



4th International Conference & Gathering of Elders Report

Nourishing the Balance of the Universe

English

Haridwar, India

4th International Conference and Gathering of the Elders

The Fourth triennial International Conference and Gathering of the Elders of Ancient Traditions and Cultures that was held at the picturesque, serene and lively campus of Dev Sanskriti Vishwa Vidyalaya (DSVV), Haridwar, India from the 4th to 7th March 2012. The theme of this conference was ‘Nourishing the Balance of the Universe’.

Over 300 delegates, representing 38 countries and 50 traditions and cultures, participated in the Conference. They discussed, deliberated and analyzed the ways and means of preserving the priceless ancient traditions and cultures inherited from their ancestors in different parts of the world. In addition, they resolved to pass their traditions in an enriched form to their respective future generations. They also pondered on the ways to revive and rejuvenate the ancient traditions and cultures world over. The conference provided an ideal occasion to share their experiences and learn from each other for the common good of for the whole humanity. The divine and delightful ambience provided by the DSVV augmented the atmosphere manifold and enhanced the positive energy in each and every delegate.

During the four-day conference, the delegates took part in various programs and interacted with people from many different cultures and traditions. They found the exchanges highly beneficial as they intermingled with revered elders, versatile community leaders, experienced social workers, thinkers, scholars, activists philosophers, professionals and budding youth leaders from ancient cultures and traditions from around the globe stretching from the Maoris from New Zealand to the Mayas of Guatemala.

The conference had ceremonies, plenary sessions, parallel sessions, paper presentations, workshops, discussions, experience sharing sessions and cultural programs literally a potpourri of heart filling and soul thrilling agenda.



Procession and Inaugural Session

The first program of the conference held from 7.30 to 9 a.m. on 3rd March was the colorful and vibrant procession by all the delegates in their traditional attires accompanied with rhythmic dances to the tunes of trumpets and beating of drums. The procession went around the vast campus of DSVV and culminated at the big and well-equipped Mrutunjaya Auditorium.

The inaugural session started with the welcome song by the students of DSVV. Dr. Radhey Shyam Dwivedi, President ICCS, US welcomed the delegates to the Conference. This was followed by prayers by 23 representative individuals and groups of various traditions like, Mayan, Maori, Inca, Druid, Pagan, Cham, Devturi etc. from different parts of the world.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati founder Arsha Vidya Gurukulam delivered the Keynote Address. He said that as Managing Trustees of the indigenous traditions and colorful cultures we need to protect all that we have inherited from our ancestors and each of us should be able to contribute in these efforts and nourish our cultures and traditions.

Dr Pranav Pandya, Chancellor, DSVV thanked the organizers for providing his university a chance to host such a wonderful conference at its premises. He expressed hope that the conference would be able to full-fill its aims and objectives and enlighten all the delegates about the task they have to play in restoring the balance and establishing harmony. It is our duty to preserve the precious diversity he remarked.

A souvenir magazine was released at the hands of the dignitaries. Saumitra Gokhale, ICCS board-member and dignitary and International coordinator of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh and Professor S. C. Bagri representing the Indian Hospitality Conference also addressed the inaugural session. Suresh Soni, Joint General Secretary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, was present on the dais along with the various dignitaries.

Daily Schedule

The typical daily schedule was to have individual / group / parallel ceremonies and rituals of the different cultures which revealed several similarities like use of fire / water for their performance. The rituals performed by the delegates exhibited the harmony of cultures, traditions and customs of different groups. Worshipping the Nature (i.e. five basic elements Earth, Air, Water, Fire and Sky) was the underlying principle of different cultures and traditions. "Love Mother Earth" was the message that emanated from all these rituals and religious ceremonies. This would be followed by a delightful, energizing and sumptuous Indian style breakfast. Breakfast was would be followed by plenary sessions by scholars and resource persons and later a few hours of lectures and talks on various topics by some of the delegates in the parallel sessions. Then the delegates were served a delicious and lavish multi-cuisine vegetarian lunch, followed by another few hours of interesting and thought-provoking lectures/presentations followed by Q/A sessions. From 6 to 6.15 p.m. there would be a nada yoga and meditation session where there would be total silence and tranquility.



