



▲ Themes of the Council of Europe Exchange included the role of religion in the public sphere and the promotion of tolerance through education. Photo by Council of Europe via Bahá'í World News Service

Exploring the role of religion Bahá'í view contributes to Council of Europe Exchange

— Bahá'í World News Service —

SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: RELIGION IS A POWERFUL source of human motivation and society should gain a deeper understanding of how to benefit from its influence, the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) has said at a major Council of Europe meeting.

Political and religious leaders as well as civil society representatives and academics attended the Council of Europe Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue Nov. 2–3 in Sarajevo.

The meeting explored the theme of “building inclusive societies together,” focusing on the role of religion in the public sphere and how religious and non-religious education in schools could promote more tolerant communities.

Rachel Bayani, BIC representative to the European Union, said, “There is a need to analyze some of the assumptions on which current societal arrangements rest and to ensure that they do not deprive society of the constructive role religion can play.”

“Religion is a very powerful source of positive human motivation, and we need to gain a deeper understanding about how to tap into that source for the benefit of society as a whole,” she continued.

Other themes during the meeting included how religious and secular thought could help prevent the spread of radicalization and violent extremism.

Johanna Mikl-Leitner, Austrian interior minister, said religious leaders shared the common responsibility of making the world a better place for everyone. “Religion is the solution, not the problem,” she said.

Anne Brasseur, president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, emphasized the symbolism of the gathering taking place in Sarajevo, the scene of one of the most tragic conflicts in the past, while at the same time being an emblem of both the crossing of civilizations and religious coexistence. ■

Concert aiding Nepal is collaborative effort with Mormons in California

BAHÁ'Í AND CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS communities in Orange County, California, collaborated on an entertaining and educational concert to help children orphaned by the devastating April 2015 earthquake in Nepal.

The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Mission Viejo organized musicians and other artists including Red Grammer, Jamey Heath and Eva LaRue for the Oct. 10, 2015, concert to raise money for the two orphanages in Nepal of the Children's Education Foundation, an organization founded by Bahá'ís.

Latter-day Saints in Aliso Viejo offered their church

building's multi-purpose facility free of charge and decorated it for the concert. About 35 volunteers of both faiths planned the concert, and cleaned the church together afterward.

About 350 attendees raised more than \$8,500, all of which went directly to the Children's Education Foundation.

Local musician Badi Yazdi, a Bahá'í, conceived the concert as a way to help with recovery efforts following the April 25 earthquake.

“As I was watching video clips and photographs of the devastation on the news, I was moved,” recalls Yazdi. “I felt bad for the people ... of Nepal who not only lost their homes and all their belongings but many also lost their parents, their children and other loved ones. I thought, ‘I have to do something.’”

Yazdi set about organizing his many musician friends. Six Bahá'ís from Mission Viejo, Laguna Beach, San Clemente and Anaheim formed a committee, sought a venue that could host a large audience, and eventually approached the Mormon church in Aliso Viejo.

Performers, in addition to Grammer, Heath, LaRue and Yazdi, included Zinnia Harper, Suzy K, Bijan Konjkav, Ramses Rashidi, Farshid Doust, Poupak Zadeh, Nicole Jafari, Ellie Ataii, Shahram Shariari, Travis Williams, Fariborz Osafi, Mehrnoush Talibian, Karina Velasco, Nika Imani and Sirous Sanaie.

The music ranged from soulful ballads to Persian drumming to children's sing-alongs, leading the church's music director to comment that it was “spiritually rich and high quality” and the church's event planning director to suggest they repeat the concert in 2016.

In addition, audience members learned more about the devastation wrought by the earthquake, which claimed at least 7,300 lives, injured about double that and crippled housing and infrastructure. ■



▲ Attendees enjoy the Bahá'í-organized concert for Nepal in Orange County, California. Photo courtesy of Badi Yazdi