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## NEWS LETTER Vol.1 January 2005

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Hindu Council of Australia, I wish you and all members of your organisation a very happy and prosperous New Year.

### Tsunami Disaster

The beginning of this year is dominated by the terrible news of the devastating tsunami that struck South and South-East Asian countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and Maldives on December 26, 2004. Over 150,000 people are estimated to have died and the toll is rising by the day.

Growing estimates indicate that over 14,000 people in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and the Andaman and Nicobar islands and over 25,000 people in Sri Lanka have been killed, and thousands more are homeless and without access to clean water, shelter, food or clothing. There is an immediate need to provide relief to the victims, and to evacuate those in affected areas.

The Hindu Council of Australia expresses its profound grief and sympathy for the affected people and encourages its members to contribute generously to charities involved in providing relief to the suffering people.

### Deepavali 2004

We have had a very successful Deepavali celebrations at the Sydney Olympic Park Athletic Centre on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2004, followed by the historic celebration at the Federal Parliament House on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2004 for the first time in the history of Australia. It was a memorable moment for all Hindus living in Australia. It marks the recognition of one of our most important festivals as an important and significant event to be celebrated in multicultural Australia.

We took this initiative in our Deepavali fair in 2002 when we requested NSW Premier, Bob

Carr to have Deepavali lighting and celebrations at the State Parliament. He agreed and we had the first Deepavali celebration at the NSW State Parliament in 2003 and again in 2004 with lighting of the exterior of the Parliament. As mentioned earlier, we had a successful celebration this year at the Federal Parliament House in Canberra. The Prime Minister was represented by Hon. Senator Gary Humphries and the Leader of the Opposition was represented by Hon. Senator Joe Ludwig. His Excellency Prabhat Shukla, High Commissioner for India also addressed the gathering. Punjabi Bhangra group was specially flown from India to perform at the function, courtesy of the High Commission of India and India council of Cultural Relations. The Great Hall was full to capacity. People came from Sydney and Melbourne and other nearby places and witnessed this historic event and took part in the celebrations.

We also understand that Deepavali was celebrated in the Legislative Council of Canberra. We sincerely hope that other State Parliaments in Australia will also be celebrating this function in years to come. We would like to request our member organisations in other States to take the initiative and approach their respective Premiers and Parliamentarians. Let Deepavali be celebrated all over Australia like the Christmas and the Chinese New Year.

### Interfaith Dialogue

As the representative of the Hindu community living in Australia, I had the privilege of being invited by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, Hon. Alexander Downer to attend the Interfaith conference in Yogyakarta, Indonesia from 5-7 December 2004. The conference was jointly organised by the Australian and the Indonesian governments with the theme "Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation: Community Building and Harmony".

### Objectives:

- ◆ To build a harmonious relationship among all followers of different faiths and religions in the region through promoting confidence and trust.
- ◆ To foster mutual understanding and respect between Islam, as the prominent religion in Indonesia, and other faiths and religions.
- ◆ To engage all faiths and religious groups in developing an inclusive conceptual proposal to bridge differences and find specific common grounds for practical cooperation.

The participants included prominent faith and religious leaders from Australia, Brunei, Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste, and Vietnam. There were a total of 133 delegates from 13 countries that took part in the Dialogue.

The Australian delegation consisted of:

1. Cardinal George Pell, Cardinal Archbishop of Sydney, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney
  2. The Reverend John Baldock  
Anglican Church
  3. Ms. Wendie Wilkie  
Uniting Church of Australia
  4. Reverend John Henderson  
General-Secretary, National Council of Churches in Australia
  5. Dr. Ameer Ali, President, Australian Federation of Islamic Councils
  6. Archbishop Aghan Baliozian  
Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand
  7. The Most Venerable Phuoc Hue OAM  
President, the Buddhist Federation of Australia
  8. Dr. Appupillay Balasubramaniam  
Chairman, Hindu Council of Australia
  9. Sister Patricia Madigan OP  
Roman Catholic Church, Bishop's Advisory Committee (Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations)
  10. Ms. Peta Jones Pellach  
Executive Council of Australian Jewry
- Observer**
11. The Venerable Phuoc-Tan Thich  
The Buddhist Federation of Australia



Borobudur Buddhist Temple

The three day conference included the tour of the famous 8<sup>th</sup> Century Buddhist Temple, the Borobudur and the Hindu Temple Prambanan.



Prambanan Hindu Temple

The *Prambanan temple* is the biggest and a most beautiful Hindu temple about 20 minutes from Yogyakarta city. This magnificent *Shaivite* temple is reputed to be the biggest and most beautiful Hindu Temple in Indonesia. The temple is believed to have been built by *King Balitung Maha Sambu* in the middle of the ninth century.

The delegates were addressed by the President of the Republic of Indonesia, H.E. Dr. H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the Australian Foreign Minister, Hon. Alexander Downer and various religious leaders. Also included 3 plenary sessions over a two day period where participants took part in further deliberations. At the end of the conference the following statement was issued:

### STATEMENT

1. The delegates to the International Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation, held in Yogyakarta on 6-7 December 2004, expressed their strong commitment to fostering peace and respect for religious diversity in the Asia-Pacific region. Delegates affirmed their strong condemnation of violence and terrorism. Participants committed themselves to taking action in their own communities to further promote interfaith and inter-communal harmony. Delegates undertook to discuss with their own national governments a range of recommendations designed to strengthen interfaith unity and cooperation.
2. Delegates expressed their strong appreciation to the Governments of Indonesia and Australia and the Central Board of Muhammadiyah and to those of participating countries for their support for the Interfaith Dialogue meeting and underlined their support for further interfaith dialogue initiatives.