The Dinner would be a multi-course vegetarian dinner with numerous Indian preparations. The much awaited event used to be the colorful and spectacular evening cultural programs that were held from 8 to 10 p.m. These were put on by the delegates on the first and third days. The students of DSVV provided an assortment of folk dances and shows on the second evening.

These were most entertaining and the performers would always amaze the audience by their moves and skills. The pulsating activities of the day would come to a close with the recitation of the Shanti Mantra (prayer for world-peace) after which the delegates would silently retire to their quarters.

Valedictory Function

The Valedictory function was held from 3.30 to 5 p.m. on the 7th of March. Dr. Pranav Pandya, Chancellor, DSVV and Dr. Mohan Bhagwat, 'Sarsanghchalak' (Supreme Chief) of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, started the proceedings by the lighting of the lamp.

Shyam Parande, Zonal Coordinator of ICCS, India and President of Sewa International welcomed the gathering and gave a brief account about the conference. This was followed by a Pragma Geet rendered by the students of DSVV that portrayed the vision of Late Pandit Sriram Sharma Acharya, the founder of DSVV.

Five dynamic Elders viz. Indra of Vietnam, Cholponai of Kyrgyzstan, Katrina Pihera of New Zealand, Ghulam Asgar Zaidi of DSVV, Haridwar and Lyla Johnston of USA spoke about their dreams, ideas, aspirations and expressed their feelings that they have experienced in the 4-day conference. Each of them confessed that the four days of interactions have been their finest experience in life and a great learning opportunity.

Awarding of Honorary Doctorates

Setting a new precedent, University of World Ancient Traditions and Cultural Heritage, USA (UWATCH) awarded Honorary doctoral degrees to 5 eminent personalities for their distinguished leadership and outstanding social service to their respective traditions and cultures. Dr. Pranav Pandya and Dr. Mohan Bhagwat conferred the awards to the recipients. They are as follows:

1. Kenneth Kennedy of New Zealand: He is a Kaumatua of the Te Arawa tribe, and the Waiariki Institute of Technology, New Zealand. He is an acknowledged expert in Maori Language and culture, particularly knowledge of history and Whakapapa of the Te Arawa tribal area. He represented Aotearoa New Zealand as Kaumatua at the World Indigenous Conference in Education (WIPEC) in Peru in 2011. He is also Kaumatua for Te Toi Tauiramo Te Matariki, a National Maori Network in tertiary education, supporting Maori staff and students in Polytechnics, Institutes of Technology and Universities. He provides Kaumatua support for a number of organizations e.g. Te Arawakaumatua for the New Zealand Maori RugbyLeague.



2. Alejandro Cirilo Perez Oxlaj of Guatemala: He is a Grand Elder of the National Council of Elders of Mayas, Xinca and Garifuna of Guatemala, In 1980 he received a call from the Invisible Beings, in Celestial voices they spoke that he was the voice of the Jungle and the messenger of the Mayas. There was also a mandate that asked him to travel around the Earth carrying messages of Unity and Peace. It was at this time also that he was recognized and appointed as the Grand Elder, representing the 23 Mayan Ethnic Pueblos plus the Xinca and the Garifuna. He has convened Continental Congress of Indigenous Elders many times. He was appointed as Ambassador to the Indigenous Peoples of Guatemala by the President of Guatemala. He has fought for the rights of the Indigenous people, and was able to have legal recognition from the government to the Indigenous Authorities, the Mayan Flag, the traditional music, the Hymn of the Mayas; and also recognition of the Spiritual Guides and the traditional medicine practitioners.

3. Jonas Trinkūnas of Lithuania: From 1989-2006 worked as a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology in Vilnius. In 1997 he was awarded the National Prize for his work and contributions in the field of Lithuanian culture. In 2009 was recognized as a participant in struggle for freedom. The main area of his activity is the revival and popularization of the ancient Baltic faith of the Lithuanians. He pays special attention to strengthening of the ties between the religious organizations of pagans worldwide. In 1998 the first international conference on ethnic religions took place in Vilnius during which the World Congress of Ethnic Religions (WCER) was founded and he was elected its chairman. During the following years, another 10 European ethnic religious organizations joined WCER which is being reorganized into European Congress of Ethnic Religions (ECER) since 2010. In 2009 Romuva (the association of Lithuanian indigenous religion) was invited to The Parliament of World's Religions that was held in Melbourne, Australia. Romuva was invited to take part and was an active participant in the section of the Association of Indigenous Religions. He has mainly concentrated on building organizational bridges between Indian Hinduism and Baltic Paganism.

