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WORLD
1995 * 96

AN
INTERNATIONAL RECORD

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HAIFA

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INTRODUCTION

In 1995–96, two world-embracing events—the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in China, and the United Nations’ fiftieth anniversary—engaged the particular attention of the Bahá’í international community, and *The Bahá’í World 1995–96* features major articles about Bahá’í participation in both. Other milestones within the Bahá’í community are also noted: the formation of five new National Spiritual Assemblies and the gathering of members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors from around the world to deliberate with other senior officers of the Bahá’í Faith about the growth and consolidation of the Bahá’í community.

The wide-ranging work of the Bahá’í International Community, a United Nations-accredited nongovernmental organization which represents the collective voice of national Bahá’í communities throughout the world, is also highlighted here, as are activities undertaken by Bahá’ís in their local and national communities. A survey of the media coverage of the Bahá’í Faith, as well as updates on the situation of the persecuted Bahá’í community of Iran and the progress of the construction projects on Mount Carmel at the Bahá’í World Centre are also included.

Regional Spiritual Assemblies has grown from 56 to 174; and the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies has increased from 3,555 to over 17,000. Bahá'ís live in some 235 countries and territories around the planet.

Spiritual and Moral Teachings and Bahá'í Community Life

The force that unites this widely diverse body of people is a unity of vision gained from belief in Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God, in the social and administrative structures He established, and in the spiritual and moral teachings He propagated. Central to these spiritual teachings is the concept that there is only one God and that the major religions of the world have been established by Messengers or Manifestations of this one Divine Reality: Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muḥammad, who have been sent by the Creator progressively throughout history to deliver a divine message commensurate with humanity's stage of development. The spiritual essence of all the major religions, in the Bahá'í view, is the same: that humanity has been created to know and to worship God. Only the religions' social teachings change through the process of this progressive revelation. The Bahá'í perspective is optimistic, seeing the cumulative benefits of progressively revealed religions as fundamental to an "ever-advancing civilization." What divides various religious communities, Bahá'ís believe, comes not from God but from humanity and its accretions to the essential religious teachings brought by each divine Messenger.

In this new stage of humanity's development, the time has come for the recognition of the unity of the human race, for the establishment of the equality of women and men, for the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, and for the realization of the age-old promise of universal peace. Lkening the development of the human race to that of a child, the Bahá'í writings say that we have passed through the stages analogous to infancy and childhood and are now enduring a tumultuous adolescence, on the threshold of maturity. Bahá'u'lláh taught that humanity is destined to come of age, but the course it takes to achieve that goal is entirely in its own hands.

To promote the development of a society in which Bahá'í

ideals can be fully realized, Bahá'u'lláh established laws and moral teachings that Bahá'ís are called upon to follow. Central to these is daily obligatory prayer. Study and meditation upon the Bahá'í sacred writings is also enjoined upon believers each morning and evening. Bahá'ís between the ages of 15 and 70, with the exception of women who are pregnant or menstruating, as well as nursing mothers and the sick, observe a nineteen-day, dawn-to-dusk fast each year. Bahá'u'lláh referred to prayer and fasting as the "twin pillars" of faith, an indication of their importance and the benefits to be gained from them. He also raised work to the level of worship. The main repository of Bahá'u'lláh's laws is a volume entitled the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, or the Most Holy Book.

There are no dietary restrictions in the Bahá'í Faith, but the consumption of alcohol and the use of narcotic and hallucinogenic drugs are forbidden, as they affect the mind and interfere with spiritual growth. Bahá'u'lláh counselled Bahá'ís to be honest and trustworthy, to render service to humanity with an abundance of deeds rather than mere words, to be chaste in their relationships with others, and to avoid gossip and backbiting. He forbade lying, stealing, adultery, sodomy, and promiscuity. The importance of the family is central to Bahá'í community life, as is the moral and spiritual education of children.

Bahá'ís often gather together in their communities to study the sacred writings of their faith and to pray, but a central feature in Bahá'í community life is a meeting called "the Nineteen Day Feast," at which all members join in worship, consult about community affairs, and socialize. For the time being, pending the further development of Bahá'í communities, these meetings often occur in rented facilities, people's homes, or, in some locations, in the local Bahá'í center. The Bahá'í writings call for the erection in each community of a beautifully designed House of Worship, set in exquisite gardens and functioning as a spiritual center of activity. A variety of social and humanitarian institutions are also to be established around it. A Bahá'í House of Worship presently exists on each continent, and sites have been purchased around the world for construction of many more in the

In Kenya's Primary Health Care Course, held from 13 to 25 July 1995 at the Menu Bahá'í Teaching Institute in Bungoma, 24 women and men were trained as primary health workers for their home communities. A Bahá'í development committee held a seminar for community health agents from 22 to 31 May in Kaboke Nundu, Zaire, with participants from Fizi, Mwenga and Uvira. Trainers were provided by the committee and by a nearby hospital.

Mrs. Lyowa of Zambia undertook a similar, two-week training course in March 1995 to become a Bahá'í community health educator. Upon returning home, she cleaned up the family compound, dug a rubbish pit, and held a workshop for the people in her compound and for the teachers in the neighboring high school. She and Jeddah Bradley, a Bahá'í youth from Australia serving in the area, arranged to teach the importance of primary health care and education for children through a four-day program which resulted in the formation of a women's club, called Twikatane (Come Together United). Many of the club members then took steps to improve sanitation in their homes and around their compounds. Mrs. Lyowa and Miss Bradley, joined by five other Bahá'ís, scrubbed and disinfected the women's ward of the Mporokoso District Hospital, and the Local Spiritual Assembly of Mporokoso agreed to adopt a part of the hospital grounds for flower gardens. Mrs. Lyowa and two other Bahá'í community health educators joined another Bahá'í in much-needed volunteer work in the hospital's pediatrics clinic, through which they noticed that the clothes for the patients were being washed by their relatives and put on the ground to dry. This fact was brought to the attention of the Local Assembly, which consequently had a clothesline built outside the ward. In August, a refresher course was held for the Bahá'í health educators, after which there was a special ceremony to unveil on the hospital grounds a plaque declaring that part of the hospital grounds had been adopted by the Bahá'ís of Mporokoso. This prompted a representative of the secondary school to say that the school would also adopt some of the hospital grounds and would go into competition with the Bahá'ís in making the area beautiful. These many improvements in the lives of the people of Mporokoso are

the result of the effort to offer just a short period of training to one woman.

Involvement in the Life of Society

In obedience to the behest of Bahá'u'lláh to "be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements," Bahá'ís the world over are stepping up the tempo of their contributions to dialogue on the issues confronting humanity today.

The Bahá'ís in the Eastern Caroline Islands presented a paper at the recent Federated States of Micronesia Economic Summit held in Pohnpei. The paper, which was entitled "The Purpose of Development and the Decision-Making Process," included concepts from the Bahá'í statements *Turning Point for All Nations* (see pp. 241–83) and *The Prosperity of Humankind* (see *The Bahá'í World 1994–95*, pp. 273–96) and was the only paper offered by a nongovernmental organization.

Jaime Duhart—a Bahá'í and a member of the board of Universidad Bolivariana of Chile—toured a number of Latin American countries this year including Peru, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Cuba. In each country he presented *The Prosperity of Humankind* to nongovernmental organizations, university staff, and other interested groups. His efforts were covered by local media in many of the places he visited.

As a follow up to the Copenhagen Social Summit, the Bahá'ís of Botswana hosted a seminar on human prosperity at the University of Botswana, in Gaborone, on 26 September 1995.

The Cook Islands Bahá'í community of Te Au O Tonga, working with its National Spiritual Assembly, presented *The Prosperity of Humankind* to 150 people, beginning with the Queen's Representative, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, various other ministers, and the country's Arikis (chiefs). On 15 July 1995, a public meeting was held to introduce the statement, which was attended by Pa Arikí—one of the traditional leaders—and the Minister of Health and Tourism. Subsequently, a television program about *The Prosperity of Humankind* was aired by the Bahá'ís, followed two weeks later by the screening of the same program translated into Maori.

Presentations and meetings on the theme of human prosperity were also held in Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Venezuela, Senegal, India, and Guyana. Swaziland hosted a meeting on the subject as one of a series of monthly fora on various related topics.



Presentation of The Prosperity of Humankind in August 1995 to Her Excellency Dame Nita Barrow, Governor General of Barbados, by a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Barbados.

On behalf of the Bahá'í International Community, Guilda Navidi-Walker and Arthur Dahl attended a conference in Bucharest, Romania, called by President Ion Iliescu, entitled the Workshop Worldwatch Conference on Sustainable Development and International Co-operation, and held on 22 and 23 March 1996. Dr. Dahl presented Bahá'í views on the spiritual dimension of sustainable development, which were eagerly received by participants.

