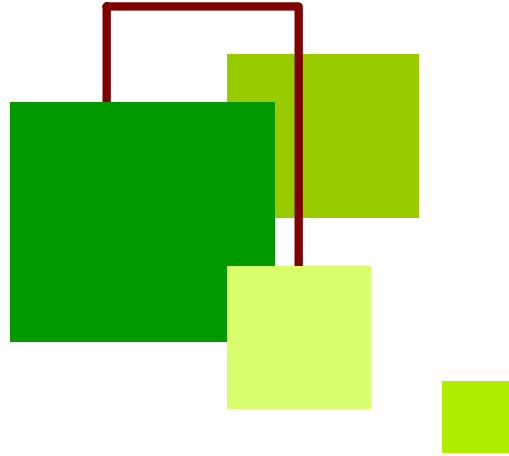


The Search for Values in an Age of Transition



**A Study Guide
to the Statement of the
Bahá'í International Community**

<http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/06-0701.htm>

FOREWORD

I. Context

The Search for Values in an Age of Transition is a statement of the Bahá'í International Community addressed to the United Nations on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Organization. In a time of sweeping reforms at the United Nations and spirited debate about the mechanisms and goals of global governance, the Bahá'í International Community took this opportunity to contribute its vision and concrete recommendations for the construction of a more just and peaceful global community. The full text of the statement is available at: <http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/pdf/05-1002.pdf>.

This guide is meant to assist readers in their understanding and examination of concepts presented in the statement. To accomplish this, it provides: comprehension and discussion questions, a glossary and brief case studies, which elaborate on issues raised in the statement. Wherever possible, web links have been provided to assist the reader in consulting the source in question.

Equally important, the guide seeks to familiarize readers with a number of issues currently under consideration by the United Nations as well as the ways in which the Bahá'í International Community endeavors to apply principles of the Bahá'í Faith to assist in the resolution of the challenging issues facing the United Nations and the global community.

II. About the Bahá'í International Community

The Bahá'í International Community is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) with affiliates¹ in over 180 countries and territories, which together represent over five million members of the Bahá'í Faith. As an international NGO, the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) interacts and cooperates with the United Nations and its specialized agencies², with governments, as well as with inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations. In this capacity, the BIC seeks to promote and apply principles – derived from the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith – which assist in the resolution of current day challenges facing humanity and in the development of a united, peaceful, just, and sustainable civilization.

III. Relationship of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations

The relationship of the BIC to the United Nations dates back to the earliest days of the United Nations: in 1945, Bahá'í representatives were among the NGOs present at the San Francisco Conference, where the United Nations Charter was signed by the first 50 member countries.

In 1948, the Bahá'í International Community registered with the UN as an international non-governmental organization (NGO) and in 1970 was granted consultative status³ with the UN

¹ These affiliates are democratically elected nine-member councils that guide the affairs of the Bahá'í community in their respective region. Within the Bahá'í system of administration, these are referred to as “National Spiritual Assemblies.”

² Specialized agencies of the United Nations include, for example: the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

³ “Consultative” status is granted by the United Nations to non-governmental organizations that have demonstrated relevant expertise and contributions to the achievement of the goals of the United Nations. This status permits NGOs to attend and speak at certain UN meetings and to have documents translated and circulated as official UN documents.

Economic and Social Council. Consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) followed in 1976, and with the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 1989. Working relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) were also established in 1989. Over the years, the BIC has worked closely with the UN Environment Program (UNEP), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

At present, the BIC's United Nations Office focuses on four core programmatic areas: the promotion of a universal standard for human rights; the advancement of women; the promotion of just and equitable means of global prosperity; and the development of moral capabilities. It also works to defend the rights of Bahá'ís in countries where they are persecuted.

IV. BIC engagement with the UN and the principle of non-participation in politics

At first glance, the BIC's long-standing engagement with the UN could appear to contradict the Bahá'í principle instructing Baha'is to abstain from involvement in the political arena.⁴ Yet it is important to examine this principle carefully as it does not imply a wholesale withdrawal from public affairs.⁵ Rather, the principle is rooted in the central tenet of the Bahá'í Faith – namely the building up and maintenance of an organic and spiritual unity between the communities, peoples, and nations of the world. Judged against this standard, participation in adversarial or partisan politics would undermine this foundational tenet. This suggests that action in the political realm must proceed from principle without “the slightest departure from the fundamental verities and ideals” of the Bahá'í Faith⁶, without involvement in party politics, electioneering or campaigning so as to ensure that the principle of unity is upheld.

While a detailed discussion of this subject is beyond the scope of this introduction, it is instructive, when considering what constitutes appropriate Bahá'í engagement in international affairs and political discourse, to examine – albeit briefly – examples from the lives of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. The following examples from the life of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi embody a new standard of engagement with contemporary issues in the modern political climate.

- *Bahá'u'lláh's letters to world leaders*: Beginning in September 1867, Bahá'u'lláh wrote a series of letters to the world leaders of His time, addressing, among others, Emperor Napoleon III, Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm I, Tsar Alexander II of Russia, Emperor Franz Joseph, Pope Pius IX, Sultan Abdul-Aziz, and the Persian ruler, Nasiri'd-Din Shah. In these letters, Bahá'u'lláh openly proclaimed himself as the Founder of a new religion and spoke of the dawn of a new age. In His letters, He warned, there would be catastrophic upheavals in the world's political and social order. To smooth humanity's transition, He urged the world's

⁴ Referring to this principle, the Bahá'í texts state, for example, that “...this principle...which involves the non-participation by the adherents of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, whether in their individual capacities or collectively as local or national Assemblies, in any form of activity that might be interpreted, either directly or indirectly, as an interference in the political affairs of any particular government.” Shoghi Effendi (1991). *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust), p.64. [<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/WOB/>]

⁵ For a compilation of quotations on the subject, please see, *Political Non-Involvement and Obedience to Government. A Compilation of some of the Messages of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice* (1980). Compiled by Peter J. Khan. (Bahá'í Publications Australia). Can be ordered at: <http://www.bahai bookstore.com/productdetails.cfm?PC=2079>

⁶ Shoghi Effendi (1991). *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust), p.66. See Note 4 above.

leaders to pursue justice. He called for general efforts at disarmament and urged the world's rulers to band together into some form of commonwealth of nations. Only by acting collectively against war, He said, could a lasting peace be established.⁷

- *Abdu'l-Bahá*⁸, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*: Written in 1875, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* is a message addressed to the rulers and people of Persia, which outlines the causes of the fall and rise of civilization and puts forward the pattern of a true social order. Apart from its specifically Iranian context, this treatise addresses education, the development of spiritual qualities, religion, government, law, peace, and the nature of wealth.⁹
- *Shoghi Effendi*¹⁰, *Letter to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine*: In 1947, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine asked Shoghi Effendi, as head of the Bahá'í Faith living at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, for the Bahá'í position on the future of Palestine. Shoghi Effendi's reply, dated July 14, 1947, offered no advice on a political solution for Palestine. Rather, it set forth the non-political character of the Bahá'í Faith and expressed the desire of the Bahá'í community for universal peace and justice and for reconciliation between Jews and Muslims.¹¹

Furthermore, in its 1984 Ridvan Message to the Baha'is of the world, the Universal House of Justice¹² provided further guidance on what constitutes principled Bahá'í engagement with non-Bahá'í institutions:

“There can be no doubt that the progress of the Cause from this time onward will be characterized by an ever-increasing relationship to the agencies, activities, institutions and leading individuals of the non-Bahá'í world. We shall acquire greater stature at the United Nations, become better known in the deliberations of governments, a familiar figure to the media, a subject of interest to academics, and inevitably the envy of failing establishments. Our preparation for and response to this situation must be a continual deepening of our faith, an unwavering adherence to its principles of abstention from partisan politics and freedom from prejudices, and above all an increasing understanding of its fundamental verities and relevance to the modern world.”¹³

⁷ Bahá'u'lláh (2002). *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Center). [<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/SLH/>]

⁸ Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921) was the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh and His designated successor. He was the head of the worldwide Bahá'í community from 1892 until his death.

