moral ethics are derived from the spiritual dimension of being human," said Dr. Gill. "So there is a pressing need to educate in

order to develop a deeper awareness of the spiritual dimensions of our lives."

Participants described the symposium as thought-provoking and inspiring. Among them, Jocelyn Armstrong – a New Zealand-based educator – said it helped her to understand the importance of taking a holistic approach to religious education.

"You can discuss issues like honesty and integrity in the classroom, and then look at how religions encourage those virtues," she said, "or how religions value the environment."

Diane Evans, a chaplain at Hereford Sixth Form College in the United Kingdom, said correct knowledge is often lacking about religious beliefs. "The more we can come together to talk about how to improve religious education, the more we can hopefully put into place programs that can eradicate a lot of the tensions," she said.

The deliberations were inspired by 20 papers submitted by the participants, including a working document from the Baha'i International Community (BIC) which explored how concepts of religion and "human flourishing" can be better integrated into education.

"This led to a discussion about the difference between religious education and spiritual education," said BIC representative, Ming Hwee Chong.

"It is only through education," he said, "that the latent potential of every human being can develop, be expressed, and ultimately serve to benefit the individual and his or her community."