3. We noted the Important statement made by the President of the Republic of Indonesia, in his opening remarks, stating that when ethnic and religious prejudice was compounded by economic and political rivalry, conflict was inevitable. The President stressed that the solution was not to deny the reality of our differences, but to affirm a deeper, greater and more important reality-our common humanity.
4. We believe the meeting has achieved its main objective as a forum to promote understanding and to foster harmony between faith communities across our region. We see this Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation as the beginning of a process of more direct and frequent communication between regional faith leaders in solving problems and building a more harmonious and peaceful future for the region.
5. We are of the view that the promotion of a culture of peace and acceptance based on relationships of justice should be promoted through education as a way to enrich dialogue.
6. We call upon governments to support such initiative in the future as a way to promote and strengthen people-to-people contact.

### **HSC Syllabus**

The Hindu Council of Australia has also participated with NSW Board of Studies to develop the HSC Syllabus for the Study of Religions in NSW schools.

I am looking forward to your active involvement and cooperation in the coming year for not only in the celebrations of Deepavali but in a number of other activities we want to undertake to help the Hindu community living in Australia. And more importantly, we would like to play a significant role in the multicultural Australian society. We have a very rich cultural heritage, which we like to share with other ethnic groups. We want to pass on this heritage to our children and make them feel proud to belong to that rich heritage.

We would be endeavouring to get the Hindu Youth Council of Australia established and start functioning. Involvement of the younger generation of our Hindu community is absolutely vital for the future of our community. You will see an article about that effort in this Newsletter.

I would appreciate your feedback to the contents of this first issue of our Newsletter. Two way communication is very important. Please let me know what would you like to have covered in the newsletter. We would like the member organisations to send us the details of their activities which we would be pleased to include in the newsletter so others could know about them and cooperate to promote similar activities in their areas.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With regards and best wishes,

Dr. A. Balasubramaniam  
Chairman

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### **Hindu Youth Council of Australia**

The HYCA seeks to be an umbrella body of the existing Hindu youth bodies around Sydney, and ultimately, around Australia. There are a few motivating factors for having such a body:

- ◆ At present, many different Hindu youth groups exist around Sydney (detailed below). Many of these groups are not aware of each other and the activities that they are involved in. These youth groups would have largely the same objective - that is, to promote Hinduism, but where they differ is in the activities and events that they organise. Hence, if there were greater unity amongst these groups, there would be a much more powerful representation of Hinduism, and much larger events could be organised.
- ◆ Currently there is no knowledge base or reference point for Hindu beliefs/Scriptures. That is, if an outside organisation - such as the media or the government wants representation from Hindu youth, they have no such direct body to contact. As a result, Hindu youth may often go unrepresented.

By being an umbrella organisation, the HYCA would not be attempting to add to the list of Hindu Youth organisations, but instead, foster unity amongst the existing ones.

We recognise that Hinduism can be interpreted and practiced in a number of different ways, and that's what lends it to these different organisations. Hinduism thrives on this diversity, and in this way, caters for every type of individual. However, with greater unity, there

could be a much larger pool of dynamic youth available to all participant organisations, and all Hindus around Sydney would be exposed to many more of the dimensions of Hinduism. This would enable Hinduism to be accessible to a much larger range of people.

## OBJECTIVES

HYCA's core objective is to promote unity in diversity amongst existing Hindu youth groups. There are a number of activities that HYCA plans to undertake to achieve this objective:

1. Organise a Convention in 2005 with representation from ALL Hindu youth groups in Sydney. At this convention, the youth groups would have the opportunity to inform everyone of what they do, as well as present an item reflecting it.
2. Develop a website, which provides links and information of all the Hindu youth groups around Sydney. It should be the central information portal for Hindu youth, with various articles and links to other interesting Hindu-related websites.
3. At present, there is only one Hindu society at a university campus in Sydney - at the University of Sydney. HYCA would seek to establish and support the development of Hindu societies in all Sydney University campuses.
4. Assist the parent body in its various endeavours/activities for HCA as a whole
5. Facilitate regular meetings for representatives from various Hindu youth bodies to encourage knowledge gathering, sharing ideas and interacting with one another
6. Representation of Hindu youth in the wider Australian multicultural community.

## Hindu Identity

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Speaks On Hindu Identity

INDIA, November 27, 2004

"It is interesting to probe into the psyche of identity, which often is a source of security, insecurity, conflict and comfort. Perhaps the following reasons would answer the identity crises of the Hindus. The broadmindedness of Hinduism, its inherent inclusiveness and secularism, makes Hindus feel guilty about claiming their identity, as it is embedded in their philosophy that it is wrong to exclude others. Claiming a religious identity makes them feel they are excluding others, and so they shy away from doing so," says Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in his recent column for The Indian Express.

"But Hindus who know *Sanskrit* or a few *shlokas* are rare. Most educated Hindus know the Bible; they know Christmas carols. When they know nothing about their religion, how can they take pride in it?" "There are 1.25 billion Hindus in the world, a little over one-sixth of the world's population, but you hardly find a single Hindu lobby at international forums. You will find a Christian lobby, a Muslim lobby or a Jewish lobby, but you can't find a Hindu lobby. Just 12 million Jews in the world are such a powerful voice. Buddhists also have a voice and make their presence felt at world forums.

"A strong community is an asset to any nation. A weak community will always be in fear and because of insecurity will become aggressive. It is the pride in one's identity which strengthens the community," Sri Sri Ravi Shankar said.

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