The Fourth International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society was convened at the University of Maryland at College Park, from 14 to 17 October 1995. The conference was organized by the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace and the university's Department of History on behalf of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management, and Landegg Academy, and held under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The theme this year was "Divisive Barbarity or Global Civilization: The Ethical Dimensions of Science, Art, Religion and Politics," and the objectives of the dialogue were to find answers to the challenge of building a global civilization

and to inspire action by leaders in all realms of society to realize the proposed solutions. The keynote speaker was the Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, who was followed by five other speakers: His Excellency Amine Gemayal, former President of Lebanon; Her Royal Highness Princess Rahma bint El Hassan of Jordan; Ervin Laszlo, President of the Club of Budapest and International Adviser to the Dialogue; Dr. Bertrand Schneider, Secretary-General of the Club of Rome; and His Excellency Dr. Karan Singh, head of the Auroville Foundation in India and former Ambassador of India to the United States. The final speaker of the session was His Excellency Amata Kabua, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, who delivered a special address. Also in attendance were Ambassador Paul-Marc Henry, Ambassador-at-Large of France; Lily Boeykens, former President of the International Council of Women, and currently the Commissioner of Belgium to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women; Ambassador Tahseen Basheer, Director of the National Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Cairo, Egypt; Edy Kaufman, from the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland at College Park; and Eberhard Zeidler, a prominent North American architect.

The Landegg Academy held a forum on global governance in Germany's Haus der Demokratie on 20 September 1995. Some 40 nongovernmental organizations delivered statements in the presence of more than 200 participants, calling for a variety of measures to reform and restructure the international order and the UN.

The "First European Bahá'í Conference on Law and International Order" was held in the Netherlands this year at the de Poort Conference Center. Presentations addressed such subjects as the Kitáb-i-Aqdas; international law and the new world order; the ethical aspects of crime and punishment; and the coming of world peace. One evening the gathering was visited by two prominent jurists, one working at the State Council and the other at the International War Crimes Tribunal for former Yugoslavia, both of whom offered presentations.

France's Association médicale bahá'íe sponsored a dialogue on the ethics related to medically assisted procreation on 25 November 1995 in Nice. The meeting entitled "Embryo: Who Are You?" benefited from the contributions of a Justice of the Supreme Court and Vice-President of the National French Committee of Ethics, and the Director of the Center of Bioethics at the Catholic University of Lyon.

A National Consultative Workshop on Adolescent Health and Youth Development Programs was held on 11 March 1996 in Quezon City, in the Philippines. A representative of the Bahá'í community actively participated in group discussions and workshops.

Many Bahá'í communities this year put special efforts into observing the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and presenting the statement *Turning Point for all Nations* to government officials, hoping to win wider appreciation for the need to strengthen the United Nations and improve its capacity to coordinate the responses of nations to the challenges facing humanity (see pp. 159–70).

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Russian Federation sponsored a reception to commemorate UN 50, highlighting the *Turning Point* document. Programs were also held in both Bamenda and Limbe, Cameroon, on 24 October, accompanied by presentations of *Turning Point for All Nations* and radio coverage of the events in English, French and a number of vernacular languages.

In April 1996, the Mayor of Velika Gorica, Slovenia, was given a translation of *Turning Point for All Nations* and other Bahá'í literature. Inspired by the contents, the mayor asked the Bahá'ís how to make Velika Gorica a "Model City" in order to promote the idea of world peace, harmony and justice. He also suggested that a series of seminars could be held on world and local governance according to the Bahá'í teachings.

The United Nations-sponsored Human Rights Day was also observed by many Bahá'í communities. The National Spiritual Assembly of Greece hosted a reception in its honor on 7 December 1995 in Athens. The reception was held under the

auspices of the United Nations Information Center in Athens, the main United Nations Office in Greece. The National Assembly of Romania also held such a reception, on 12 December 1995, in the Diplomat Club of Bucharest. Among others, the event was attended by their Excellencies the Ambassadors of Austria, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, and the United Nations. Other prominent guests included some twenty members of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies and over 40 senators. The Bahá'ís of Luxembourg observed Human Rights Day by hosting a reception for prominent people who had assisted Bahá'ís in Iran by defending the community. Bahá'ís were interviewed on Tele Cartagena and on Onda Cera as a result of the Human Rights Day celebration held in Spain, on 12 December 1995, and a long report about the event was aired on Radio Voz. The observance took place at the Regional Bahá'í Center in Murcia, and involved the participation of eight different representatives of various organizations in a round-table discussion about human rights.

A seminar was held for directors of homes for the elderly, at the Blanco Cervantes Hospital in San José, Costa Rica, and was cosponsored by the Bahá'í community and the National Crusade for the Protection of the Elderly. Some 125 directors of such facilities from every part of the country attended, and several asked to have the program repeated in their communities.

