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Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः ॐ May Everybody Be Happy

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Dear Friends,

I attended the **Regional Interfaith Dialogue**, held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 3-6 June on the invitation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Stephen Smith MP to represent the Hindu faith, It was entitled "*Phnom Penh Dialogue 2008 on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony*", to explore ways of promoting harmonious relations between the diverse faith communities in our region. Its focus was on the themes of peace, harmony, security, education, media and development. Representatives from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam attended the conference. For details of the signed declaration please visit "Inter-faith Activities" page on our website. During the conference we had the opportunity to visit the famous and one of the oldest Hindu Temples, Angkor Watt. Please see some details included in this newsletter.

Vijai Singhal presented a paper on the Hindu perspective on "**A Moral Climate - Faith Encounters Global Warming**" on 6th May 2008. The conference was jointly organised by the United Theological College, Centre for Public and Contextual Theology in Charles Sturt University, Earth Ministry of the Uniting Church and the Project Green Church. The keynote speaker was the well-known Professor of Ethics at the Edinburgh University, Prof Michael Northcott. Abstracts of the paper presented by Mr Singhal are included in this Newsletter. The full text of the paper can be read at our website.

I also attended a meeting called by the NSW Department of Land to discuss the issue of **Sustainable Burials in the Sydney Greater**

Metropolitan Area. I made a written submission to provide a Prayer Hall in all crematoriums for Hindus, Sikhs and Jains for performing the last rites as the space in present crematoriums is not sufficient. I also requested that a small part of the beach be officially reserved and marked for the purpose of immersion of ashes. This would be acceptable both to the relatives of the deceased and to the beach goers. This would save the embarrassment to the relatives of the deceased who try to do it secretly to avoid any objections from the general public.

There is a **World Youth Day** celebration organised by the Catholic Church in Sydney. We have been requested to participate in recitation of multi-faith prayers for World Peace, Harmony and Social welfare. Also Miss Gauri Saxena, a Hindu youth representative was interviewed by the Digital News media on youth views on various contemporary aspects of life, religion, spirituality and sexuality faced by Hindu youth living in Australia. The interview extracts shall be available on their website: news.com.au.

Deepavali 2008: This year we will be holding the Deepavali fair on Sunday, 19th October 2008 at Sydney Olympic Park, Athletic Arena. This fair provides the best opportunity to the Business community to sell and showcase their business to over 25000 people of Indian origin. We request the business community to come forward to sponsor the fair and put up their stalls and promote their products through advertisements in our coloured Souvenir, which is unique in its quality of publication. All application forms are available at our website: www.hindu council.com.au. You will enjoy the spectacle.

Meat-free Day on 2nd Oct 2008: You know global warming is a very hot topic and animal farming is one of the biggest causes of environmental degradation. A single individual

by not consuming meat, prevents 1.5 tons of carbon dioxide emission in a year. Hence to save the environment we are proposing to observe 2nd October 2008, Gandhi ji's Birthday, as Meat-Free day. We are proposing to hold ½ day function to highlight the benefits of consuming less meat in our diets both for saving the environment and on individual health and at the same time preventing cruelty to animals. We will be inviting the Federal Minister for Climate Change, Hon. Penny Wong to attend and address the conference. Majority of Hindus are vegetarians and that is our biggest contribution to save global warming. We urge upon all to observe this day by not consuming meat and propagate this message to all your relatives and friends.

I continue to look for your cooperation and support for our activities.

Regards,

Dr. A. Balasubramaniam
Chairman.

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ANGKOR WATT



Angkor watt is the largest monument of the Angkor complex - there are several other Hindu and Buddhist temples and monuments in the Angkor complex. It is the largest place of worship (including all religions) that was ever build by man. It lies about 4 miles north of the main town of Siem Reap. It was built in the first half of the 12th century (approximately 1113-50) by Suryavarman II. He dedicated the temple to Lord Vishnu. Watt is Thai name for temple, which must have been added on to Angkor when it became a Threveda Buddhist monument, probably in the 16th century.