4. Grand Chief Stan Beardy of Canada: Grand Chief Beardy was born and raised on a trap line at Bearskin Lake First Nation. He attended high school and college in Thunder Bay where he also worked as a welder-fitter for several years. In order to return to a traditional lifestyle of living off the land, Beardy moved to Muskrat Dam First Nation where he was elected and served as Chief for 10 years. He was re-elected to an unprecedented fourth term as Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation in August 2009. He represents 49 First Nation communities in Ontario. Throughout his time in office he has worked toward the implementation of traditional governance based on beneficial treaty relationships with the governments of Ontario and Canada. He has championed the inherent rights of First Nations in Nishnawbe Aski territory. He is a member of the Political Confederacy – a political table of Grand Chiefs in Ontario. In 2010 he was awarded with an honorary doctorate degree in education by the University of Nipissing in recognition of his services.

5. Jagdeo Ram Oram: He hails from a very humble and modest background. As a young boy he came in contact with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. He worked as Physical Education teacher for some years but left the same and completed his Masters in Political Science. After completing his MA he decided to devote his life for the cause of the nation. He is at present the President of Akhil Bharatiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram. He travels extensively to guide the hundreds of workers who are working for the welfare and upliftment of the tribals.



This was followed by traditional prayers by Pat McCabe a Navajo from USA and Solyomfi Nagy Zoltan of Hungary representing White Horse tradition of the Huns.

Presidential and Keynote Addresses

Dr. Pranav Pandya, Chancellor, DSVV, in his Presidential Address remarked that incomprehensible damage has been done to ancient cultures and traditions by a few groups who could not appreciate the diversity. He recalled the Mayan belief that a New Era is due in 2012 and proclaimed that the DSVV would be the epicenter of the same and hoped that differences would melt and future is sure to be of humanity seeking welfare and wellbeing of everyone. He also mentioned that this conference was sure to be a turning point and a new beginning for humanity.

Dr. Mohan Bhagwat, 'Sarsanghchalak' (Supreme Chief) of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, delivered the Keynote Address where he stressed the need to nourish the balance of nature. He praised the efforts and resolve of the Elders in preserving their traditions and cultures. He recalled the priceless treasures of Indian thought like "Live and Let Live", "Unity in Diversity", "World is one family" & "Let us ennoble the world" and remarked that these have extreme relevance today. "Universal outlook is the hallmark of Indian thought and the happiness and well-being of everyone is always sought" - he reminded. He stated that it only through integral view and not compartmentalized view that we can bring about the change in attitude. He declared that individuals and communities should progress without suppressing each other and both constantly and consciously nourishing the Nature. "Nourishing the balance of life is of paramount importance today he exclaimed. It is in this context that the world has today started looking at ancient traditions and cultures for answers to today's vexed problems and it's the sacred duty of those ancient traditions that possess the knowledge and wisdom to restore the balance and save humanity" - he remarked. He also felt that it is our responsibility to show to the world that the age old traditions have solutions to modern problems. "We have to become the instruments of change and for this we need to organize ourselves for the benefit of everything in this creation" - he concluded.

The 4-day event has transformed the delegates who arrived as strangers but returned as relatives. They felt empowered with the new connections and network. They could communicate with each other not with the help of a language but by their love, warmth, respect and affection to each other. The gathering had made each one of the delegates richer with new relatives and stronger with bonds of love and affection.

Traditional Holika Dahan

The delegates finally took part in the traditional Holika Dahan festival held at the Shantikunj complex adjacent to DSVV. They enjoyed the proceedings with great thrill. It was a perfect finale to the Kumbh Mela of Worlds' Ancient Traditions and Cultures. The flames of the bonfire emotionally and spiritually charged the delegates they dispersed with a solemn resolve to channelize all their energies to the task ahead and to make the next conference bigger and better.



Organizers

The event was jointly organized by International Center for Cultural Studies (ICCS), Dev Sanskriti Vishwa Vidyalaya (DSVV), National Council of Elders Mayas, Xincas and Garifuna, European Congress of Ethnic Religions (ECER) and World Council of Elders of Ancient Traditions & Cultures (WCEATC).