A public meeting on the topic of tolerance was held in Mons, Belgium,



The Representative in Greece of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Janvier de Riedmatten, speaking at a UN Human Rights Day reception held by the National Spiritual Assembly of Greece, December 1995.

at the City Hall on 11 December 1995. It was organized by the Bahá'í community.

The European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF) participated in the third annual conference on "Moral and Ethical Principles in a Social Market Economy" from 20 to 22 October 1995 in Sofia, Bulgaria. The event was cosponsored by EBBF, the Bulgarian Association of the Club of Rome, the Institute for Sustainable Development, the College of Management, Trade and Marketing, the Sofia Commodity Exchange, and the National Spiritual Assembly of Bulgaria. Sixteen papers were presented, including four by members of EBBF.

Several national Bahá'í communities had the opportunity this year to contribute to the constitutional processes in their countries. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Gambia sent a representative to public hearings held by the Constitutional Review Committee which took place in the Parliament building and contributed Bahá'í viewpoints on national unity, the equality of men and women, and the use of consultation in governance. The National Assembly of Eritrea submitted its views to the Constitutional Commission in that country. In the Mariana Islands, the Third Constitutional Convention in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands provided that National Assembly with an opportunity to hold a luncheon for the convention delegates during which Bahá'í principles of governance were offered.

In the Netherlands, the newly established Commission for Equal Treatment, which has been given the role of an independent legal consultant able to pass verdicts on disputes submitted to it or refer them to courts of law, has one Bahá'í member out of a total of 24. The Commission is designed to combat all forms of injustice, and will make recommendations to the government and advise judges about how to ensure fair treatment of all people.

The Bahá'í community of Brazil published a document in 1995 addressed to the "new governors and legislators of Brazil." The statement deals with such essential matters as education and the rural population; the advancement of women; leadership and

morality; and the prosperity of humanity. In July 1995 the Bahá'í community of Brazil was invited to send a representative to be a member of the Human Rights and Citizenship Special Commission.

The Bahá'í community of the Canary Islands was one of only a small number of nongovernmental organizations invited to participate in the Tri-Continental Conference of the parliamentary commissioners from Africa, the Americas, and Europe, organized by the parliamentary deputies of the Canary Islands and inaugurated by the King and Queen of Spain. The commissioners consulted on their role in the defence of human rights. The Bahá'ís were able to offer many of the commissioners a document on world citizenship, which was relevant to discussions on the movement of people fleeing poverty and the xenophobia they often face in other countries.

In France, many prominent individuals gathered on 2 May 1995 at the Bahá'í National Center for the presentation of the National Order of Merit to Christine Samandari-Hakim, a Bahá'í of that community. Dr. Samandari-Hakim was elevated by the French Government to the rank of Knight in the National Order of Merit in recognition of her humanitarian activities and her contribution to the promotion of human rights in general.

Recognition

Although the Bahá'í Faith is now represented in virtually every country in the world, the process of obtaining various forms of official recognition continues. In the Cook Islands this year, for the first time Bahá'ís were invited to take part in the religious ceremony for the opening and closing of Constitution Week (30 July and 6 August 1995). The Bahá'í community of Vanuatu succeeded in obtaining on 11 December a certificate of registration under the Religious Bodies Act of 1995. The Faith was also registered in Tonga this year under the Government Incorporated Societies Act, Section 7. In Hong Kong, government authorities have approved the Bahá'í community's application to license the Bahá'í Hall as a place of public worship; thus, Bahá'í marriages conducted there can be legally recognized. The government of St. Eustatius in the Netherlands Antilles has issued a letter to that

Bahá'í community recognizing the Faith as a religion, the Spiritual Assembly of St. Eustatius as the administrative body of the Faith for the Bahá'í community on Statia, and the National Spiritual Assembly of the West Leeward Islands as its regional administrative body. On the local level, the Bahá'í communities of Tallinn, Estonia, and Asmara, Eritrea both succeeded in registering with their national governments.

Landmark Occasions

Occasionally in Bahá'í communities, certain landmark events occur which offer a glimpse of the potency of principles and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. One such event occurred in Burundi, in early 1996. It was reported at that time that the Local Spiritual Assembly of Rohero had been reformed and was actively taking up its duties, Rohero being the zone which includes what is known as downtown Bujumbura. The Assembly elected was made up of two people from the Hutu tribe, three from the Tutsi tribe, three Canadians and one Iranian and, as the report also stated, it, "unlike the rest of the country, meets in absolute harmony."

During Riḍván 1995, the National Convention of Sierra Leone took place, in the face of dangerous civil upheaval, some of the delegates traveling through the most dangerous areas to reach the Convention. The first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Gibraltar was elected that same Riḍván.

