

# Bahá'í International Community, The Office for the Advancement of Women, New York

## News Update!

*March, 2007*

*Dear Friends,*

*We are in the process of preparing the Office for the Advancement of Women Newsletter, which we hope to complete after the Commission on the Status of Women in the late March 2007. In the meantime, we would like to share with you number of uplifting and inspiring news stories we have received from National Spiritual Assemblies around the world. With the simple design of "OAW News Update", we hope to provide you with a source of inspiration and a sense of interconnectedness between your communities.*

*In particular, we are sharing activities of National Assemblies in their follow-ups of the Violence Against Women Campaign, UN Commission on the Status of Women, and The 16 days of Activism for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which began on November 25<sup>th</sup> and ended on the International Human Rights Day, December 10<sup>th</sup>.*

*Please keep us apprised of your progress, so that Bahá'ís in other parts of the world may be encouraged and motivated by your actions!*

*Wishing you all the best in your noble endeavors,*

*With loving Bahá'í greetings,  
Fulya Vekiloglu  
Office for the Advancement of Women*

### Country Reports

#### **Uganda...**

During the 16 days of Activism a meeting was held at the Bahá'í National Centre, entitled "Young Women's Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and Domestic Violence". The guest of honor at the meeting was a female Member of Parliament (MP) for Kampala. There were also participants from the Centre for Domestic Violence and Prevention (CEDOVIP).

Additionally, the Bahá'í International Community statement entitled "Beyond Legal Reforms Culture and Capacity In the Eradication Of Violence Against Women And Girls", has been distributed at various meetings and disseminated at different public dialogues, such as the Uganda Land Alliance and the Uganda Women's Network on Human Right's day during Human Right's week. The statement has also been distributed to other Non-Governmental Organization working on women's issues in Uganda.

#### **Puerto Rico...**

The Puerto Rican Committee for the Advancement of Women (Puerto Rico east), organized a study group for the

Bahá'í community. On 26<sup>th</sup> November, participants studied the Bahá'í International Community statement, "Beyond Legal Reforms Culture and Capacity in the Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls". The Puerto Rican Committee for the Advancement of Women also participated in a radio program on WKAQ, a commercial news station, heard in all of Puerto Rico and Spanish speaking radio in the United States on Univision.



*Bahá'ís participating in a radio show in Puerto Rico*

### **Bulgaria...**

In Bulgaria, the Bahá'í International Community statement was partially translated into Bulgarian to facilitate its study, and to encourage the national NGO community and Bulgarian diplomats to read the statement. A member of the Bulgarian Bahá'í community, met with and presented the statement to the President of the Bulgarian Fund for Women. After the presentation to the President, a lively discussion followed, which led to topic of the Bahá'í Faith. The statement was

then presented to a journalist at the National Radio Station, who asked to use extracts and to present it to other appropriate journalists at the station.

In addition, on December 10<sup>th</sup>, a special program was organized at the Bahá'í Centre on violence against women; which was attended by 8 Bahá'ís and 3 prominent non-Bahá'ís. The attendees studied and discussed the statement, paragraph by paragraph. One of the guests was a Director in the Ministry of Justice who was recently appointed as the first prison chaplain of Bulgaria.

### **New Zealand...**

The Chief District Court Judge of New Zealand requested 132 copies of the statement for distribution to all District Court Judges. Since then, feedback has been received from a number of recipients, including the Chief Human Rights Commissioner, and the Minister of Women's Affairs.

It has also been suggested that Local Spiritual Assemblies use International Women's Day, 8 March, as an opportunity to further disseminate the Bahá'í International Community statement, "Beyond Legal Reforms Culture and Capacity In the Eradication Of Violence Against Women And Girls".

### **Zimbabwe...**

The Bahá'í International Community statement was presented successfully to several public and government officials including the Vice Chancellor of Africa

Women University, the Minister of Science and Technology, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Further efforts are being made to continue distribution to other officials.

As well, based on the Statement of Bahá'í International Community on Violence Against Women and Girls an article, "Towards a more Balanced World", was published in the Herald of Zimbabwe on the first day of 16 Days of Activism against Gender based violence. Later a shortened version appeared in the Express Newspaper in Bloemfontein.

