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# Media Release

19 January 2010

## Spiritual leaders leave world's largest interfaith gathering on high note

Thousands of people from 80 cultures gathered together in December to attend the world's largest interfaith gathering – the Parliament of the World's Religions - and they left not only on a spiritual high, but with high praise for the host city of the global event, Melbourne, Australia.

Held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC), it was the first time the event had been to Australasia - with previous conventions taking place in Chicago, Cape Town and Barcelona.

In a week long event with more than 650 programmes, including a session held by head of state and spiritual leader of Tibet, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the attendees worked on matters such as indigenous reconciliation, global poverty and global warming, environmental issues, migration, spirituality and education of the young.

The event was welcomed by the country's highest governing bodies – the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Victorian Premier John Brumby and Melbourne's Lord Mayor Robert Doyle, who said it was fitting that the Parliament of the World's Religions was held in Australia's multicultural capital Melbourne which is home to people from more than 200 countries of origin.

Four years in the planning, executive manager of leading conference organiser Arinex, Karine Bulger, says the event provided an amazing experience for those involved.

"It was a highly complex event with a large spread of stakeholders, each of whom had different needs from the event. As an example, just from an organising committee perspective there were the international council, the local office, 10 sub-committees, the board and representatives from federal and state governments.

"To manage all these requirements flexibility was the key. Our relationship with the MCEC was therefore paramount and both parties viewed our liaison as a partnership rather than just as client and supplier."

The event was one of the largest to be held in the Melbourne Convention Centre which opened in June 2009 and has already won a string of awards and accolades. As the only convention centre in the world to hold a '6 Star Green Star' environmental rating, its vast open spaces and ground breaking architecture didn't go unnoticed.

Speaker at the conference, Dr Margarete Czerny, economic advisor to the Government of Austria and European Union, says she had never seen an environmental building of this standard and size before.

"It's an excellent venue, a really amazing building with an impressive green construction and use of green energy."

She said the location is also exceptional, being right in the city with the ability to cross the road and walk down a lively river bank of restaurants and accommodation.

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Conference speaker, Professor JJ Hurtak who works for the academy for future science in New York says he too, has never experienced such a state of the art venue.

“This space gives the ambience of being inside a space ship – the architecture is modernistic and futuristic – it’s amazing and the hospitality of staff is exceptional.”

Rabbi Roger Ross from the new seminary of interfaith studies in New York agreed: “It is amazing with everything you would want of a venue. The facilities are all in the right place, the people are friendly and it’s in a great location with the train, tram or bus right on your doorstep.”

Youth patron to the event Azmeena Hussein who resides in Melbourne and was hosting youth to the event from the US, Hong Kong, Germany and India says they were all impressed with the venue and city.

“It exceeded expectations; they were very impressed with the cultural diversity of Melbourne and what it offered as a host city.”

MCEC’s chief executive Leigh Harry is delighted that Melbourne was chosen as host city and the MCEC as the venue for such a globally significant event.

“Our ability to meet the diverse requirements of the delegates, whether that be for their meeting requirements or their dietary and religious needs, certainly put the new venue to the test. It was very rewarding to receive such high praise given the complexity and challenges of the event.

“As the most flexible convention and exhibition centre in Australia, the MCEC accommodates events from all over the world. It was truly an honour to host such an important event as the Parliament of World’s Religions and welcome delegates from all over the world to Melbourne and the MCEC.”

The MCEC was presented with a peace pole which was created in Japan specifically to commemorate the event. The peace pole will be a permanent fixture at the MCEC.

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