



HINDU COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND Incorporated

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A landmark in the history of New Zealand and race relations: Maori King Tuheitia inaugurates Hindu Conference

His Highness Te Arikini King Tuheitia, the Maori King, inaugurated the 2nd New Zealand Hindu Conference on 16 May 2008 at the Hindu Heritage Centre, Auckland by lighting the lamp in the traditional Hindu way for the auspicious beginning of the conference.

This is an important event for the Hindu community in New Zealand, and also for race relations. King Tuheitia received a traditional Hindu welcome when a young girl, Deepika Magesan, garlanded the distinguished dignitaries. Mr. Haare Williams, the Kaumatua (Maori elder), blessed the occasion with a Maori traditional prayer. This was followed by a Hindu prayer from Swami Vigyananand.

The theme of the Conference was "*Sustaining New Zealand communities through health benefits of Yoga, Meditation and Ayurveda*". Mr. Vinod Kumar, the President of the Hindu Council of New Zealand, welcomed all the delegates and enlightened the audience on the work carried out by the organization – strengthening the bond between New Zealand communities; developing the creativity of the youth; and understanding and experiencing the Maori culture. He also briefed delegates about the outcomes of the 1st NZ Hindu conference: Hindu Social Services Foundation, Hindu Elders Foundation and Hindu Youth Foundation. He also explained the purpose of Hindu Heritage Centre and the future plans of the organization. Mr Vinod Kumar also announced HEART – A humanitarian emergency aid & relief team, an initiative of the Hindu Council of New Zealand. This is in response to help needed with natural disasters happening around the world, for example, Myanmar. Mr Nandan Modak was the master of ceremonies.

Mr Rahui Papa, who spoke on behalf of King Tuheitia and his entourage, mentioned the similarities between Maori and Hindu communities. He said, "We are the same family but speak two different languages". He also spoke about common words such as 'Mana' which have the same meaning in Maori and Sanskrit. He said this is a good beginning and we need to take it forward, and assured the delegates that all cooperation will be extended to foster inter-community cultural relations. He appreciated the work of the Hindu Council of New Zealand and also congratulated the organization for celebrating Matariki (Maori New Year). He was impressed by the welcome by the Hindu community and told the audience that he felt at home.

This conference provided a platform for all organizations dealing with yoga, meditation and ayurveda to showcase the health benefits to the New Zealand society. Dr Guna Magesan, a senior scientist and the conference coordinator, chaired a plenary session where the overseas keynote speakers made presentations on Yoga and Meditation. The keynote speaker for Yoga was Dr H.R. Nagendra, the vice-chancellor of SVYASA Yoga University, Bangalore, India. He spoke on the "Integrated approach of yoga therapy – a glimpse of 30 years research". He spoke on his research on the therapeutic effects of yoga in curing and controlling asthma and bronchitis, obesity and diabetes, hypertension, etc. Since obesity and diabetes are major issues in New Zealand communities, his University is willing to cooperate and collaborate with the New Zealand Government and health agencies.

The keynote speaker for Meditation was Swami Sridharanand, President of Vedanta centres of Australia and New Zealand. Dr Shirish Karnik, an Ayurvedic practitioner, was the keynote speaker for Ayurveda. He

gave an overview of Ayurveda, and how Ayurveda integrates with modern medicine. The session was chaired by Dr Ram Prakash Agarwal of Miami University, USA.

The session on 'Working with Government Agencies' was well received by the delegates. This session was chaired by Ms Farida Sultana, Founder of Shakti. Representatives from the Auckland District Health Board, Accident Compensation Corporation, and NZ Police made presentations. The three concurrent workshops were coordinated by Paul Barton, Rotorua; Ananya Chaitanya of Foundation of Self Knowledge New Zealand; and Dr Vijay Srinivasa Murthy, an Ayurvedic doctor.

The conference papers were presented by highly qualified research scholars, university lecturers of both Hindu and non-Hindu origin. Discussions following the presentations and during the workshops were highly appreciated by the delegates. Although this conference was mainly for the New Zealand community, there were a number of delegates from India, USA, Fiji and Australia.

The second day of the conference had three plenary sessions on Yoga, Ayurveda and Meditation. All the sessions were well attended and the delegates actively participated in the interactive sessions. The afternoon sessions had three concurrent workshops. The conference sessions were chaired by well qualified professionals: Dr Nikhil Zaveri of East Tamaki Health Care, Auckland; Dr Yogini Ratnasabapathy of Waitamata District Health Board; and Rakesh Naidoo of the NZ Police. Similarly, the workshops were run by Sneh Prasad of Auckland District Health Board, Dr Amritha Sobrun-Maharaj of Auckland University, and Mr Venkatesan and Mr Velayudan from India.

The third day of the conference started with a session on establishing a research institute for yoga and ayurveda (AROGYA). The session was chaired by Dr H.R. Nagendra, Vice-Chancellor of Yoga University from India. Delegates discussed and deliberated extensively on the prospect of the research institute and the response was very positive.

Ms Sonali Hegde and Ms Pritika Sharma, joint-coordinators of the conference, proposed a vote of thanks to all the members of the organizing committee for their hard work, delegates from New Zealand and overseas for their participation in the conference, sponsors for their financial and in-kind support, media and internet sites for wide publicity, and volunteers for their selfless service for the success of the conference.

Delegates expressed their appreciation at the way the conference was organized with a human and personal touch for looking after the needs of the delegates.

Outcome of the conference:

In response to the discussion an *ad hoc* committee was formed to take further the concept of AROGYA – Aotearoa Research Organization for Generic Yoga and Ayurveda.

The Conference organizers were overwhelmed by the response they received, and it appeared that the conference had caught the imagination of the people, like the first New Zealand Hindu Conference. There was active participation from various government agencies, professionals, university staff, business leaders, Maori elders, and community and youth leaders.

Many youth, especially women, have volunteered to actively participate and coordinate the future programmes being organised by the Hindu Council of New Zealand. This is indeed a good outcome and the conference has given enough confidence to the Hindu community in general, and youth and women in particular.

The 3rd New Zealand Hindu conference with the theme "*Sustaining New Zealand through strengthening relations amongst communities*" was announced to be held on 1-2 May 2010.