



ON TO AUSTRALIA...

I arrived in Melbourne on November 30, where I was met by Rohana Fraval and Harris Smart. Just one day to get my bearings and we returned to pick up Amalia Rasheed then drove to Templestowe, where she and I attended the 2nd meeting of the “Coalition for a UN Decade of Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace.”

This event was attended by around 40 people from many different NGOs, faiths, religions and traditions, and focused on the progress that has been made toward getting the UN General Assembly to agree to the Decade. A decision one way or another is imminent. If the UN GA agrees, then the next move is to start planning what kind of events could happen during the Decade (from 2011 to 2020). WSA's involvement at this time was to find out more about this coalition that we had been invited to join. If the Decade goes ahead, then we may, all together, give thought to what kind of initiatives we might like to organise, from the community level upwards.



A Brahma Kumari, Sikh and Jew at the Coalition meeting

If the UN GA does not agree to the decade, then the steering committee would look to other avenues – via UNESCO, for example.

The meeting with the coalition was also a great way to start to get to know some of the people who would be at the Parliament of World Religions. I felt like we were beginning to be drawn into a real interaction with the broader human community. People seemed openly curious and positive about Subud – there were few raised eyebrows or references to cults! This was a feeling that continued throughout the Parliament, that followed immediately afterward.



Yoland, a member of the Coalition steering committee, working on behalf of Indigenous peoples.

THE PARLIAMENT BEGINS...

I was graciously hosted by Sachlan and Rohana Fraval. They live a little way out of the city centre, so each morning Rohana and I caught an early train down town to start the day with a latihan. As the days ensued, our group got larger, so that at one time we were eight or nine women together. From outside Australia, we had Simon Guerrand, Scherto Gill, Sharif and Tuti Horthy, Alexandra Asseily, Patrice Brodeur, Amalia Rasheed, Liliane Tavakilian, Sharifin Gardiner, Garrett Thomson and his wife Elena; plus we linked up with Christine from New Zealand, who currently lives in Europe, two Lauras from the States, one a newer member, the other who 're-discovered' Subud at the Parliament. From inside

Australia we had Rohana and Sachlan, Murray Clapham, Hadrian (from Sydney), and Harris Smart (some for all, some for part of the time). There were a number of other Australian members who would have loved to have been with us, but had to choose between the Parliament and World Congress.

During our preparations for this event, we had made an intention to connect regularly for latihan and also for meals and other moments of sharing, as well as preparing our joint presentation. I feel we achieved this very well, creating a network of support as we each went to our own choice of workshops, panel discussions and presentations.



A number of the Subud attendees at the Parliament of World Religions

My sense is that we all felt very well integrated into the Parliament. Connecting with strangers, hearing about their interests and sharing who we are seemed to flow easily. The event was like a colourful, mixed bouquet, representing not only religions, but other spiritual and cultural movements and traditions. There was so much to see and listen to, that one had to trust one's choices and leave regret behind. I attended a number of workshops that gave me interesting insights into the challenges various religions face as they try to come together and find commonalities and a way to live together in harmony and respect – more than just tolerating each other. I learned about the Sikhs and Brahma Kumaris, whom I knew virtually nothing about, and about the prominent role that Mary, the mother of Jesus, plays in the Qur'an. I watched an amazing movie called “The Pastor and the Imam”, where two former rebels and enemies had

found a way to forgive each other and work together. I attended a lecture by author Andrew Cohen, who presented an interesting new perspective on the spiritual evolutionary drive, and I found out about “A Course in Miracles”.

There were also workshops on education (where Simon Guerrand was part of the panel) and forgiveness (where Alexandra Asseily played a prominent role), and another hosted by Saleem Ahmed – a friend of Reynold Feldman in Hawaii, who was actually opened some years ago. Saleem presented together with a representative of Monks Without Borders, and the very vivacious Mariknoll Sister, Joan Chatfield. Saleem's calling is to make in-depth studies of all religions and spiritual movements, with the aim of bringing to light their many commonalities. Monks Without Borders brings together monks of different denominations to work together, and has a dream of creating a multi-faith monastery one day.