Angkor watt is an immense monument, occupying a rectangular area of about 500 acres, defined by a laterite, which is surrounded by a moat that is 600 feet wide. The reflection of the entire temple on the water of the moat during the evening is a

brehtaking experience. Angkor watt is 213 feet tall, achieved by using three rectangular or square platforms. Each platform is progressively smaller and higher than the one below. At the third level, the platform supports five towers - four at the corners and one in the middle. The ingenious plan allows a view of all five towers only from certain angles. The overall profile imitates a lotus bud. Angkor watt temple is most famous for its Bas-reliefs. The Bas - reliefs surround the first level of the temple. The reliefs cover the innermost wall of the first level on all four sides, and covers 12,900 square feet of brilliant sandstone carvings. It extends seven feet from top to bottom. The Bas- reliefs on the western gallery depicts the story of battle of Mahabharata; south gallery depicts the army of Suryavarma; East gallery portrays the story of churning the Ocean milk; West Gallery portrays the story of battle of Lanka- Ramayana. The exquisite and intricate sand stone carvings points to the rich heritage of the Khmer civilization.

REPLACING LORD VISHNU WITH LORD BUDDHA: The top level has five towers , four at corners and one in the middle , which is considered the sanctum sanctorum. It is understood that the middle tower had the most beautiful statute of Lord Vishnu at the time the temple was built. However, with the Khmer rulers adapting to Buddhism, Angkor Watt was taken over by the Buddhist priests, and they replaced Lord Vishnu with Lord Buddha. Today, there are three gigantic Lord Buddha statues inside the sanctum sanctorum.

In the Angkor complex there are many other temples - both Hindu and Buddhist.

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Paul McCartney proposes "Meat-free Mondays"
June 23, 2008

Paul McCartney is asking the UK to schedule "Meat-free Mondays" to reduce carbon emissions. The ex-Beatle told *The Grocer* that the plan would make consumers more aware of the environmental impact of meat production. He said:



"one of the most significant conclusions of the recent report on climate change was that we should eat less meat. This is not the Vegetarian Society that said that. It is the UN."

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A Moral Climate: Faith encounters Global Warming, a Hindu Perspective

Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world. It is called: *Sanatana Dharma*, the Eternal Religion. It has existed since the very beginning of creation. Hindus believe in the unity of all existence. "*Sarvam Idam Khalu Brahma*", the whole universe is pervaded by Brahman, the supreme consciousness. Hindus have lived in perfect harmony with nature for thousands of years. They worship the sun and the stars, the rivers, the trees and the animals- nature in all its manifestations and glories.

When we talk about climate change, we are talking about the degradation of the external physical environment that we live in. There is another environment, internal environment of our inner being, our mental peace and tranquility, which is equally important if not more.

The present problems of climate change are due to our over exploitation of nature's abundant resources. Nature has provided us in abundance all its resources and there is an ecological system that keeps it all in perfect balance. But when human beings start to over exploit some resources it disturbs that balance and creates the problems that we are facing now.

We are suffering from the problem of affluence. Someone has called it "Affluenza". The more affluent we are the bigger is our ecological footprint. Our economic model is based on consumption. We are urged upon to consume more and more through TV and other forms of advertisements and promotions.

In all our talk about global warming, there is not much emphasis on reduction of demand, because that is against the basic economic model. The US with only 5% of the world population consumes more than 25% of the oil, whereas China and India with a combined population of 2.5 billion people use less than half that amount. If they are to continue to follow in the footsteps of USA it will be catastrophic for the whole humanity. They need to evolve a different economic model, which is not demand driven.

That is where the religions come in. Their role is to emphasize the moral values - keeping our lives simple, using the resources carefully, reducing wastage, taking from nature only what we need. In India, 70% of its population lives in villages. They lead very simple lives. They consume what they grow locally. They

are virtually self-sufficient. Their ecological footprint is miniscule, very tiny amount, almost zero. The climate change problems are the problems of those 30% people who live in big metropolitan cities like Mumbai and Delhi and similarly Beijing and Shanghai in China, with increasing numbers of cars, choking pollution etc.

When India got her independence in 1947, Mahatma Gandhi had proposed a different economic model for India's economic growth. He had proposed small-scale cottage industries to improve the lives of the villagers. Provide them with better, more efficient implements/tools for farming; improve their living conditions, and provide better sanitation and give them basic education, so that they lead contented, happy and healthy lives. He was not in favour of large scale industrialization that causes population shift to big cities, alienation of the people from their roots and causing all the problems associated with that. But Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India was more western oriented in his thinking. He wanted India to grow industrially. He went for the big industrial development for India. The economy struggled initially but now Indian economy is growing fast at an annual rate of 8-9%. There is criticism that the benefits of all this economic advancements have not filtered through to the poorer sections of the Indian community.