Additionally, an article recently appeared in the Herald, the main Daily newspaper of Zimbabwe entitled, "Gender equality; Men still have a lot to learn" together with a big color picture of Abdu'l-Bahá which covered almost half a page. In this article the writer who was unknown to the Bahá'í community at the time, quotes from the including Paris Talks and other selection from the writing of Abdu'l-Bahá. Later on, the community discovered that the writer is a journalist who had obtained the information about the Faith from Internet. Arrangements were made to meet with the journalist and supply him with some Bahá'í literature including, Gleanings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Promise of World Peace and some introductory materials to the Faith. He is now planning to write his next article possibly about the "Oneness of religions".

### **Republic of Seychelles ...**

A two-member delegation of the National Spiritual Assembly met with the Minister for Social Affairs and

Employment in her office on November 7<sup>th</sup>, following our request to present the Bahá'í International Community statement and the accompanying backgrounder. The Minister enthusiastically welcomed the two documents, noting the significant role that NGOs and religious organizations can play in the development of society. She went on to say that civil society can greatly assist in finding answers to the worsening conditions, which government alone is unable to provide. The Minister was provided with relevant information relating to the activities organized by the Bahá'í community and its stance on establishing gender-equality as an established principle of the Bahá'í teachings. More contacts were assured with the Minister's Office with regard to the global agenda on gender and women's issues.

### **Tanzania...**

On 22 November 2006 a meeting was held with members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Tanzania, and the Minister of Community Development, Gender, and Children. The members of the Assembly were warmly welcomed and appreciated for the information provided and the eagerness to assist the Ministry with the issues at hand. The statement "Beyond Legal Reforms: Culture and Capacity in the Eradication of Violence against Women and Girls" was presented to the Minister along with a brochure on the Faith. The Permanent Secretary was also present.

A second meeting with the Minister for Community Development, Gender, and Children was initiated by a Member of Parliament. Later, a suggestion was

made by a member of the National Spiritual Assembly to work with the Department of Education to introduce a human rights curriculum into the current school curricula. It was acknowledged that the systematic and sustained education of children in human rights issues would be the best course of action in terms of effectiveness and cost when addressing the issue of violence against women. The Minister and the Permanent Secretary agreed to give it serious consideration. The ministry also invited the Bahá'í delegation attending the CSW in New York, to take part in the briefing meeting for all Tanzanian delegates before their departure.



*From left to right: Peter Kabisa (Resource person on OEA), the Minister Hon. Sofia Simba and Mitra Deliri, member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tanzania*

## **Sweden...**

The Swedish Bahá'í Community is now one of 35 women's organizations who is a member of the Swedish UNIFEM network for the celebration of International Women's Day. The theme of the program on March 8, 2007 is "Violence against Women".

## **Trinidad and Tobago...**

The National Spiritual Assembly appointed a task force to oversee the activities during the 16 days of Activism. Members visited appropriate NGOs, high government officials, like-minded organizations, and their United Nations office. University professors and individuals, who are particularly interested in promoting the advancement of women, and the mass media were given articles about the violation against women and girls.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, a meeting was organized at the National Bahá'í Centre to commemorate the International Day of the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls. Key people who are involved in the area of gender affairs and the promotion of the advancement of women were invited. The speakers and panelists chosen for that occasion were: the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, a Professor and head of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies for the University of the West Indies, a Director of Gender Affairs in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs; the Coordinator of the Network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago; as well as Bahá'í presenters. Closing remarks were made by a senior lecturer of the University of the West Indies and the head of ANSA MCAL Psychological Research Centre.

A Former First Lady also attended the event. Afterwards, a retired judge in a high court of Trinidad and Tobago remarked that he was happy to attend this event and was now educated on a subject that he was previously unaware.

A portion of the program was shown on TVI Channel 16.

The officials, who were not able to attend, were presented with copies of the statement “Beyond Legal Reforms: Culture and Capacity in the Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls”