



CASE STUDY

The 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions	
TYPE OF EVENT: International Association Conference	DATE OF EVENT: 3 – 9 December 2009
EVENT DESTINATION: Melbourne, Australia	EVENT VENUE: Melbourne Convention Centre
ORGANISER/HOST: Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions was created to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities, and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world.	CONFERENCE ORGANISER: arinex
ACTUAL ATTENDANCE: 6,282 delegates from 83 countries, 209 faiths	

PROFILE/OBJECTIVE OF CONFERENCE:

The Parliament of the World's Religions is the world's largest global inter-religious event. It is held once every five years in a different city. The Melbourne event brought together people from around the world, including renowned spiritual, religious, civic, academic and political leaders.

First held in Chicago in 1893, the Parliament of the World's Religions brings together the world's religious and spiritual communities, their leaders and their followers, to a gathering where peace, diversity and sustainability are discussed and explored in the context of inter-religious understanding and cooperation.

REASONS FOR DESTINATION/VENUE SELECTION:

Melbourne was selected as the host city in 2006 for several reasons, including the new Melbourne Convention Centre's '6 Star Green Star' environmental rating.

The venue is the only convention centre in the world to hold a six star rating. Its environmental features start with the building, but the entire venue operates under stringent environmental guidelines.

Also assisting in the selection was the fact that the new convention centre would have a 5,500 seat plenary, that can be divided into three self-contained, acoustically separate theatres.

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The event had also never been in a location so close to Asia before, and it was noted at the time that this would give greater access to Asian based participants.

In addition to this was the financial support from the federal and state Governments and the City of Melbourne. These funds assured that the 2009 Parliament could operate as the world class event desired by the selection committee.

Another key point for selection was the obvious multicultural and grassroots interfaith activities already part of everyday life in Victoria.

LOCATION/VENUE/ACCOMMODATION INFRASTRUCTURE:

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre is Australia's premier venue, located in the heart of the country's multicultural capital - Melbourne.

It comprises the state-of-the-art Melbourne Convention Centre, which has been fully integrated with the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, to create the most versatile and advanced convention and exhibition centre in the Southern Hemisphere.

Setting new world benchmarks as the first convention centre to be awarded a '[6 Star Green Star environmental rating](#)' by the Green Building Council of Australia, the centre is also raising standards to new heights in innovation, technology and its imaginative food and wine offering.

It features 32 meeting rooms of various sizes, a grand banquet room and a 5,500 seat plenary that can be divided into three self-contained, acoustically separate theatres.

The centre has only been open for a matter of months and has already won a string of awards for its food and wine, operations, architecture and environmental features.

With vast light spaces, state of the art facilities and globally groundbreaking environmental features, it was the perfect environment for the Parliament of the World's Religions.

To view a list of awards won by the MCEC visit <http://www.mcec.com.au/Utility/MCEC-Information/Awards.html>

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GOVERNMENT SUPPORT:

The event received \$4.5 million funding from Federal, State and local Government.

Included in the support of the City of Melbourne was in kind support in the form of office space for two and a half years.

Governments were also invaluable with committee involvement in areas including security, compliance, finance and logistics.

Funding support in the form of donations from individuals and religious and spiritual bodies was forthcoming and helpful, but fell short of projected amounts. There was also very little corporate support, thought to be related to the development of the global financial crisis when funding was sought.

MARKETING:

Marketing was managed out of the Melbourne PWR office and the international CPWR office in Chicago.

A detailed marketing strategy took place over three years prior to the event.

This strategy involved print material, website and email marketing, along with face to face meetings with communities to ensure that the grass roots attendees were being reached.

Meetings commenced with the purpose of ensuring the desired content within the program themes was met, and to encourage local communities to be involved and submit programs. They then followed on to gain commitment in the form of registrations to attend, or bookings for the exhibition.

On an international level, in addition to a similar print and email marketing component, there was a program where confirmed speakers and supporters of the Parliament were tasked with gaining the commitment of five other people to register to attend.

SOCIAL PROGRAMME/ACTIVITIES:

Plenary sessions were held on five of the seven evenings, involving major speakers, prayer, performances and entertainment.

There was a 'Communities Night' and the Sacred Music Concert. The 'Communities Night' was an evening where the religious and spiritual communities of Melbourne held a 'Night of Hospitality' for people of all faiths and spiritual traditions from around the world.

The Sacred Music Concert featured world-class musicians, vocalists, and dancers performing some of the most sacred music and movement from many religious and spiritual traditions.

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In addition to this – there were a number of offsite events organised to be linked and run in conjunction with the 2009 Parliament.

EVENT CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS:

Major challenges, other than difficulties with raising funds, centred on the need to explain at every turn what a Parliament of Religions was.

To assist, PWR Melbourne engaged a small team of community organisers, plus much printed material and mail outs assisted to spread the word. A final count of more than 20 committees and working groups in Australia alone, with major emphasis on programming was complimented by similar teams and working groups in Chicago.

With only a handful of Australian having ever attended a previous Parliament, and with minimal information from previous events, printed or otherwise, it was challenging for all involved to visualise the end product.

However, there has not been a person involved at any level, from staff, to volunteers, to contractors to home stay hosts who has not felt their life has been altered as a result of their involvement with PWR Melbourne 2009.

The Parliament website recently launched a social media site called PeaceNext. This site contains many positive comments and reflections.

CONFERENCE OUTCOMES:

A legacy report is being prepared and will be available in late March 2010. In addition, the outgoing board is looking to approach State Government to fund an ongoing Melbourne based activity to maximise the high level of local, and other, interest in the community as a result of not only the Parliament, but the three years of work leading up to the event in December 2009.

DIIRD is also working on a triple bottom line report due to be completed late February 2010.

QUOTES/FEEDBACK:

"I have 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. 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.

Dr Margaret Czerny

Economic Advisor to the Government of Austria and European Union

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"This space gives (Melbourne Convention Centre) the ambience of being inside a space ship – the architecture is modernistic and futuristic – it's amazing and the hospitality of staff is exceptional."

Professor JJ Hurtak
Academy for Future Science
New York

"The Melbourne Convention Centre 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."

Rabbi Roger Ross
Seminary of Interfaith Studies
New York

"The youths attending the event from the US, Hong Kong, Germany and India were all impressed with the venue and city."

Azmeena Hussein
Youth Patron
Melbourne

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

"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."

Leigh Harry
Chief Executive
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

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