The majority of Hindus, over 60-70% are complete vegetarians. Even those who do eat meat do so occasionally. Also they eat poultry meat and fish as against beef. Their relative greenhouse gases emission is much less. This is one of the biggest contributions the people of Hindu faith have been making to save the climate, as we all know that the animal farming for human consumption is one of the biggest causes of environmental degradation. In *The Ethics of What We Eat*, Peter Singer and Jim Mason write:

It has become apparent that the human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage now threatening the human future, deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilisation of communities and the spread of disease.

It is estimated that some 60 billion animals are slaughtered every year for human consumption. It is just a mind boggling number. There are ethical and health reasons as well to reduce consumption of meat,

especially red-meat, which causes cancer as per studies carried out at the Harvard Medical School.

When it comes to feeding the world, an acre of land used for crops could feed about 10 times as many people as an acre for grass-fed beef. As per new report published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation states the livestock sector generates more greenhouse gas emissions as measured in CO2 equivalent of 18%, than the burning of fossil fuels by transport. If all people in Australia abstain from eating meat for one day and stick to vegetarian only diet, that would save an enormous amount of CO2 gas emission and many giga litres of water.

Commonalities with other faiths

There are lots of commonalities amongst all faiths on the issue of morality and the question of our inner peace and tranquillity that we all desire. According to the Hindu faith our true nature is "*Sat Chit Ananda*" that is "Truth, consciousness and bliss". Unfortunately that peace and tranquillity has been lost. Fear, mistrust, selfishness and greed have taken over our lives.

We have to find a peaceful solution to this so called war-on-terror. Violence begets violence. The Iraq war is the biggest curse on humanity. It has costed the US economy a close to a Trillion US dollars. According to World Bank estimates, \$54 billion a year would eliminate starvation and malnutrition globally by 2015, while \$30 billion would provide a year of primary education for every child on earth. A Trillion dollars cost of war could have fed and educated the world's poor for over 10 years. The cost in terms of the human misery has been enormous. Almost 4,000 US soldiers have been killed and more than 60,000 wounded. These return-soldiers suffer war traumas for rest of their lives. What about the poor Iraqis? An estimated 700,000 innocent men, women and children have been killed and more than 4 million have been made refugees. The war not only causes human tragedy of gigantic proportion but also the destruction of physical environment as well. All the religious groups should unite together and raise our voice to oppose war. Let us build bridges of friendship. Let us embrace each other. Let us love each other and remove all hatred from our hearts.

(This is an abstract of the presentation made by Vijai Singhal on 6th May 2008)

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Hinduism A De Facto Supporter of Ecology

NEW YORK, USA, January 27, 2008: Whether we are actively religious or not, religious belief permeates the very fabric of our existence. Namely, it influences our legal systems; and therefore our constitutions; and therefore our nations' policy choices, both at home and abroad. It also shapes role with regards to protecting the environment. American thinker Lynn White wrote, "Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny -- that is, by religion."

Hinduism is an immensely complex and diverse religion, based on an all-pervasive Divinity, Karma and Moksha. At its core is living a simple life and shunning the myth of happiness through material gain. "Hindu religion wants its followers to live a simple life ... People are meant to learn to enjoy spiritual happiness, so that to derive a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, They need not run after material pleasures and disturb nature's checks and balances," writes Ranchor Prime for the Alliance of Religions and Conservation.

Notably, Hinduism appears to be a de facto supporter of renewable fuels, such is its adherence to sustaining the natural order of things. Hindus are instructed not to "use anything belonging to nature, such as oil, coal, or forest, at a greater rate than you can replenish it."

The western, Abrahamic view differs from the Dharmic faiths. "Christianity," wrote White, "Not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploits nature for his proper ends." The emergence of Christianity, many, like White believe, marked the moment humans broke away from previously common held beliefs that all beings, all forms of life -- including plants -- had spirits (or souls). "In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its guardian spirit," he wrote. "By destroying pagan animism," White wrote. "Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."

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I adopted the theory of reincarnation when I was 26. Religion offered nothing to the point. When I discovered reincarnation ... time was no longer limited. I was no longer a slave to the hands of the clock.

American auto industrialist **Henry Ford**