Impromptu performances reflect the Parliament's relaxed atmosphere

Finally, on the last day of the Parliament we had our presentation on Subud. Throughout the days prior, we had made many connections and many people had expressed an interest in coming. Whatever was to be, we felt very much at ease and in a familial and welcoming setting.

Murray Clapham (who had been very active in bringing participants from Indonesia to the Parliament) was asked to chair our presentation, which he did with charm and flair. The speakers were, myself, Sharif and Tuti, Simon, Sharifin

and Alexandra. Harris Smart, one of the observers, reckoned there were about 60 people present.

After Murray introduced us, I greeted the gathering and expressed my gratitude. Then I went on to explain about the essentials of Subud – the meaning of the words Susila, Budhi and Dharma – the nature and purpose of the latihan. I talked about the two aspects of our worship: one, where we open up our feelings, let go and simply follow whatever arises spontaneously from within; and two, where we come to know ourselves and discover our particular and unique gifts and talents, giving them expression in our lives, in the hope that it will benefit ourselves and our fellow human beings. So it's like a circle of worship: receiving, expressing and giving back.

Sharif and Tuti followed, talking about Bapak – as both a man who received an unexpected gift, and the man who founded Subud: Bapak's experiences when he was first touched by the latihan and how he came to understand that it was to be shared with any who sincerely asked for it.



Mandala created by Tibetan monks during the days of the Parliament

Next came Simon who took a more personal approach, speaking of how he had come to find Subud and how it had changed and impacted his life, giving rise to a feeling to create the Guerrand Hermes Foundation for Peace that focuses on interfaith dialogue and human-centred education.

After Simon we had ten minutes for questions. These came unhesitatingly from the floor, giving a sense that people were engaged and interested.

Sharifin spoke next, talking about the work of Susila Dharma as one way in which Subud members express themselves in the world, followed by Alexandra Asseily who shared about the profound experiences that had led her to creating the Garden of Forgiveness in Lebanon. She finished by quietly inviting the audience to join us in asking a few essential questions about peace within ourselves and in our lives. Under normal (for us) circumstances, these would be the kind of questions we might test about, but in this setting Alexandra just asked everyone to listen inside for an answer. The presentation finished on a very quiet and rich note; but we were soon into overtime with more questions (one person wanting to join there and then!) and comments. The feedback was very positive, and Sister Joan Chatfield had some very encouraging words to say. As everyone needed to have lunch before the closing plenary that afternoon, it was agreed that some would meet again later for further questions and explanations.

There were many distinguished speakers at the Parliament's opening and closing ceremonies, presided over by senior Wurundjeri elder, Joy Murphy Wandin, and interwoven with a wide array of cultural performances. However, the large draw on the final day was the Dalai Lama. With the his well-known sense of humour, he laughingly took the animal skin offered to him by Joy, pretending, as he lay it on a chair, that it had jumped and was alive! Even so, he did follow with sobering words about the importance of action following words.

The Dalai Lama speaking on the last day



After a week of very intense interaction, the Parliament came to a close and we bade farewell to our many friends, old and new. I think all of us who attended will agree that it was an enriching experience. At the same time, I hope that we left behind a gentle and positive impression of Subud, and that in the not too distant future, when asked who we are, the answer 'Subud' will not be met with the statement, "Never heard of it!"



Parliament attendees send a message to the Environmental Summit in Copenhagen.

In closing I would like to say that I am very grateful for the interest and encouragement members around the world have shown both before and since the event, and I am sorry to have delayed in writing this report. With our own World Congress following so close, it has not been easy to find the time. There will be another Parliament in five years time (location as yet unknown), and I would highly recommend that anyone who feels drawn to do so attend if at all possible. On this occasion we gave one presentation, but there is no reason why, in the future, we could not propose many more. One thing that became clear to me is that we have a lot of wonderful projects and endeavours to share with our fellow human beings, and that we don't need to be shy about offering to talk about them.

Osanna