

REFLECTIONS ON THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

Melbourne Dec 4-9 2009, Sharifin Gardiner

About 15 Subud members attended the Parliament of Religions , mostly members of the GHFP board, but including Osanna Vaughn as WSA Chair, and Amalia Rashid as WSA External Relations Coordinator and myself, representing SDIA . This was an amazing and touching experience and I am very grateful to the generous Subud brother who enabled me to attend.

The first Parliament of Religions took place in Chicago in 1893 marked by the unexpected appearance of the Indian Guru, Vivekananda. This effectively started the interfaith movement, and a dialogue between Eastern and Western spirituality, but it was 100 years before the next one took place again in Chicago followed by parliaments in Capetown in 1999, and Barcelona in 2004.

This time some 7000 people attended under the overall banner of **“Make a World of Difference, Hearing each other, Healing the earth”**. All the major Religions and their subdivisions were represented, some that I had hardly heard of, and there were strong representations of traditional beliefs including those of the Australian Aborigines, the American Indians, the Maoris and the Nagas of NE India.

There were Plenaries on several days and cultural performances in the evenings and dozens of presentations and workshops four times a day. As some of them featured world class speakers there was a rich and challenging choice. The Subud party met most lunch times, but other wise we made our own choices. I focussed on things that are relevant to our work in Susila Dharma, doing my best to network with kindred spirits. Although people were from so many different backgrounds there was an amazing consensus.

We, humanity are one people, facing a series of major crises linked to and aggravated by global warming.

Religious tolerance is not enough. We need to respect other faiths and practices and celebrate the unity and diversity of mankind and our different paths.

The first nations who have suffered so much under colonialism, slavery, cultural and religious suppression and even genocide are waking up and rightly demanding their human rights. A major healing is required.

Ever increasing economic growth fuelled by greed whether driven by unfettered capitalism or state sponsored development is unsustainable, and is leading us to an overwhelming catastrophe , predicted by the scientific community. We have to find new and sustainable ways of running our economies.

People of faith need to work together to advocate change and put pressures on our politicians.

It is still not too late to heal our world. Compassion is a basic human trait though often covered over. Already there are thousands of organisations working to alleviate human suffering and to reverse environmental destruction.

Partnership is a basic tool for SDIA and we need to extend our range of these.

Later: it looks (20th Dec a.m.) as if Copenhagen will result in expected fudge. It is a move in the right direction but nowhere near enough.