⁹ Abdu'l-Bahá (1990). *The Secret of Divine Civilization* [1875] (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust). [<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SDC/>]

¹⁰ Shoghi Effendi (Rabbani) (1987-1957) was the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith and was appointed to the leadership (termed 'Guardianship') of the Bahá'í Faith in 1921 in the Will and Testament of his grandfather, Abdu'l-Bahá. (See *supra* note 8.)

¹¹ National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States and Canada (1981). *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, Volume 11: 1946-1950 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust), pp. 43-44 [<http://statements.bahai.org/47-0702.htm>]

¹² Established by the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice is the legislative authority of the global Bahá'í community, endowed by Bahá'u'lláh with the authority to legislate on all matters not specifically laid down in the Bahá'í scriptures. The Universal House of Justice consists of nine members elected at five-year intervals by the entire membership of the national governing institutions of the Bahá'í world.

¹³ Universal House of Justice (1984). *To the Bahá'is of the World, Ridvan 1984*. (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre). [<http://bahai-library.com/published.uhj/ridvan/84.html>]

At present, the diplomatic work of the Bahá'í Faith is carried out by the Universal House of Justice, the Bahá'í International Community, and external affairs representatives appointed by their respective National Spiritual Assemblies. The statements issued by the Bahá'í International Community, approved by the Universal House of Justice, provide yet another means to articulate a principle-based Bahá'í perspective on a variety of issues and problems in the world today.

V. Statements to the United Nations

While the BIC's United Nations Office has contributed numerous statements and recommendations to the United Nations throughout its association with the Organization, *The Search for Values in an Age of Transition* follows in the tradition of two earlier statements prepared for the 10th and 50th anniversaries of the UN respectively. A careful reading of these statements will reveal the application of fundamental Bahá'í principles to the social, economic, legal and political questions and circumstances of the United Nations at that time.

First, in 1955, the BIC's United Nations Office submitted its proposals for Charter Revision to the Secretary-General stating that “real sovereignty is no longer vested in the institutions of the national state because the nations have become interdependent; that the existing crisis is moral and spiritual as well as political; and that the existing crisis can only be surmounted by the achievement of a world order representative of the peoples as well as the nations of mankind.”¹⁴

Forty years later, the Office released a statement on the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, titled *Turning Point for All Nations*. The statement highlighted the trend toward the ever-increasing interdependence of humanity and presented proposals for the resuscitation of the General Assembly, the development of the UN's executive function (e.g. enforcement of collective security), the strengthening of the World Court, and the promotion of economic and moral development, human rights and the advancement of women.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bahá'í International Community, “Proposals for Charter Revision Submitted to the United Nations by the Bahá'í International Community.” In The Universal House of Justice, *The Bahá'í World 1954 – 1963* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., 1970), pp. 795-799. [<http://statements.bahai.org/55-0501.htm>]

¹⁵ Bahá'í International Community (1995). *Turning Point for All Nations* (New York: Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office). [<http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/95-0303.htm>]

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

In his letter of 1936 titled, “The Unfoldment of World Civilization,” and published in the compilation, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, Shoghi Effendi, the Head of the Bahá’í Faith from 1921 to 1957, repeatedly refers to “the age of transition.” He characterizes this period as “a titanic, a spiritual struggle, unparalleled in its magnitude...through which the organized community of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh and mankind as a whole are passing.” In order to understand the basis for the analysis presented in this section of the statement, it is helpful to read two of Shoghi Effendi’s letters in particular: “The Unfoldment of World Civilization” and “The Goal of a New World Order,” both found in the above-mentioned book.¹⁶

It is the unceasing search for direction in global affairs and its accompanying values and principles – reflected in the work of the United Nations and in the broader global community – that gives rise to the title of this statement, presented to the United Nations on its 60th anniversary.

The statement is divided into two sections. The first section identifies the pressing questions facing the Organization at this point in its history. It analyzes the state of current global challenges from an evolutionary perspective, raises the complex yet unavoidable issue of the increasingly prominent role of religion in the public sphere, and offers the principle of the “oneness of humankind” as both the direction and the operating principle of the emerging global order. The second section presents concrete recommendations for improving the work of the United Nations in the areas of human rights, development, democracy and collective security. These are discussed in more detail in the introduction to Section 2.

To begin...we invite readers to consider the following questions addressed in the statement and the subject of ongoing debate at the United Nations:

- Why have the current systems of governance failed to provide for the security, prosperity, and well being of the world’s people?
- What responsibilities do nations have towards their neighbors and their citizens?
- What fundamental values should guide relationships between and within nations to secure a peaceful future?

¹⁶ “The Unfoldment of World Civilization”: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/WOB/wob-41.html>; “The Goal of New World Order”: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/WOB/wob-14.html>.

A NOTE ABOUT THE FORMAT OF THIS STUDY GUIDE

[SAMPLE PAGE]

Text

In 1945, the founding of the United Nations gave a war-weary world a vision of what was possible in the arena of international cooperation and set a new standard by which to guide diverse peoples and nations towards a peaceful coexistence. Against the backdrop of the most calamitous war in human history, the creation of a world organization for the protection of the dignity, equal rights, and security of all peoples and nations was an extraordinary feat of statecraft. Sixty years later, the questions that fuelled the San Francisco Conference assert themselves anew: Why have the current systems of governance failed to provide for the security, prosperity, and well being of the world's people? What responsibilities do nations have towards their neighbors and their citizens? What fundamental values should guide relationships between and within nations to secure a peaceful future?

Text of the BIC statement.

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T1. What benchmark was set by the founding of the United Nations?
- T2. What questions are currently before the United Nations?

Discussion...

- D3. (a) What are the manifestations of the "age of transition" economically, socially, culturally, politically and morally?
(b) What are the precipitating factors for this "age of transition"?
(c) What is the world transitioning to?

Questions are of two types: Questions marked "T" are for text comprehension and can be answered from the text alone; questions marked "D" require some further research and lend themselves to discussion and group-study settings.

Case studies illustrating and elaborating on various points in the statement text and in accompanying questions.

BOX 1. Responsibility to Protect – defining sovereignty and the limits of intervention

The sovereignty of states, i.e. a state's right to govern all affairs within its borders, has been a foundational principle of international relations. Yet humanitarian crises such as those in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and Darfur have called into question the legitimacy of this principle as a standard of international law. Given the tremendous loss of life and the systematic violations of human rights, the United Nations has been forced to answer the question: at what point is it morally legitimate and necessary for the international community to intervene in the affairs of sovereign states? In 2001, in response to this question, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty...

Glossary of terms used in BIC statement.

Glossary

statecraft – the art of leading a country; wisdom in the management of public affairs (synonyms: statesmanship, diplomacy)

I

Text

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Glossary

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Questions

Text Comprehension...

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- T2. What questions are currently before the United Nations?

Discussion...

- D3. (a) What are the manifestations of the “age of transition” economically, socially, culturally, politically and morally?
(b) What are the precipitating factors for this “age of transition”?
(c) What is the world transitioning to?

(See: *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*
<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/WOB/wob-41.html>)

BOX 1. Sovereignty revisited

The sovereignty of states, i.e. a state's right to govern all affairs within its borders, has been a foundational principle of international relations. Yet humanitarian crises such as those in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and Darfur have called into question the legitimacy of this principle as a standard of international law. Given the tremendous loss of life and the systematic violations of human rights, the United Nations has been forced to answer the question: at what point is it morally legitimate and necessary for the international community intervene in the affairs of sovereign states? In 2001, in response to this question, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty defined sovereignty not only as an inviolable right (as it had been previously understood) but as a 'responsibility to protect (its citizens).' In a historic move - during the 60th Session of the United Nations General Assembly - member states, after much debate, endorsed this new understanding of sovereignty.

Report: <http://www.iciss.ca/report-en.asp>.

Text

2. In the collective effort to find answers to these questions, a new paradigm is taking hold – that of the interconnected nature of our challenges and our prosperity. Whether the issue is poverty, the proliferation of weapons, the role of women, AIDS, global trade, religion, environmental sustainability, the well-being of children, corruption, or the rights of minority populations – it is clear that none of the problems facing humanity can be adequately addressed in isolation from one another. The blurring of national boundaries in the face of global crises has shown, beyond a doubt, that the body of humankind represents one organic whole. The practical implications of this emergent paradigm for the reform of the United Nations are the focus of the Bahá'í International Community's contribution on the 60th anniversary of this august body.

Glossary

paradigm – a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality
proliferation – a rapid increase or spread
sustainability – capable of being maintained

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T4. What new paradigm is emerging to describe the challenges in present-day society?
- T5. What global challenges are identified in this paragraph?

Discussion...

- D6. How are the challenges listed in this paragraph inter-related? (For example, how is the HIV/AIDS pandemic exacerbated by each of these challenges?)
- D7. What metaphor does Bahá'u'lláh use to describe the organic nature of the challenges facing humankind?

BOX 2. 'Clinical' Economics – a holistic approach to the analysis and eradication of poverty

In his book, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Time*, economist Jeffrey Sachs presents 'clinical economics' - a holistic approach to economic development that highlights the complex nature of poverty. Clinical economics uses the analogy of diagnosing an illness to present its vision of economics; poverty, in this sense, is an 'illness' which can only be correctly diagnosed and treated by attention to a number of factors and, equally importantly, to the interactions between them. These include: economic policies, fiscal framework, physical geography, governance, culture, and geopolitics.

Jeffrey D. Sachs (2005). *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Time* (New York: Penguin Press).

Text

3. (a) The processes of United Nations reform must be understood as part of a broader evolutionary course, starting with early forms of international cooperation such as the League of Nations and leading to increasing levels of coherence in the administration of human affairs, facilitated by the creation of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the growing body of international law, the emergence and integration of newly independent states, and mechanisms for regional and global cooperation.
- (b) The last fifteen years alone have seen the establishment of the World Trade Organization, the International Criminal Court, the African Union, the significant expansion of the European Union, the global coordination of civil society campaigns, and the articulation of the Millennium Development Goals – an unprecedented global development framework aimed at the eradication of poverty worldwide.
- (c) In the course of these developments, the definition of state sovereignty – a cornerstone of the modern system of international relations and a foundational principle of the United Nations Charter – has itself emerged as the object of vigorous debate: what are the limits of traditional notions of sovereignty? What responsibilities do States have towards their citizens and towards each other? How should such responsibilities be enforced? Although uneven and fraught with setbacks, the emergent institutions, movements, and discourse evidence an increasing drive towards unity in world affairs and constitute one of the pervasive features of social organization at the end of the 20th century and in the first years of the new millennium.

Glossary

African Union – the successor of the Organization for African Unity; launched in 2002, the principal institution for the socio-economic integration of the African continent

International Criminal Court – first-ever permanent international criminal court established to prosecute individuals who have committed genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, when national courts are unable or unwilling to do so

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T8. What perspective helps to understand the processes of United Nations reform?
- T9. What institutions and events have facilitated “increasing levels of coherence” in the administration of human affairs? (How have they done so?)

Discussion...

- D10. What is “state sovereignty”? How has the understanding of this concept changed since the creation of the United Nations? (See Box 1: Sovereignty Revisited)
- D11. What are the manifestations of the “increasing drive towards unity in world affairs”?

(Note Abdu'l-Bahá's references to the “seven candles of unity” in Selections of the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá (p.29-32)
<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAB/110>)

League of Nations – precursor organization to the United Nations

Millennium Development Goals – a set of eight goals agreed upon by the international community aimed at halving extreme poverty in the world by 2015
[\[http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/\]](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/)

Text

4. (a) Why, then, given the dramatic increase of mechanisms and fora for cooperation is the world so deeply divided against itself? Why the universal affliction, which assails relations between those of different cultures, creeds, religions, political affiliations, economic status, and gender? To answer these questions, we must examine dispassionately the legal standards, political and economic theories, values and religious formulae, which have ceased to promote the welfare of humankind.

(b) The advancement of men and boys at the expense of women and girls has sorely limited the creative and material capacities of communities to develop and address their problems; the neglect of cultural and religious minorities has intensified ancient prejudices setting peoples and nations against one another; an unbridled nationalism has trampled the rights and opportunities of citizens in other nations; weak states have erupted in conflict, lawlessness, and massive refugee flows; narrow economic agendas exalting material prosperity have often suffocated the social and moral development required for the equitable and beneficent use of wealth.

(c) Such crises have laid bare the limits of traditional approaches to governance and put before the United Nations the inescapable question of values: which values are capable of guiding the nations and peoples of the world out of the chaos of competing interests and ideologies towards a world community capable of inculcating the principles of justice and equity at all levels of human society?

Glossary

assail – to attack or assault

fora – plural of forum

Gross National Product (Box 3) – dollar value of all goods and services produced in a nation's economy, including goods and services produced abroad

inculcate – instill

Questions

Text Comprehension...

T12. What are examples of political or economic theories that have “ceased to promote the welfare of humankind”? (Can you think of others?)

Discussion...

D13. What is the “universal affliction” referred to in paragraph (a)?

(From *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*:
“Is it not a fact...that the fundamental cause of this world unrest is attributable...to the failure of those into whose hands the immediate destinies of peoples and nations have been committed, to adjust their system of political and economic institutions, to the imperative needs of a rapidly evolving age?”)

D14. What is a ‘weak’ or ‘failed’ state? What elements are necessary to maintain a well-functioning state?

BOX 3. Measuring human development: the evolution of an idea

For many years, the level of “development” of a nation was assessed primarily by its Gross National Product (GNP), its GNP per capita and other commodity-based indicators. In 1990, under the leadership of Mahbub ul Haq (former minister of finance of Pakistan) and Amartya Sen (Nobel prize winning economist from India) – the UN released its first annual Human Development Report stating that “people are the real wealth of a nation.” The first Report defined human development as a process of strengthening human capabilities and expanding human choices, accompanying this definition with new measures of development (life expectancy, literacy, income indicators) aggregated into the *Human Development Index*. Over the last 15 years, the Reports have developed further indices of human development including the gender empowerment index, the gender empowerment measure, and the human poverty index. Moreover, they have shifted the focus from utilitarian economics to the well-being of people and have charted a new agenda for the measure and definition of human development.

United Nations Development Programme (1990). *Human Development Report 1990* (New York: Oxford University Press). <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1990/en/>

Text

5. (a) The question of values and their inextricable link to systems of religion and belief has emerged on the world stage as a subject of consuming global importance, which the United Nations cannot afford to ignore. While the General Assembly has passed a number of resolutions addressing the role of religion in the promotion of peace and calling for the elimination of religious intolerance, it struggles to grasp fully both the constructive role that religion can play in creating a peaceful global order and the destructive impact that religious fanaticism can have on the stability and progress of the world. A growing number of leaders and deliberative bodies acknowledge that such considerations must move from the periphery to the center of debate – recognizing that the full impact of religion-related variables on governance, diplomacy, human rights, development, notions of justice and collective security must be better understood.

(b) Neither political leaders nor academics foresaw such a widespread re-emergence of religion in the public sphere, nor did the practice of international relations develop the conceptual tools to address religion in a meaningful way. Our inherited notions of religion as an irrelevant and obstructionist voice in the international public sphere offer no help in resolving the complex problems before the leaders of the world's nations. In fact, the appropriate role of religion in the public sphere is one of the most pressing issues of our time.

Glossary

General Assembly resolution – a decision of the General Assembly

obstructionist – blocking, impeding progress

public sphere – referring to society at large rather than the private life of the individual; concerning public interaction

Questions

Text Comprehension...

T15. What two facets of religion does the UN struggle to understand?

Discussion...

D16. Why did international relations theory in the West largely reject religion as a legitimate voice in public life? (See Box 4 below.)

D17. What are the prevailing notions about the appropriate role of religion in the public sphere in your country?

D18. What are examples, both positive and negative, of the resurgence of religion in the public sphere?

BOX 4. Rejection of religion in international relations theory

Several factors have contributed to the near complete rejection of religion in concepts of international relations. First, the social sciences were based upon the work of those who believed that religion was giving way to rational and scientific modes of thought which would crush what they saw as the ignorance and superstition caused by religion, thereby ushering in a period of modernity. Second, “not only was international relations theory (like other social sciences) founded upon the belief that religion was receding from the world as an important factor, it can be argued that the modern context for the relations between states was founded on intentionally secular principles. The modern concept for the territorial state, the basis for modern international relations, was articulated by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648,” which, “was designed to end the Thirty Years’ War between Protestant and Catholic States. In doing so, it developed a format for relations between states which did not include religion.”

Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler (2005), “The Question of Religion and World Politics,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 17: 296-298.

Text

6. (a) That religions have been manipulated and used for the accomplishment of narrow ends cannot be denied. Yet, a careful historical analysis reveals that the periods of greatest advancement in human civilization have been those where both faith and reason were permitted to work together, drawing on the resources of the totality of human insight and experience. For example, during the height of Muslim civilization, sciences, philosophy, and the arts flourished; a vibrant culture of learning propelled the human imagination to new heights, providing, among others, the mathematical basis for many of today's technological innovations.

(b) Among humanity's diverse civilizations, religion has provided the framework for new moral codes and legal standards, which have transformed vast regions of the globe from brutish and often anarchical systems to more sophisticated forms of governance. The existing debate about religion in the public sphere, however, has been driven by the voices and actions of extreme proponents on both sides – those who impose their religious ideology by force, whose most visible expression is terrorism – and those who deny any place for expressions of faith or belief in the public sphere. Yet neither extreme is representative of the majority of humankind and neither promotes a sustainable peace.

Glossary

anarchical – characterized by chaos and lawlessness

Questions

Text Comprehension...

T19. What are the dominant voices in current debates about the role of religion in public life?

Discussion...

D20. What are other examples of ways in which the flourishing of Muslim civilization impacted the development of the sciences, arts, or philosophy? What are examples of similar cultural advancements from the history of other religions?

D21. What has been the role of the media in representing different sides of the debate of the role of religion in the public sphere?

BOX 5. Islam and the advancement of mathematics

“...it was the Arab-Muslim world that gave birth to algebra and algorithms, terms both derived from Arabic words. ...the entire modern information revolution, which is built to a large degree on algorithms, can trace its roots all the way back to Arab-Muslim civilization and the great learning centers of Baghdad and Alexandria, which first introduced these concepts, then transferred them to Europe through Muslim Spain.”

Thomas L. Friedman (2005). *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux).

Text

7. (a) At this juncture of our evolution as a global community, the search for shared values – beyond the clash of extremes – is paramount for effective action. A concern with exclusively material considerations will fail to appreciate the degree to which religious, ideological, and cultural variables shape diplomacy and decision-making. In an effort to move beyond a community of nations bound by primarily economic relationships to one with shared responsibilities for one another’s well-being and security, the question of values must take a central place in deliberations, be articulated and made explicit.

(b) While the United Nations has repeatedly emphasized the need for multilateralism, such efforts alone, while a step in the right direction, will not provide a sufficient basis for community building between nations; collaboration alone does not confer legitimacy or ensure benevolent outcomes for the greater good. In order to fulfill the promises of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties and resolutions, we can no longer be content with a passive tolerance of each other’s worldviews; what is required is an active search for those common values and moral principles which will lift up the condition of every woman, man, and child, regardless of race, class, religion or political opinion.

Glossary

juncture – a point in time

multilateralism – a term in international relations that refers to multiple countries working together

Questions

Text Comprehension...

T22. Why is the search for values important at this juncture? (Who is responsible for conducting this search?)

T23. Why is multilateralism an insufficient basis for community building between nations?

Discussion...

D24. What are the “promises” of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? (Charter: <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/index.html>) (UDHR: <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>)

D25. What values and principles does the UN recognize as essential for cooperation among States? (See Appendix 1.)

BOX 6. The Search for Common Values – Drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In 1947, the challenge for the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), namely the United Nations Human Rights Committee, was to fashion a universally agreed upon declaration of rights – a document acceptable to statesmen representing different cultures, civilizations, religions, and philosophies. Was “universality” even possible? Many argued that the document contained a Judeo-Christian and “Western” notion of rights. The strain between universalism and cultural relativism has been a permanent feature of the human rights debate. After extensive consultations with representatives of diverse nations, cultures, and religions – which often necessitated the invention of new words to accommodate emerging concepts – the final text of the declaration was adopted without any dissenting votes. “For the first time in history, the organized community of nations had issued a common declaration of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Mary Ann Glendon (2001), *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (New York: Random House).

Text

8. (a) We assert that the emerging global order, and the processes of globalization that define it, must be founded on the principle of the oneness of humankind. This principle, accepted and affirmed as a common understanding, provides the practical basis for the organization of relationships between all states and nations. The increasingly apparent interconnectedness of development, security and human rights on a global scale confirms that peace and prosperity are indivisible – that no sustainable benefit can be conferred on a nation or community if the welfare of the nations as a whole is ignored or neglected.
- (b) The principle of the oneness of humankind does not seek to undermine national autonomy or suppress the cultural and intellectual diversity of the peoples and nations of the world. Rather, it seeks to broaden the basis of the existing foundations of society by calling for a wider loyalty, a greater aspiration than any that has animated the human race. Indeed, it provides the moral impetus needed to remold the institutions of governance in a manner consistent with the needs of an ever-changing world.

Glossary

autonomy – self-government

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T26. What are the elements of the principle of the “oneness of humankind”? (See Box 7 below.)

Discussion...

- D27. What is the difference between a ‘state’ and a ‘nation’?

(From a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 July 1936: “The difference between a state and a nation” is that “the former...is a political entity without necessarily being homogenous in race, whereas the second implies national as well as political homogeneity.)

- D28. What is implied by a “wider loyalty”? How does the call for a wider loyalty impact concepts of citizenship, state sovereignty, humanitarian relief, development assistance and human rights?

- D29. In what way does the principle of the oneness of humankind provide the “moral impetus” to reform present-day institutions of governance?

BOX 7. The principle of the ‘oneness of humankind’ in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*

“The principle of the Oneness of Mankind...is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. [...] It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.”

Shoghi Effendi, “The Goal of a New World Order,” [1938], *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991).

<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/WOB/wob-22.html>

Text

9. (a) From the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, we offer the following vision, in the realization of which the members of the worldwide Bahá'í community across 191 nations are engaged:
- (b) *“A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of capital and labour definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law—the product of the considered judgment of the world’s federated representatives—shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship...”*

Glossary

federalism – a system of government in which power is constitutionally divided and delimited between a central government and that of provinces or states

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T30. What are the various elements of the vision of the future world community outlined in the quote by Shoghi Effendi?
(Source: Shoghi Effendi, “The Goal of a New World Order,” [World Order of Bahá'u'lláh](#), pp. 40-41.)

Discussion...

- D31. What elements of this vision can already be discerned on the world stage?
- D32. What are present-day examples of a “capricious and militant nationalism”?
- D33. What current governments operate under the principle of federalism? What are some different kinds of federalism? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this form of government as it operates in the world today?

BOX 8. The theory of ‘Cosmopolitan Democracy’

The idea of global governance has been vigorously debated in the field of political science. One prominent theory comes from Dr. David Held (London School of Economics) who argues that in our interconnected, globalized world a ‘political basis exists upon which to build a more systematic democratic future.’ In his book, *Democracy and the Global Order*, he states that the “future has to be conceived in cosmopolitan terms” which include a set of global institutions shaped by democratic law and which act as a “government” by implementing and enforcing that law. Citing philosopher Immanuel Kant, Held states that “cosmopolitan law” is not a utopian way of thinking about law, but rather a “necessary complement” to the existing code of national and international law and a “means to transform the latter into the public law of humanity.”

David Held (1995). *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to the Cosmopolitan Governance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

SECTION 2 INTRODUCTION

The second part of this statement consists of concrete recommendations for United Nations action in four areas: human rights and rule of law, development, democracy, and collective security. Formal communication by non-governmental organizations such as the Bahá'í International Community with the United Nations often includes recommendations – as this is most concrete and, often, the most ‘actionable’ form of communication (i.e. saying what could be done differently as opposed to only pointing out what is wrong). The above categories derive from major areas of United Nations work and mirror those in the Secretary-General’s report to the General Assembly, *“In Larger Freedom: Towards development, security, and human rights for all,”* outlining his comprehensive reform strategy for the Organization.

As you read the recommendations included in each section, consider (a) the broader spiritual principle(s) which inform the recommendation; and (b) how these recommendations help to realize the overarching principle of the “oneness of humankind.”

II

Text

10. In light of the foregoing analysis and the areas currently under consideration by the United Nations, we offer the following recommendations as concrete steps towards the realization of a more just and effective United Nations system. Our recommendations address human rights and the rule of law, development, democracy, and collective security.

Questions

Discussion...

- D34. Why is focusing on concrete steps within the areas currently under consideration by the UN a useful approach?

Glossary

collective security – a two-pronged principle of international relations: on the one hand, it requires all states to act together to protect a wronged state; on the other, it requires all states to act together to punish the wrongdoer; in an attempt to make this principle a reality, the international community has developed certain international institutions and procedures that operate within the general framework of the United Nations.

BOX 9. *“In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security, and Human Rights for All” – Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s proposals for United Nations reform*

Leading up to the historic United Nations World Summit in the fall of 2005, Kofi Annan presented the General Assembly with his ambitious report outlining concrete proposals to tackle global problems and help the United Nations to respond to current challenges. The report took a comprehensive approach – stressing the interdependence of development, freedom, and peace and emphasizing human solidarity as the basis for effective and sustainable solutions to global challenges. The report is divided into four main sections: “Freedom from want” – addresses questions of development; “Freedom from fear” – deals with collective security; “Freedom to live in dignity” – deals with human rights, democracy, and rule of law; and, the final section, “Strengthening the United Nations” – presents proposals for reforming the Organization to make it more able to implement reforms in the above-mentioned areas.

Report: <http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/contents.htm>

Text

Human Rights and the Rule of Law

11. No effective and peaceful international order can be founded and sustained unless it is firmly grounded in the principles of justice and the rule of law. An adherence to such principles provides the requisite stability and legitimacy required to gain the support of peoples and nations that the system aims to serve. We offer the following recommendations:
- a. The grave threats posed by religious extremism, intolerance and discrimination require the United Nations to address this issue openly and earnestly. We call on the United Nations to affirm unequivocally an individual's right to change his or her religion under international law. The General Assembly may request the International Court of Justice, under Article 96 of the United Nations Charter, to issue an advisory opinion on the issue of freedom of religion or belief. Specifically, the Court could be asked whether the principle of freedom of religion or belief has attained the status of *jus cogens*, customary international law, or is merely left to the interpretation of each state. Such a clarification would help to remove fallacious interpretations of this right and lend moral force to the condemnation of policies and practices that violate the principle of non-discrimination in matters of religion or belief.

Glossary

advisory opinion – an opinion issued by a court which advises on the interpretation of a law

International Court of Justice – the principal judicial organ of the United Nations established to settle disputes between member states

jus cogens - (Latin for "compelling law"); holds that there is a higher order of legal norms that cannot be abrogated by national laws (e.g. prohibitions against slavery and genocide)

customary international law - international law that has arisen from custom and usage, and is accepted as binding even though not codified

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T35. What course of action does the BIC propose in paragraph 11(a)?
(Consult glossary for definition of new terms.)

Discussion...

- D36. Why is the right to freedom of religion or belief so critical to the establishment of a peaceful and just society? Consider the example of societies in which this freedom does not exist.

BOX 10. Rule of Law

Rule of law refers to the concept that the exercise of executive political power must conform to general principles as administered by the courts. "Human rights are furthered where the rule of law creates a consensus that person will be governed by constitutionally enacted law and not by individuals; where the law applies to all persons equally, including those who govern; where the laws are enforced swiftly and without discrimination; where justice is dispensed by objective officials who base decisions only on existing laws that are publicly known; and where those charged with enforcing and applying the law are accountable for their actions."

Robert L. Maddex (2000). *International Encyclopedia of Human Rights, Freedoms, Abuses, and Remedies* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press).

Text

(Human Rights and Rule of Law, continued)

- b. Beyond the ongoing structural and functional reforms of the United Nations human rights machinery, the legitimacy of this machinery must be restored through its consistent adherence to the highest principles of justice, including those elaborated in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Only in this way, will it secure the legitimacy and trust of Member States and their citizens required for it to exercise its mandate.
- c. The General Assembly should consider setting a timeline for the universal ratification of international human rights treaties.

Glossary

mandate – a binding obligation

ratification – making something valid (e.g. a treaty) by confirming or ratifying it; treaties become legally binding after a predetermined number of countries have ratified them

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T37. What does United Nations human rights system need in order to be effective?

Discussion...

- D38. Why are trust and legitimacy important elements of international relations?
- D39. Give an example of a treaty and the date of ratification. What is required for a treaty to be ratified?

BOX 11. International Human Rights Treaties

A treaty is an international agreement, which may be viewed as a contract between countries. Also called ‘conventions,’ ‘covenants,’ or ‘protocols,’ treaties are a specific form of human rights document – which invites countries to sign and ratify them, thereby binding signatory countries to implement the provisions in the document. Examples of treaties include the United Nations Charter (1945), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1967), and the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968). United Nations treaty monitoring bodies are committees of independent experts that monitor the domestic implementation of the treaty’s provisions. Unlike national laws, however, which can be enforced using police power, there are few ways to enforce international treaties beyond the use of sanctions. Sanctions include diplomatic pressure, moral and intellectual arguments and public opinion.

Robert L. Maddex (2000). *International Encyclopedia of Human Rights, Freedoms, Abuses, and Remedies* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press).

Text

(Human Rights and Rule of Law, continued)

- d. The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, bolstered by the requisite moral, intellectual, and material resources, must now become the standard-bearer in the field of human rights and an effective tool in alleviating the suffering of individuals and groups whose rights are denied.

d(i) As one of the most effective instruments for the protection of human rights, Special Procedures should receive adequate budgetary and administrative support. Government cooperation with Special Procedures should not only be limited to access to the country in question but, equally important, should include full consideration of subsequent recommendations. These should be reflected in the interactive dialogues between the Rapporteur and Member States.

Glossary

High Commissioner for Human Rights – an expert appointed by the UN Secretary-General to promote and protect human rights worldwide through contact with governments and the provision of assistance where appropriate
interactive dialogue – opportunity for human rights experts to question a member state’s record on human rights and an equal opportunity for member states to respond

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T40. What is the Office of the High Commissioner called upon to become?
- T41. What are the “Special Procedures” of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights? (See Box 12 below).
- T42. What is required of governments’ cooperation with Special Procedures?

BOX 12. Special Procedures of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

“Special procedures” is the general name given to the mechanisms established by the Commission on Human Rights to address either specific country situations or thematic issues (i.e. racism, freedom of expression, poverty, etc.) These mechanisms enable the Commission to be continually involved in an issue of concern throughout the year. Special Procedures are generally volunteer independent experts (“special rapporteurs”) or a group of experts (“working group”), appointed by the Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights to investigate, monitor and advise on the human rights situation in a particular country or on a specific theme. They do so through country visits and, in this way, serve as the eyes and ears of the Commission at the ground level. There are currently 13 experts with [country-specific mandates](#) (e.g. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus) and 28 experts with [thematic mandates](#) (e.g. independent expert on minority issues).

More information:

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/index.htm>

Text

(Human Rights and Rule of Law, continued)

d(ii) The Public Information section of the Office of the High Commissioner should be developed in order to allow resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights/Human Rights Council, recommendations of the Special Procedures and concluding observations of the treaty monitoring bodies to be accorded more prominence in the media. This could include, for example, the translation of documents into relevant national languages in order to generate more publicity.

d(iii) The Office of the High Commissioner, along with the Council, should continue its productive engagement with non-governmental organizations, which, since its inception, has contributed positively both to the work of the Office and to the development of non-governmental organizations' capacity to interact meaningfully in this context.

Glossary

Human Rights Commission/ Human Rights Council – a body supervised by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; sets standards which govern the human rights conduct of member states; monitors human rights violations; acts as a forum for countries, NGOs, and human rights defenders to voice their concerns; in March 2005 – in a historic development, the United Nations voted to create a Human Rights Council to replace the much criticized and discredited 60-year-old Commission on Human Rights.

Questions

Text Comprehension...

T43. How can human rights resolutions be accorded more prominence in the media?

T44. What role should be given to non-governmental organizations?

Discussion...

D45. (a) How could the media promote greater awareness about human rights and human rights violations?
(b) Why is the media a critical component of the effort to hold governments accountable for their commitments and violations in this area?

D46. Why is continued engagement with non-governmental organizations an important element of the promotion of human rights at the United Nations? (Note example of the BIC in Box 11.)

BOX 13. The work of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office to defend the rights of the persecuted Bahá'í community in Iran

Much of the work of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office (BIC UNO) focuses on the promotion of a universal standard of human rights. For over twenty years, for example, the BIC UNO has consistently monitored the situation of the Bahá'í minority population in Iran and brought the persistent denial of human rights – including the destruction of religious property, denial of access to education, arbitrary detention, limitations of employment opportunities and others – to the attention of the United Nations. By keeping this on the radar of the international community, BIC UNO has successfully advocated for the inclusion of references to the persecution of Bahá'ís in resolutions of the General Assembly. For many victims of human rights violations around the world, the monitoring, awareness raising and advocacy work of concerned international non-governmental organizations represents an important avenue for the rectification of injustices committed against persecuted populations.

Text

Development

12. At the heart of human development must be the understanding that people are irreplaceable resources in a self-sustaining process of change. The challenge is to find methods that allow them to fully express this potential in all its dimensions. Development defined in terms of certain patterns of “modernization,” however, seems to refer exactly to those processes, which promote the domination of people’s material ambitions over their spiritual goals. While the search of a scientific and technologically modern society is a central goal of human development, it must base its educational, economic, political, and cultural structures on the concept of the spiritual nature of the human being and not only on his or her material needs. We offer the following recommendations:

- a. The capacity of people to participate in the generation and application of knowledge is an essential component of human development. As such, priority must be given to the education of girls and boys, women and men in order to enable them to set the path of their own development and to apply their knowledge in the service of the greater community. The United Nations should consider that in terms of economic investment, the education of girls may well yield the highest return of all investments available in developing countries considering both private benefits, as well as returns to family members and the greater community.

Questions

Text Comprehension...

T47. What is one of the main challenges in current development efforts?

T48. What human capacity is an essential component of human development?

T49. What yields, possibly, the highest return on investment in developing countries?

Discussion...

D50. How have efforts at “modernization” shaped the understanding of “development”?

D51. How does the education of girls and women benefit the larger community? (See Box 15 on next page.)

BOX 14. Rural centers of research and technology

“While the adoption of new technologies is integral to development, too often – under the guise of “modernization” – these have been inappropriate to the culture and community into which they were introduced. Alongside the Millennium Development Goals calling for the sharing of information and communication technologies, equally important is the creation of local institutions, such as rural centers of technology training and research, constructively blending modern scientific methods with indigenous practices and thereby directly engaging local populations in the generation and implementation of new ideas. True development consists of the creation of indigenous capacity to participate in the general of technologies for the benefit of the broader community.”

Bahá’i International Community (2006). *A New Framework for Global Prosperity* (New York: Bahá’i International Community).

<http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/06-0101.htm>

Text

(Development, continued)

- b. We submit for the consideration of the United Nations five spiritual principles, which may serve as a basis for the creation of indicators of human development, to be used alongside existing measures of development. These principles include: unity in diversity, equity and justice, equality of the sexes, trustworthiness and moral leadership, and the freedom of conscience, thought, and religion.
- c. The rich countries of the world have a moral obligation to remove export and trade distorting measures that bar the entry of countries struggling to participate in the global market. The Monterrey Consensus, which recognizes the importance of creating a ‘more open, rule-based, non-discriminatory and equitable’ system of trade is a step in the right direction.
- d. Alongside reform in systems of trade, countries must facilitate the flow of labor and address the dehumanizing impact of trafficking in persons, which leads to widespread economic and sexual exploitation of people seeking a better life.

Glossary

Monterrey Consensus – an agreement adopted by heads of State gathered in Monterrey, Mexico (2002) pledging to eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth, promote sustainable development, and advance an equitable global economic system; involved unprecedented collaboration between the United Nations, finance ministers, the private sector, and NGOs

trade distorting measures – obstacles, which prevent a country from taking part in the global market (high tariffs, subsidies, monopolies, etc.)

trafficking – transnational illegal activity, usually involving the transport of drugs, small arms or people

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T52. What spiritual principles are proposed as the basis for evaluating human development?
- T53. What are “trade distorting measures”? (See glossary.) What is a consequence of trade distorting measures?

Discussion...

- T54. What are commonly used measures (or indicators) of human development? How do these measures shape the concept of ‘development’? (See Box 3: Measuring human development: the evolution of an idea)
- T55. How can participation in a global trading system facilitate development?

BOX 15. Investing in the education of girls and women

According to the World Bank, in addition to being more productive in market work, educated women have smaller families, fewer of their children die in infancy and the children who survive are healthier and better educated. Educated women are also better equipped to enter the paid labor force, which is critical to the survival of the many female-headed households in developing countries. Nations with higher levels of female school enrollment show higher levels of economic productivity, lower fertility, lower infant and maternal mortality, and longer life expectancy than countries that have not achieved as high enrollment levels for girls.

World Bank, “The Benefits of Education for Women,” 1993; <http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/hnp/hddflash/hcnote/hrm002.html>

Text

Democracy

13. We commend the international community for its commitment to democracy and to a freely elected government as a universal value. However, the standard of deliberation and truth-seeking required for the realization of goals set by the United Nations needs to go far beyond the patterns of partisanship, protest, and compromise that tend to characterize present day discussions of human affairs. What is needed is a consultative process – at all levels of governance – in which individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of one body with its own interests and goals. Through participation and unity of purpose, consultation becomes the operating expression of justice in human affairs. Without this principled anchor, democracy falls prey to the excesses of individualism and nationalism, which tear at the fabric of the community - both nationally and globally.

