

## VISHVA HINDU PARISHAD OF AUSTRALIA Incorporated (World Hindu Council, Australia)

(ABN:78862155168,Reg.No:Y2898719,Charity No:C N10709)  
GPO Box No 1374,Sydney 2001, Australia

### The 2nd Australian Hindu Conference

The 2nd Australian Hindu Conference with the theme *"Sustaining Australia through strengthening bonds amongst communities"* was organized by Vishv Hindu Parishad (VHP) of Australia Inc. The conference was inaugurated by world renowned Hindu teacher and spiritual leader, His Holiness Swami Dayananda Saraswathi by lighting the lamp. The conference was held on 11-12 April 2009 at the University of Western Sydney, Parramatta campus, Sydney. Uncle Max Harrison, the Aboriginal elder, blessed the occasion with Aboriginal blessing. He was impressed by the welcome by the Hindu community and told the audience that he felt being at home.

The conference brought together Hindus in Australia coming from different countries as well as guests from across Australia, Dharma civilization group (Buddhist, Jain, Sikh and Aboriginal) and Australian host community. There were over 250 attendees at this 2-day conference.

Sri Brij Pal Singh, the President of the VHP Australia, welcomed all the delegates. Shri Nikhil Rughani, co-ordinator of Hindu Youth Australia, was the master of ceremony for inauguration ceremony.

Mrs. Akila Ramarathinam, Joint General Secretary of VHP Australia, and coordinator of the 2nd Australian Hindu conference provided an update of VHP activities over the past 12 months. Sydney Veda Patasala, unique project for Veda chanting, was started

in 2008 with 10 students. Veda chanting has been considered as the outstanding oral cultural tradition, and has been declared as World's Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO. Now over 100 students learn the Vedas at 5 Veda Patasalas (schools) in the various suburbs of Sydney. The recital of select mantras (verses) from number of Vedas by students of the Sydney Veda Patasala demonstrated the levels of learning achieved in mere 12 months and less. It also showed Australia's country that supports and nurtures oral traditions of the Vedas that has been recognized by the United Nations as a World Cultural Heritage.

His Holiness Swami Dayananda Saraswathi presented the keynote address of the conference, in which he pointed out that human conscience and values are universal. Swamiji emphasized the message from the Vedas. 'Ahimsa Paramo Dharma' – that non-violence in thought, deed and action – is the highest and most basic of all values and all else are derivatives of this universal value.

Mr Cheenu Srinivasan made presentation that highlighted the fact (based on Australian Census 2006) that among the immigrant community, Hindu community is the third largest faith-based community in Australia. He also highlighted the Hindu contribution in Health, Economy, Education, Social and Cultural aspects. He mentioned how Hindu doctors and nurses are providing services by working for the various hospitals, thereby

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fulfilling the shortage of skills in the health sector. Of the age distribution among Hindu community, majority of people are in the most productive age group (20 – 49 years). In education, it was highlighted that the number of post graduates and doctoral degree holders in Hindu community is at least 9 times when compared to total Australian population, on percentage scale. In social and cultural aspects, it showed evidences of how Hindus have integrated with the Australian society while maintaining the Hindu identity intact.

Hindus are major contributor to Australia's talent pool in: Health Services, Teaching, Research, IT Services, Public Service, Business Services (Accounting, Legal etc). A number of our fellow Hindus won national recognition with Order of Australia Medals, Prime Minister's Science Award etc. In our own way we recognize their contribution to Australia and the country acknowledging their contributions.

Federal Parliamentarians, the Hon Mr. Philip Ruddock and Hon Mr. Laurie Ferguson (Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs) addressed the conference. Former Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Mr. Philip Ruddock said that Australia had benefited from diversity in its society and that managing it was not easy and requires good deal of effort with policies and programs. Hon Mr. Laurie Ferguson recalled the address of Swami Vivekananda at the World Conference of Religions in Chicago 1893 and acknowledged Hindu ethos and values. He reaffirmed the Rudd Labor Governments' commitment to multiculturalism.

Other dignitaries who attended the conference were The Hon. Ray Williams MP representing the New South Wales Leader of the Opposition, Hon Mr. Dilip Chopra, Councilor of the Hornsby Shire Council and Professor Michael Adams, Head of the School of Law and Provost of UWS Parramatta.

