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International News

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Bahá'í Youth Conference in Brazil focuses on preparing young people to become agents of global change



SÃO PAULO, Brazil, March 8, 2002, Bahá'í World News Service,(BWNS) – With the goal of discussing how young people can make a more positive impact on the world, more than 600 youth from 15 countries came to the Ninth Congress of the Bahá'í Youth Movement of the Americas here 17-21 January 2002 to talk about peace, change and the future. Held at the Soltanieh Bahá'í Educational Centre outside Mogi Mirim, some 150 kilometres from São Paulo, the four day Conference programme featured talks by members of the Board of Counsellors for the Americas, artistic presentations, small-group workshops and audio-video presentations. Organized by the Bahá'í National Youth Committee of Brazil, the goal of the event was to bring together youth from different countries and backgrounds in order to share ideas of how to better the world. The Congress was the latest event in an international Bahá'í Youth Movement that is focused in the Americas.

“It brings youth together, it unifies, it gives the youth a sense of the Bahá'í culture,” said Massoud Moslehi, 33, from Victoria, Canada. “Bahá'í culture” means living according to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, he said, which not only promote the oneness of humankind but also exhort Bahá'ís to live an active life of service to humanity and to be upright in their personal behaviour.

The first of the Congresses was in Santiago, Chile, where some 650 youth from 25 countries gathered in January 1998. Thousands of youth from dozens of countries gathered at international congresses in 2000 and 2001, held in Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay.

“Youth have played a special and unique role in every generation,” states a paper on the Congress's Website, explaining the goals and purposes of the Bahá'í Youth Movement. “They have often served as a positive and catalytic force pushing society towards something better. Free from the pressures of work and family responsibilities, their energy, enthusiasm and zeal can be harnessed to promote a positive movement within society to bring about change that ensures a better future for them and their children.”

Participants at the most recent Congress indeed appeared to be energized by the event, expressing the sense that they do have the power to change the world for the better, by focusing on positive actions and their own moral development. “We are not revolutionaries in the usual use of the word, we are not trying to make governments fall, or make a guerrilla war,” said Gaël Masrou, a 28-year-old Bahá'í living in Chile. “But we are trying to change the world as we see it nowadays. I think these conferences are only a step in this process, not a goal in itself, but a step.”

“Humanity is going through a time where no room is left for idle fancy and useless leisure,” Masrou continued. Not to take action at this point in the development of the world he said is “suicide”

“If we want change,” he said, “we need to transform both our own selves and society in a parallel process. We must become moral leaders and make a difference through hard work and example.”

In addition to talks by senior Bahá'í advisors, there were numerous presentations by the youth themselves, ranging from music and dance performances to a video sent by youth who attended the Youth Conference in Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada, in July 2001.

Lena Delchad, 23, from San Diego, USA, said the coming together of so many young people from so many countries created a unique energy — which was the main reason she had come.

Youth conferences like these “send a surge of energy through the youth straight into their own communities,” she said.

The youth ended the four-day event by committing themselves to actions they will take over the next year in order to effect a positive change in their community.

Some of these actions included starting moral education classes for children, making use of the arts as an education tool, starting a moral education theatre group, and becoming involved in community-building projects.

Several groups of youth launched a two-week campaign immediately following the Congress to spread the principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Congress Website, at <http://www.mjbahai.com/brasil/>, contains information about the Congress, the message of the Bahá'í Youth Committee of Brazil, documents from previous Youth Congresses, and information about the Bahá'í Youth Movement.