Glossary

governance - the institutions and processes that determine how power is exercised, how citizens are given a voice, and how decisions are made on issues of public concern; method of system of government
partisanship - devoted to or biased in support of a party, group, or cause (e.g. partisan politics)

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T56. What are some of the shortcomings of the present-day patterns of deliberation at the United Nations?
- T57. What are the characteristics of the “consultative process”?

Discussion...

- D58. In what way is consultation an “expression of justice” in human affairs”?
- D59. What aspects of democracy make it vulnerable to the “excesses of individualism and nationalism”?

BOX 16. The Spread of Democracy Worldwide

In the 1980s and 1990s the world made dramatic progress in opening up political systems and expanding political freedoms. Over eighty countries took significant steps towards democracy, and today 140 of the world’s nearly 200 countries hold multiparty elections—more than ever before. Despite these positive developments, [Gallup International’s Millennium Survey](#) (1999) found that of the 50,000 people surveyed in 60 countries, less than a third felt that their country was governed by the will of the people. Only 1 in 10 respondents said that their government responded to the people’s will.

Text

(Democracy, continued)

14. Beyond the administration of material affairs, governance is a moral exercise. It is the expression of a trusteeship – a responsibility to protect and to serve the members of the social polity. Indeed, the exercise of democracy will succeed to the extent that it is governed by the moral principles that are in harmony with the evolving interests of a rapidly maturing human race. These include: trustworthiness and integrity needed to win the respect and support of the governed; transparency; consultation with those affected by decisions being arrived at; objective assessment of needs and aspirations of communities being served; and the appropriate use of scientific and moral resources. We offer the following recommendations:
- a. To secure the legitimacy, confidence, and support needed for the realization of its goals, the United Nations needs to address the democratic deficits in its own agencies and deliberations.

Glossary

democratic deficit – a criticism of organizations that are democratic in principle but fail to implement that principle in certain aspects of its functioning; ‘democratic organizations’ that appear inaccessible to ordinary people
transparency – the visibility and clarity of laws, regulations, and procedures; as opposed to corruption
trusteeship – responsibility, care, protection

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T60. What moral principles are required for an effectively functioning democracy?
- T61. What does the UN need to do to gain the support it needs to realize its goals?

Discussion...

- D62. (a) How does the concept of governance as “trusteeship” differ from mainstream notions of governance?
(b) How does this concept shape our understanding of power where government is concerned?
Note the Bahá’í use of the term “trustees” to describe the station of elected representatives.
- D63. In what ways could the UN – or other major intergovernmental bodies (e.g. World Bank, World Trade Organization) – address their “democratic deficits”?

BOX 17. Innovative governance: The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Over the last five years, the United Nations has generated numerous examples of innovative governance: In 2000, the United Nations Economic and Social Council established a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to serve as an advisory body to the Council on indigenous issues relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, and health and human rights, culminating a decades-long struggle of indigenous peoples to regain standing within the global community.

Permanent Forum: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/>

(Also worthy of note is that in 2002, the International Parliamentary Union was granted permanent observer status in the General Assembly of the United Nations, setting in motion new forms of cooperation.)

Text

(Democracy, continued)

- b. Thorough deliberation of the pressing issues of the day requires the United Nations to develop modes for constructive and systematic engagement with organizations of civil society (including businesses and religious organizations) as well as members of national parliaments. The relationship between civil society organizations, parliamentarians and the traditional diplomatic processes of the United Nations need not be one of competition but rather complementarity, rooted in the recognition that the relative strengths of all three constituencies are necessary for effective decision-making and subsequent implementation. We urge the United Nations to give serious consideration to the proposals put forth in the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relationships.
- c. A healthy democracy must be founded on the principle of the equality of men and women and equal recognition of their contribution to the establishment of a just society. In its efforts to promote democracy, the Member States of the United Nations must vigilantly work for the inclusion of women in all facets of governance in their respective countries. This is not a privilege but a practical necessity for the achievement of the high-minded and complex goals before the Organization today.

Glossary

civil society - refers to voluntary associations of citizens formed to advance their interests, ideas and ideologies; of particular relevance to the United Nations are mass organizations (e.g. women, retired people), trade unions, professional associations, social movements, indigenous people's organizations, religious and spiritual organizations, academic and public benefit non-governmental organizations.

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T64. What two constituencies should the UN endeavor to engage with in order to thoroughly deliberate on the challenges before it?
- T65. What is one of the foundational principles of a well-functioning democracy?

Discussion...

- D66. What are the "relative strengths" of the above-mentioned constituencies when it comes to effective decision-making and subsequent implementation of decisions undertaken by the UN?

BOX 18. Report of Expert Panel on UN-Civil Society Relationships - *We the Peoples: The UN, Civil Society and Global Governance*

The role and contribution of NGOs to the work of the UN increased dramatically with the global UN conferences in the 1990s. As part of a comprehensive effort to reform the UN, the Secretary-General appointed an [expert panel](#) to consider how the UN and civil society could work together more constructively. The report notes the 'weak influence of traditional democracy in matters of global governance':

"Concerning democracy, a clear paradox is emerging: while the substance of politics is fast globalizing...its principal institutions remain firmly rooted at the national or local level."

To accomplish its goals, the UN must effectively reach out beyond its constituency of national governments. The reports' numerous proposals include: (a) connect the global with the local; (b) help strengthen democracy on a global level; (c) create 'global policy networks' which bring together all relevant constituencies to tackle global problems; (d) strengthen security council relationship with civil society; and (e) systematically engage parliamentarians to link national parliaments more directly with international deliberative processes.

Report: http://www.un.org/reform/a_58_817.pdf

Text

(Democracy, continued)

- d. The meaningful integration of minority groups in democratic processes is of critical importance – both to shield minorities from the abuses of the past and to encourage their participation and responsibility for the well being of society. We urge Member States, in their work to promote democracy, to strive for the full inclusion of minorities – belonging to any faith, race, or class – in the processes of goal setting and deliberation. As the cultural make-up of states becomes increasingly fluid and diverse, no one cultural or religious group can lay claim to an adequate definition of the national interest.

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- T67. Why is the integration of minority groups an important element in democracy?

Discussion...

- D68. How does the growing number of minorities in various countries impact national self-identity, notions of citizenship and the “national interest”?

- D69. How does the doctrine of the “responsibility to protect” impact traditional conceptions of the “national interest”?

(Consider how the Bahá’í principle of the “[oneness of humankind](#)” shapes the notion of “national interest.”)

BOX 19. Building state-nations: balancing imperatives of unity and cultural diversity

As the number of countries with significant minority populations grows, states face the challenge of devising policies to effectively govern increasingly diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic populations. Historically, states have sought to secure the loyalty and obedience of their citizens through policies of assimilation or integration, often through the forced elimination of cultural differences between groups. Yet efforts to impose a single national identity through limiting expressions of cultural diversity have often led to tensions, conflicts, and even outright war (e.g. former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Indonesia, Iraq). Examples from nations such as India demonstrate that enduring democracies can be established in multicultural polities. Critical for the establishment of such multicultural democracies is the recognition of the shortcomings of historical nation-building exercises and of the benefits of multiple and complementary identities. Also important are efforts to build the trust of diverse populations in their common institutions, which encourage them to participate in and support democratic processes.