There were 6 paper presentation sessions and 3 workshops. The workshops focused on issues, which were common to all Hindu organizations, and also to the wider community, such as "Harnessing the dynamic spirit of youth", "Providing social services to Hindu community" and "Networking among Hindu organizations, associations, temples and institutions". The conference papers were presented by highly qualified research scholars, university lecturers of both Hindu and non-Hindu origin. Discussions following the presentations and during the workshops were highly appreciated by the delegates. Although this conference was mainly for the Australian community, there were number of delegates from India, New Zealand, Fiji and South Africa.

With speakers drawn cross wide cross-section of the Dharma traditions – Hindu, Jain, Buddhist,

Sikh – that grew out of the spiritual homeland of India, participants were able to learn the different hues of common culture that binds them all. The session on Spirituality and the Environment heard an impassioned plea from Aboriginal Elder, Uncle Max Harrison to care for the environment. Dr Vasudev Achary implored greater use of solar energy in keeping with the Hindu traditions of caring for Mother Earth and contrasted Hindu teachings to those of the Old Testament that advocated man's subjugation of nature. Dr Rugmini Venketraman stressed the need for proactive partnering with Government agencies in addressing community services.

An highlight of the conference was the powerful dance of the 'Purush Suktam and Aboriginal

Dreamtime Spirituality' choreographed by adopted Aboriginal Elders, Kumaran and Jennifer Pather representing the Goomeroi Aboriginal Community of Toomelah. There was standing ovation for this dance and call

for an on-going engagement of the VHP with the Aboriginal communities to both share and learn from each other. In an impromptu and emotional address after the dance, Aboriginal Elder Uncle Max Harrison said, 'There were 9 dancers in the group. This according to our customs means that we have just witnessed another re-birth of our traditional culture'.

In parallel with the conference sessions, the Hindu Youth focused on the issues they face and worked their way out to resounding resolution to host the Hindu Youth Foundation's inaugural conference in April 2010. Other workshops looked into those of temples and associations as well as how to better service the growing needs of the Hindu community and build stronger and sustainable networks.

Dr. Guna Magesan, General Secretary of Hindu Council of New Zealand Inc., presented the closing address on 'Going Forward' while also recapping the path they had taken in New Zealand. Earlier, Swami Vigyanand honoured the Veda Patasala teachers and volunteers for their contribution over the past 12 months.

Brij Pal Singh, VHP Australia President said that 'At time of global financial crises and fears of long recession, we must rediscover our spiritual roots and help each other to sustain us through these difficult times. VHP Australia looks forward to all Hindus and fellow Dharmic traditions in Australia working in harmony with all sections of the wider Australian community and enriching our lives with our shared traditions.'

Finally, Mrs Nalini Sankar, the vice president of the VHP Australia, thanked all the members of the organizing committee for their hard work, the foreign and local delegates for their participation in the conference, sponsors for their financial and in-kind support, media and internet sites for wide publicity, volunteers for their selfless service for the success of the conference.

The 1st Australian Hindu youth conference with the theme "Dynamic Spirit of Youth" was announced to be held in April 2010, and 3rd Australian Hindu conference to be held in April 2011.

Delegates expressed their appreciation at the way the conference was organized with human and personal touch for looking after the needs of the delegates.

The conference organizers were overwhelmed by the response that they received, and it appeared that the conference had caught the imagination of the people. There was an active participation from various government agencies, professionals, university staff, business leaders, Aboriginal elders, and community and youth leaders.

**Outcomes of the conference :** As result of workshop deliberations, key issues of the Hindu community have been identified. Four new divisions of VHP Australia Inc (Vidya Vihar, Hindu Youth Australia, Hindu Elders Foundation and Hindu Social Services Foundation) were launched as the outcomes of this conference. Many youth, especially women, have volunteered to actively participate and coordinate these programmes. This is indeed good outcome and the conference has given enough confidence to the Hindu community in general, and youth and women in particular.

Vidya Vihar is holistic personality development educational programme. The weekly classes are for children and youth. Hindu Youth Australi was launched to strengthen and unite and to develop leadership among Hindu Youth. Hindu Elders Foundation will be run by the elders for the elders. VHP Australia Inc. will offer them the necessary infrastructure and support. The Hindu Social Services Foundation will work with the community and the government agencies to find solutions to the social issues of Hindu community.