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Over 2000 Youth Make Global Youth Conference A Historical Triumph

Friday August 6, 1993, dawned with great hopes and expectations. Even the rain could not dampen the high spirits of the delegates and volunteers of the Vision 2000 Global Youth Conference organized by the Hindu Students Council. It was held in conjunction with the Global Conference which was organized by Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America. For the first time in history, over 2000 youth of ages between thirteen and thirty gathered at the elegant Omni Shoreham hotel in Washington D.C. to deliberate on the future course of this universe. The three-day program, from August 6 to August 8, was to commemorate the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's Chicago address, where he delivered the Universal Vedantic Message for the first time to the West. The program was also a forum to discuss important issues affecting our society today. Youth came from forty eight states of the U. S., and from many provinces in Canada. Youth came from far away countries. There were students from South Africa, Germany, UK, Bharat, Nepal, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Caribbean, and many other countries.

On the 6th evening, the students gathered at the ball room of Omni Shoreham hotel to witness a cultural show presented by their peers. The show included dances from different parts of Bharat, representing various styles. After enjoying the show, they retired for the day, eagerly awaiting the inaugural festival. The inauguration festival at the Capital Centre, Landover, MD, began at 9:00 am on the 7th. More than ten thousand youth and adults packed the centre to enjoy the day long celebrations. The day began with prayers and a presentation by a group of artists from Bangalore, on the life and message of Swami Vivekananda. The performances were graceful and captivated the crowd. A grand parade by about four hundred participants, representing the various states and countries they came from, was also well received. After the inauguration of the Global Conference, the inauguration of the Global Youth Conference began.

The inauguration ceremony began with a prayer seeking blessings for a successful conference. Dr. Lakshmi Kumari, the President of Vivekananda Kendra at Kanyakumari, Bharat, lit the ceremonial lamp and addressed the gathering. Dr. Kumari, who has a Doctoral degree in Botany from the Madras University, has sacrificed her career and dedicated her life for the service of the underprivileged. She said to the students, " Hold Swami Vivekananda as your hero,and serve the needy and poor". She said, "I appreciate the fact that a lady is inaugurating this conference, for Swamiji had the highest respect for, and worked for the upliftment of women. I have come as a voice of all the people at Vivekananda Kendra, who send their best wishes for a successful conference, and also their hopes and expectations of help for the needy in Bharat". Her calmness, clear articulating ability and soundness of thought endeared her to the youth.

Hindu Students Council and its activities were introduced to the gathering by Mr. Mihir Meghani, a medical student at the University Of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Swami Suddhananda of the Lokanath Seva Sang, Calcutta, Bharat, the special guest at the ceremony addressed the gathering. He touched the heart of the youth with his emotional appeal for help for the underprivileged. Dr. Veena Gandhi (Vice President , VHP of America), one of the coordinators of the conference, Sonia Gandhi, at Princeton University, and Kanchan Banerjee, coordinator of the conference, also address the youth. Mr. Banerjee proclaimed, "The next century belongs to the youth of today. I urge you to take a vow to make the future a bright and prosperous

one, and work with Swami Vivekananda's teachings as the guiding force". A graduation ceremony honoring the participants of Swami Vivekananda Study Center was held. The two year program was part of the Vision 2000 programs, where students learned about the work of Swami Vivekananda and about Hindu Dharma. Two students, Sunil Gohkale of Northeastern University, Boston and Madhuri Ranade of Boston received diplomas from Swami Suddhananda on behalf of all the participants in the program. People stayed to enjoy the performances of renowned artists in the evening. Great artists such as Sonal Mansing, Anup Jalota, Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Anuradha Paudwal, graced the occasion and dedicated their performances as a tribute to the great monk from Bharat, Swami Vivekananda.

The main part of the conference, the theme sessions were held at The Omni Shoreham hotel on Sunday the 8th. As in the previous two days, the day began with a prayer. The sessions were in three time slots beginning at 9:00 am and lasting for an hour each. There were five parallel sessions in each time slot for the college youth, and three parallel sessions for the high school youth. All the sessions were well attended. The students participated with great enthusiasm and eagerness to learn more about the various subjects that were being discussed. Topics covering a wide spectrum of issues were deliberated upon. The relevance of Vedanta in various fields of activity, how they can guide us in our every day life, and how Vedanta can be used as a basis to build a harmonious, diverse, and prosperous society were deliberated upon.

Many scholars from various walks of life graced the sessions. Swami Jotirmayananda of Ramakrishna Mission, Madras, Bharat, Swami Jotirmayananda of Florida, Dr. Ved Prakas Nanda (Human Rights Lawyer), Shree Dattopant Thengadi (social thinker, philosopher), Shree Narendra Mody (political leader of Bharat), Dr. H. R. Nagendra (president, Yoga institute, Bangalore), Dr. David Frawly (Vedic scholar), Dr. Edger Mitchell (Astronaut, founder Noetic Institute), Dr. Mary Harper, Dr. Richard Bradley, Grandmother Naniki, Sushree Krishn Dasi, etc. addressed the youth and shared their ideas with them. Each session was also addressed by two youth.

The concluding session saw emotional speeches by the members of the organizing committee thanking the students for their support, unity and commitment through the ups and downs of the three-day event. Dr. Mahesh Mehta, President of VHP of America presided over the session. The session was aptly titled "Vision for Tomorrow, Action for Today." Dr. Mehta said, "The Global Youth Conference is a grand success and I ask you youth to take up responsibilities in the emerging new world, and carry the message of Global Vision to the college campuses and communities". Hindu Students Council coordinators from various universities across this continent addressed the gathering. Seema Srivastava (Concordia Uni.,Canada), Mihir Meghani (Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor), Nutan Mehta (Univ. of Texas, Austin), Atul Nagras (Northeastern Univ.), Seema Mattoo (Univ. of Maryland), Srihari Gopal (Rutgers Univ.), Ajay Shah (Uni. of Arizona), and Kanchan Banerjee (alumnus, Boston University) talked about issues ranging from Peace in the 21st Century, Multiculturalism and Harmony, to Family Values in the 21st Century. Kanchan Banerjee proposed the vote of thanks, appreciating the efforts of all the delegates who made this historical event an event for the new century.