

THANK YOU FROM THE PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

Dear Ikebal Patel:

As the days go by, those of us at the Council office in Chicago continue to receive words of appreciation from those who attended the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions this past December 3 – 9, in Melbourne. One motif comes up again and again in the experience of those who attended: the profound and deeply meaningful nature of the programs.

Recently, members of the Council were grateful to receive feedback face to face, when visiting some of our partners in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. As it turned out, a number of people in Yogyakarta had attended the 2009 Parliament. In sharing their experience in Melbourne, they all agreed on a particular observation about the distinctive quality of programs.

Across the board, the presentations had an underlying intellectual rigor, but also engaged them in a holistic way that is often missing in academic conferences. In other words, the presentations appealed to their minds and their hearts. The presenters brought sacred ideals and lofty ideas down to earth in relevant and practical ways. And it was for this reason that they found the Parliament experience transformative.

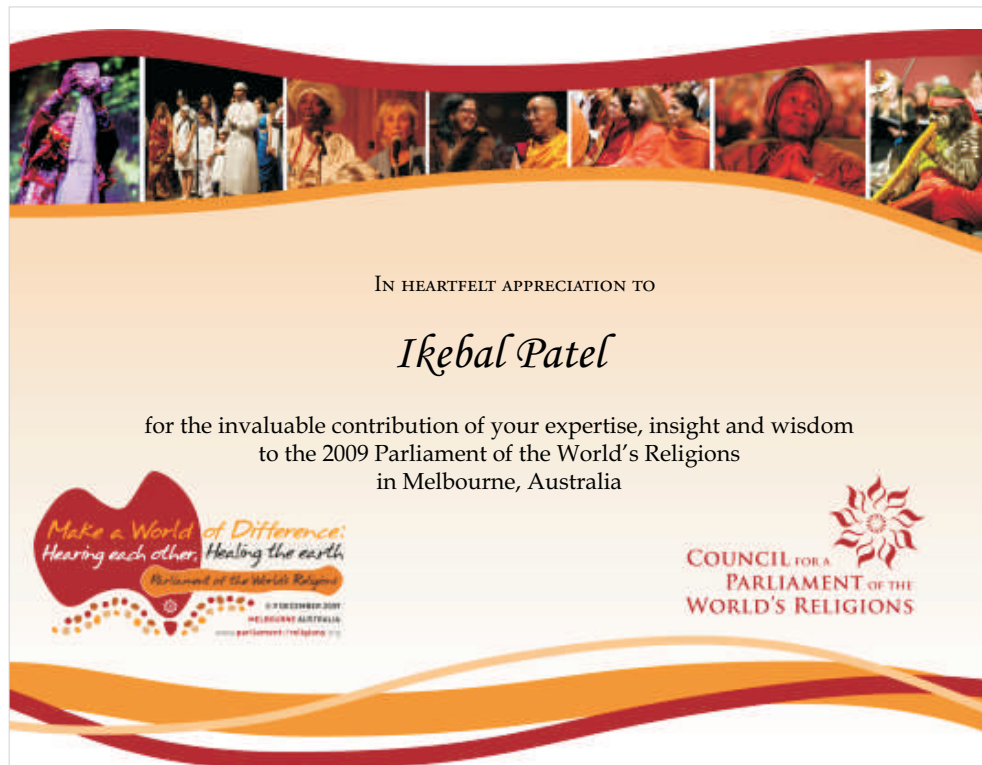
All of us associated with the Parliament know that you set aside the time to submit and prepare your presentation, to register for the event, and to travel to the Melbourne Convention Centre. That you chose to be there, and to share your wisdom and expertise in this generous way, said something very important to those who attended. It was as much a part of your message as what you had to say.

With gratitude for the tireless program staffs who labored in Chicago and Melbourne – and special thanks to our Program Chairs, Des Cahill and Joseph Prabhu – and on behalf of the Council and its local partner, the Board of Management, we thank you for your contribution to a very special international gathering that continues to make a world of difference.

In peace,

Ms. Grove Harris
2009 Parliament Program Director

Rev. Dirk Ficca
Executive Director



MAJOR FAITHS IN ACCORD ON HELPING THE NEEDY - HOW FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS HELP PEOPLE

- By Hyder Gulam¹

In a world where racial and religious tensions frequently appear to be at the root of conflict and war, it's refreshing to hear stories of genuine interreligious cooperation. Perhaps less surprising is that one of the clearest points of agreement is the subject of charitable works amongst those in need. The idea of a common social responsibility to serve the poor, the marginalised and the vulnerable is a recognisable feature of virtually every major religion.

In Australia, as in most other parts of the world, the vast majority of social services are carried out by faith-based organisations. However with large amounts of government funding now being directed towards these services, questions are beginning to be raised about the part that religious organisations are playing in the social service sector.

To directly address some of these questions a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim jointly presented at a session at the Parliament of the World's Religions on Friday 4th December 2009.

Captain Jason Davies-Kildea of The Salvation Army has engaged in some research on this subject as the recipient of a Churchill Fellowship in 2007. His research found that long term commitments to those most disadvantaged and flexible service delivery are just some of the ways in which religious values define the character of social service delivery. Captain Davies-Kildea believed that "it is vital for faith-based organisations of all types to be able to articulate the distinctive characteristics that our services bring to the sector. Understanding how our motivations shape the work we do helps us to better define our unique place and to build upon our strengths."

Steve Denenberg, Executive Director of the Union for Progressive Judaism and who was involved with Jewish Care for nearly 20 years, said that from his experience "faith-based services truly add value to the funders and, more important, to the recipient. They use highly skilled people who also bring an additional dimension - by supporting and caring for the whole person."

Hyder Gulam, Executive member of the Islamic Council of Victoria and commercial lawyer, stated that within Islam the Holy Qur'an encourages generosity in volunteerism, kindness and charity. The following verses indicate the attention and priority that the Quran has given to help and to support those who are in need regardless of their ethnic or religious background.

In Chapter (4) named "Women," the Quran states: *Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good-to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet).* (Surah 4/36).

In chapter 76 named "the Man" and "the Time," the Quran states: *And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the prisoner. (Saying), "We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks.* (Surah 76/8-9).

Hyder stated that "faith-based organisations provide an invaluable role as social services providers with a capacity to reach and engage people significantly beyond that of government and private sector providers". Hyder stated that "faith-based organisations demonstrated a number of characteristics which stemmed from an organisational orientation towards human values and helping those in need. These characteristics included ways of working with highly disadvantaged sections of the community which were more resilient, long term and extended beyond the 'basics' to recognise the importance of 'quality of life' activities and experiences".

¹Hyder is a lawyer with Logie-Smith Lanyon Lawyers, Melbourne. Hyder practices mainly in the areas of Commercial & Corporate, Defence Procurement and Islamic Finance. He is a registered nurse, a qualified lawyer, an accredited mediator as well as a Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing in Australia. He has post graduate qualifications in business/management, law and nursing. Hyder can be contacted via his blogsite: www.hydergulam.com