

DR. PETER KHAN (1936–2011): Dare to Be Different

“Happiness and contentment . . . are to be found through service . . .”

wrote Peter Khan. In a lifetime of service, he inspired many people to follow this path to peace.

Peter was born in 1936, four years after his parents moved from India to Australia. When he was 12, his family were the first Muslims in Australia to become Bahá'ís. He was an active youth in the community.

At age 21, he was the youngest person to be elected to the National Spiritual Assembly, the governing council for the Bahá'ís of Australia. Over the next several years, he spoke about the Bahá'í Faith around the world.

Peter earned a doctorate degree in electrical engineering from the University of Sydney. A prestigious Fulbright fellowship led him to Michigan, U.S. He directed a team researching miniature electronic systems for satellites, space probes, and radio telescopes.

After the fellowship, he taught at the University of Michigan. Peter said these were “very formative, very happy years” in which he and his wife, Dr. Janet Khan, “learned so much about the Faith and about the nature of the Bahá'í community.”

Language of the Spirit

Peter and Janet returned to Australia in 1975. They visited



Over 800 people attended the funeral of Dr. Peter Khan in Australia on July 21, 2011. A flock of white cockatoos flew skyward as guests prepared to leave for the cemetery. PHOTO © BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Daidanaw, Burma (now Myanmar), where all the residents—about 800 people—had become Bahá'ís. The Khans wrote, “Walking in a village that is entirely Bahá'í is a unique feeling . . . With no common language, one resorts to frequent expression of [Alláh-u-Abhá]* with smiles and ingenious hand gestures. In such circumstances the conversation is . . . in the universal language of the spirit.”

While working as an engineering professor at two Australian universities, Peter served as a Continental Counselor, inspiring and encouraging Bahá'ís throughout

Australasia. In 1983, he was appointed to the International Teaching Center, which guides the teaching of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide. Once again he traversed the globe, this time to the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel.

“Unflinching Dedication”

In 1987, Peter was elected to the Universal House of Justice—the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. He and Janet later published a book on the equality of women and men.

Peter continued to travel and speak eloquently about putting the Bahá'í teachings into action. He said, “What is required of us is a renewal of the spirit of heroism . . . that we dare to be different . . . find the courage to strike off in a part which, to some extent, differs from that of the people around us . . . We have to be strong. We have to be courageous. We have to be determined.”

Peter served on the Universal House of Justice for 23 years, until 2010. He left this world on July 15, 2011, at age 74.

The Universal House of Justice praised his “unbroken record of outstanding service” and his “remarkable life, one of earnest striving, of unbending resolve, of unflinching dedication to principle, and of constancy of effort.”