

[World Hindu Federation Meets in Bali](#)

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On the beautiful island of Bali, September 3rd, 4th and 5th, 150 delegates from Hindu organizations in Nepal, England, Bangladesh, Mauritius, America, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and India gathered for the 3rd International World Hindu Federation Conference on the theme of "World Peace and Humanity." Chaotic fellowship marked the first day as delegates arrived from countries far and wide. The evening opening plenary session was a series of speeches and a culture performance. The morning of the 4th was more speeches - mostly by Indonesian political figures and a few by delegates. Some were in the Indonesian language and completely unintelligible to the delegates from around the world. WHF executive committee members from Nepal were a little frustrated:

"We did not come here to have Indonesia's national ideology pushed on us like this!"

But the conference context was perhaps more important than content. Indonesia, its hosting Hindus and the island of Bali itself had a powerful message of love, nonviolence and spiritual culture to share with everyone. Several non-delegate observers from Delhi remarked. "The hosts have done a fantastic job taking care of us. Free hotel, free meals, wonderful accommodations and a beautiful program." The hosts were unabashedly promoting tourism to Bali, and we were frequently approached to "go on a tour."

Speeches at the plenary sessions were dominated by the Indonesian government's efforts to promote its national ideology of Pancasila: the "Five Principles" adhered to by all Indonesians, regardless of faith. They are: 1. Belief in the One and Only God; 2. Justice and civilized humanity; 3. the Unity of Indonesia; 4. Democracy led by the wisdom of deliberations among representatives and 5. Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia. It was easy to surrender to the Indonesians' efforts because peace and harmony were palpable in Bali and permeated the heart just as the hot, humid air permeated the skin. While newspapers reported on racial

riots in Germany, fighting Serbians, looting after a hurricane in the US, rising cases of AIDS in Singapore, Bali stood still in cultured peace, beauty and auspiciousness, with the people's faces full of humility and love.

The opening plenary session was held at the magnificent Art Center in downtown Denpasar. Thousands of Balinese bussed in from villages throughout the island to fill an amphitheater facing a fabulously decorated stage. Drs. Ib Oka Punia Atmaja, a scholar of Indonesian Hinduism and the general chairperson of the host member organization, Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia, presented the principal Indonesian Hindu view that peace and world harmony could only be attained when the two Hindu goals of kama and artha were disciplined by dharma and the keynote of dharma was ahimsa, nonviolence. The chairperson of the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia, Drs. Made Sudiarta, also spoke on religious harmony and tolerance.

The only spontaneous unwritten speech was delivered by His Holiness Sat Guru Sivaya Subramuniaswami in which he stated that the problems facing Hinduism were also facing all religions wherein science, technology, materialism had taken over our spiritual lives. He brought forward the message from the recent parliamentary Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro which calls for closer cooperation between government and religious leaders.

The Rt. Hon. Mr. N.P. Rijal, former Prime Minister of Nepal, who for health reasons stepped down from his post as president of the WHF had to be replaced. Elections brought in a new president: Mr. Krishna Gopal Tandon, an elderly man who presented a fine speech on the opening night. The dynamic leadership of Dr. Jogendra Jha will continue as he maintains his post at the Secretary General of the World Hindu Federation.

According to Shree Shib Shankar Chakraborty from Bangladesh, a member of the WHF executive committee, the WHF is a non-political organization founded in 1981 under the patronage of King Birendra of Nepal. Its objective is to unite Hindus all over the world and do some work to maintain peace in the world. The organization, he said, was not connected with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which was conducting a conference in Germany at the same time [sidebar].

The significance of the conference could not really be counted in the external

results: election of a new president, international fellowship over breakfast, lunch and dinner and a wonderful cultural experience in Bali for all the delegates. The conference resolutions condemned the treatment of Hindus in Fiji and Bhutan and lamented the long civil war in Sri Lanka. Delegates also cautioned that the "federation not slip into a political stand but maintain an image of religious character."

But one of the greatest issues facing all Hindus worldwide was not even raised: the loss of our next Hindu generation under pressure of modernization and Western materialism. Some felt that the conference whitewashed the current state of Hinduism. But the conference held promise and hope in another dimension, subtle, mystical perhaps but nevertheless very real. It was a gathering of Hindus wherein there was no mention of militancy, where the values of ahimsa and religious tolerance so strongly promoted by the host country dominated the conceptual atmosphere. From that angle one can say that the WHF appears, at least for now, to be a vehicle for the Vedic values of ahimsa and a fulfillment of the Sanskrit dictum of one world, one family. "The problem of individual and societal disorientation, as well as of world peace, can be solved," declared the delegates, "if shanti [peace] is strengthened within individuals and extended to societies and nations."

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