Source: <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/?CFID=7683125&CFTOKEN=42541661> (pp.48-49)

Glossary

national interest – a country’s goals and ambitions, whether economic, military or cultural

Text

Collective Security

15. We welcome the United Nations' efforts to articulate a more comprehensive vision of collective security, based on the understanding that in our interconnected world, a threat to one is a threat to all. The Bahá'í Faith envisions a system of collective security within a framework of a global federation, a federation in which national borders have been conclusively defined, and in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded all rights to maintain armaments except for purposes of maintaining internal order. While cognizant of the grave shortfalls of the current system of collective security, we commend the Security Council for its landmark Resolution on "Women, Peace, and Security," recognizing for the first time in its history the needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations and their enduring role in the promotion of peace. We offer the following recommendations:

- a. To address the democracy deficit and relentless politicization of the Security Council, the United Nations must in due course move towards adopting a procedure for eventually eliminating permanent membership and veto power. Alongside procedural reforms, a critical change in the attitude and conduct are needed. Member States must recognize that in holding seats on the Security Council and as signatories to the Charter of the United Nations, they have a solemn moral and legal obligation to act as trustees for the entire community of nations, not as advocates of their national interests.

Glossary

federation – a form of government in which powers and functions are divided between a central government and a number of political subdivisions that have a significant degree of political autonomy.

veto power – the power to vote against or block a decision (at the UN, the five permanent members of the Security Council have this power: China, Russia, France, United Kingdom, United States)

Questions

Text Comprehension...

T70. What are some of the characteristics of the system of collective security envisioned in the Bahá'í Faith?

(For a more detailed description, see: Shoghi Effendi, "The Unfoldment of Civilization", in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, pp.191-194.)

T71. Why does the Security Council resolution on women, peace, and security have special significance?

T72. What two recommendations does the BIC make for addressing the democracy deficit and politicization of the Security Council?

Discussion...

D73. What are some of the special needs of women and girls in conflict situations?

BOX 20. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (2000)

This is the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council that specifically addresses the impact of war on women, and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. This was an historic move by the Security Council as women's important contributions and concerns were often left out of strategies for conflict resolution, peace negotiations, and peace-building following periods of conflict. Women are often the primary caregivers, manage households and are involved in the life of the community; as such, they provide a critical perspective on the elements required for a sustainable peace. When their husbands and sons are absent and or injured in conflict situations, it is for them to adapt and endeavor to provide for their families, lending yet another gender dimension to the conflict. Finally, as rape has become a weapon of war, women face unique dangers and concerns in times of conflict, which must also be taken into consideration when planning a comprehensive peace-building strategy.

Security Council Resolutions from the year 2000:
<http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2000/sc2000.htm>

Text

(Collective Security, continued)

- b. A definition of terrorism must be adopted. We agree with the Secretary-General's characterization of terrorism as any action "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act." Moreover, it is imperative that problems such as terrorism be consistently addressed within the context of other issues that disrupt and destabilize society.
 - c. We urge the United Nations to take the necessary steps to increase the participation of women at all levels of decision-making in conflict resolution and peace processes, locally, nationally and internationally, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.
16. We believe the task of establishing a peaceful world is now in the hands of the leaders of the nations of the world, by virtue of the tremendous responsibilities with which they have been entrusted. Their challenge now is to restore the trust and confidence of their citizens in themselves, their government, and the institutions of the international order through a record of personal integrity, sincerity of purpose, and unwavering commitment to the highest principles of justice and the imperatives of a world hungering for unity. The great peace long envisioned by the peoples and nations of the world is well within our grasp.

Glossary

peacekeeping (UN definition) – a way to help countries torn by conflict to create conditions for sustainable peace; UN peacekeepers (soldiers and military officers, police and civilian personnel from many countries) monitor and observe peace processes that emerge in post-conflict situations and assist conflicting parties to implement the peace agreement they have signed

Questions

Text Comprehension...

- D74. (a) What definition of terrorism does the BIC support?
(b) What general approach should be taken when addressing the problem of terrorism?
- D75. In what area are women under-represented according to the BIC?

Discussion...

- D76. (a) Why is it important for the international community to come to agreement about a definition of terrorism?
(b) Why is this definition a contentious issue in international affairs?
- D77. What are the possible consequences of excluding women from decision-making in peace processes?
- D78. How does Abdu'l-Bahá describe the responsibilities of the elected leaders of human affairs, in "[The Secret of Divine Civilization](#)" (e.g. pp.23-24; pp.17-18)?
- D79. Refer to the excerpted text from the United Nations World Summit Outcome Document in Appendix 1 - a statement of principles and commitments made by the leaders of the world's nations gathered at the United Nations in September 2005.
(a) What values and principles are stated here?
(b) What values and/or principles, in your opinion, are not included?

Appendix 1

United Nations World Summit Outcome Document September 2005

I. Values and principles

1. We, Heads of State and Government, have gathered at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 14 to 16 September 2005.
2. We recognize the valuable role of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, including the Millennium Summit, in mobilizing the international community at the local, national, regional and global levels and in guiding the work of the United Nations, and we reaffirm their outcomes and renew our commitment to fully implement them in an integrated and coordinated manner.
3. We recall the United Nations Millennium Declaration we adopted at the dawn of the twenty-first century and reaffirm our faith in the Organization and our commitment to the Principles and Purposes of the United Nations Charter, and the respect for international law.

We further reaffirm that core values and principles, such as respect for human rights and human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, the rule of law, shared responsibility, multilateralism, and non resort to the threat or use of force are essential for peaceful coexistence and cooperation among States.

4. We rededicate ourselves to support all efforts to uphold the sovereign equality of all States, respect for their territorial integrity and political independence, non interference in the internal affairs of states, resolution of disputes by peaceful means, and the right of self-determination of peoples, including those that remain under colonial domination and foreign occupation.
5. We reaffirm the vital importance of an effective multilateral system, with a strong United Nations at its core, in order to better address the multifaceted and interconnected challenges and threats confronting our world and achieve progress in the areas of development, security and human rights, and commit to spare no efforts in promoting and strengthening the effectiveness of the organization and implementation of its decisions.
6. We believe that today, more than ever before, we live in a global and interdependent world. No State can stand wholly alone. We acknowledge that collective security depends on effective cooperation against transnational threats. We recognize that we all share responsibility for each other's security.
7. We agree that current developments and circumstances require that we urgently build consensus on major threats and challenges. We commit to translate that consensus into concrete action, including addressing the root causes of those threats and challenges.
8. We acknowledge that development, security and human rights form the indispensable foundations for collective security and well-being and that they are the pillars of the United Nations system. We reaffirm that development is a central goal by itself, and reaffirm that sustainable development constitutes a key element of the overarching framework of United Nations activities, and commit ourselves to fully implement the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social, human rights, environmental and related fields, including the Millennium Development Goals.

9. We also acknowledge that good governance and the rule of law at the national and international levels are essential for sustained economic growth, sustainable development and eradication of poverty and hunger.
10. We reaffirm that gender equality and the promotion and protection of the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for women are essential to advance development, security and human rights.
11. We recognize that our nations and peoples will not enjoy development without security, nor will they enjoy security without development, and that they will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.
12. We reaffirm the universality and indivisibility of all human rights, We recognize that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to the enrichment of humankind. We acknowledge the importance of respect and understanding of religious and cultural diversity throughout the world, especially through dialogue and cooperation, to promote international peace and security and enhance human welfare, freedom and progress everywhere as well as the need to encourage dialogue, understanding, tolerance and respect among different cultures, civilizations and peoples as a means to promote, inter alia, international peace and security.
13. We pledge to make the United Nations more effective, more efficient, more accountable and more credible and to provide the Organization with the resources needed to fully implement its mandates. This is our shared responsibility and our common interest.
14. We therefore resolve to take concrete measures with a view to ensuring effective follow up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit and the other major UN conferences and summits in the four following areas:
 - Development
 - Peace and collective security
 - Human rights and the rule of law
 - Strengthening of the United Nations

Full-text available at:

<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/487/60/PDF/N0548760.pdf?OpenElement>

