

# **Susila Dharma and other happenings at Pelham House**

*By Sharifin Gardiner, SD International Chairman*

Pelham House in Lewes in the south of England, an enterprise of mostly local Subud members, has been the scene of some intense and inwardly rewarding non-commercial activity in the last two weeks. We completed the refurbishment of the stable building “the Mews” in the autumn, so that we now have 32 bedrooms. Our core business includes weddings, (over 40 booked this year), hotel use, “functions” (parties) and commercial conferences. In addition we try to fit in non-commercial events: concerts, the Lewes Monday Literary Club, homoeopathic training and a revolving art exhibition.

So Pelham House is very much alive, but we still face many challenges as a business. Because of this Subud events at a deep discount can only be held occasionally. The Subud Britain Council were here in November, and two weeks ago the Guerrand Hermes Foundation for Peace held an interfaith meeting to discuss the possibility of setting up a “Museum of World Religion” in England (it turns out that it won’t be called a museum). I was privileged to be included, and met some remarkable people. Although they knew little about Subud they could sense something unusual. A distinguished Jewish Professor of comparative religion said he immediately felt a feeling of love in the building. It was remarkable that Christians, Shia and Sunni Muslims, Sikhs, Jews and Brahma Kumaris were able to discuss the pressing need to promote mutual respect and religious tolerance in a brotherly and sisterly way, to meet the needs of multi-cultural Britain ... in the safe space provided by Pelham House.

Following this we held board meetings and a conference for Susila Dharma International members. There were nearly 40 people with delegations from Norway, Germany, France, Britain and the Netherlands, plus the chairs of SD Canada and SD USA and representatives of the fledgling SD Serbia. My task as host and Chairman was made easy by the presence of our outgoing Executive Director Rosanna Hille and the warmly welcomed incoming E.D., Virginia Thomas who took it in turns to facilitate most of the sessions, and by the presence of Andrew Holloway and Farah Czwiertnia. We did latihan morning and evening in Pelham House with some very helpful testing –fortunately being able to retreat to the Subud House round the corner, when there was a noisy party across the corridor paying full rates-a Burns Night fund raiser, complete with kilted bagpiper welcoming the guests, and artificial snow blowing down over the entrance.

We covered a huge and practical agenda by spending some of the time in small discussion groups who reported back to the plenary, but the overarching theme was how to develop a three year strategy, including revising our mission statement, setting specific goals and even some operating principles in a democratic and participative way. We seemed to develop an openness and frankness of discussion in an atmosphere of trust, which bodes well for the future.

After the meeting Andrew Holloway emailed:

“Dear All,

*I just wanted to say that during our last session together on the Sunday I was feeling the Latihan very strongly, usually an indication that we are on the right tracks.*

*I must say that I felt very privileged to be among such a committed group of Subud members, and hope and pray that the new directions of the SDI organisation as a whole may truly become a reality.*

*It is my belief that we made a significant progress, and all who participated acknowledge their contribution. I feel gratitude to Almighty God that we were able to feel such guidance.*

*With love to all Andrew”*

I felt an overwhelming feeling of gratitude to Almighty God and to our fellow SDI members for being able to work in such an atmosphere... in our own space. Susila Dharma has become truly global with good news this week coming from the Congo, Java and Kalimantan, Cherkassy in the Ukraine and Belgrade, with support from new SD committees in Australia and New Zealand.