On 26 November, 150 people, including members of the media, gathered for a Day of the Covenant celebration held at the University of Liberia's auditorium. The Director of the Catholic radio station (ELCM), Amelia Wreh, was present, as well as a representative from the national radio station (ELBC). Also present were representative journalists from the electronic press media and the *New Patriot Journal*. The keynote address focused on the significance of the Covenant in the Bahá'í Faith, and special prayers for peace in Liberia were read.

The first National Bahá'í Winter School of Estonia was held in December in Parnu. Its attendees came from Sweden, Finland, Latvia and Russia, as well as Estonia. The first National Bahá'í Summer School was held in Perm, Russia, from 11 to 15 August

attracting the participation of 75 Bahá'ís from 12 cities in this landmark occasion.

The National Bahá'í Center of Bulgaria had its official opening in Sofia on 30 September 1995. It was reported that well over 200 Bahá'ís from virtually every region of Zimbabwe congregated at the newly built Bahá'í National Center to witness its official opening on 21 October.

A handful of Bahá'ís joyfully gathered in Tasiilaq, Greenland, from 10 to 12 July for a summer school. The event was characterized by study of the Bahá'í Faith, high spirits and laughter.

The Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute in South Carolina, USA, saw the Ninth Annual Black Men's Gathering in July. Participants from Botswana, Canada, Kenya, Liberia, South Africa, and the United States, engaged in study of the Bahá'í Faith, consultation, prayer and song, in what was described as the largest and one of the most potent of these annual events. This year's gathering was also distinguished by the presence of a large number of fathers and their young adult sons, adding a new vitality to the occasion.

Tirana, Albania, saw the inauguration of a Bahá'í Cultural Center on 25 May, attended by the President of the Albanian Parliament, Pjeter Arbnori, five deputies, a representative of UNICEF, and the first secretary of the Italian Embassy.

The National Spiritual Assembly of Belize established an Office of External Affairs to maintain relationships between the Bahá'í community and both governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

In April 1996, Alice Buffet, the first native Norfolk Islander to become a Bahá'í, presented the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia with the text of a translation into the Norfolk language of the Short Obligatory Prayer which she had prepared. Translation of some of the Bahá'í writings into the Norfolk language was one of Australia's goals for the Three Year Plan.

Sharing the Message of Bahá'u'lláh

The primary motivation for Bahá'ís to teach others about their Faith is their belief that its teachings represent the remedy prescribed by God for the healing and regeneration of human-

kind today. It is against the spirit of the Bahá'í Faith either to impose their religious beliefs on others or to offer material inducements in an effort to "convert" them.

Bahá'í communities often hold conferences, institutes and seminars designed to increase the capacity of individuals and of groups to teach. The Bahá'í community of Lithuania held its first such conference from 28 to 30 December, and it was attended



The Bahá'í Cultural Center, Tirana, Albania.

by people from Poland, Russia, Scotland, Kaliningrad, Denmark and Lithuania, in spite of the many and long delays on public transportation due to the weather. Other such gatherings were held in Liberia, Malaysia, Australia, Cambodia, France, Tonga, India, Sweden, Spain, Turkey, Botswana, and the Faroe Islands.

The Bahá'ís of Australia participated in the annual Port Adelaide Parade in South Australia on Saturday, 25 November 1995 with a float on the theme of unity in diversity. On 20 and 21 May, Bahá'ís of Oulu, Finland, participated in a conference entitled "The Days of Spiritual Growth." The community of Chinamora, Zimbabwe, set up a Bahá'í stand for both days of the Chinamora Agricultural Show, held on 13 and 14 July. The Bahá'ís also had an opportunity to offer musical and dramatic presentations and to say a few words about the Faith.

A special Tanzania/Zambia border conference was held from 9 to 11 June 1995 at Chiwezi village, with the principal aim of introducing the Faith to all the villages around the area, especially to the members of the Sinai Church, a large number of whom became Bahá'ís in recent months and hosted this event.

On 20 August, the first in a new series of programs dedicated to the writings of Bahá'u'lláh was broadcast on Radio Sodre, an

Uruguayan station that can be heard by people throughout the country and in parts of Argentina and Brazil. The series is named *Imagine*.

In Peru the staff of Radio Bahá'í on Lake Titicaca was asked by the Organization of Women in San Cristobal to proclaim the message of Bahá'u'lláh in its town. As part of their effort, the Bahá'ís performed two dramas about equal rights and opportunities for men and women.

Children on the Bahá'í float for the annual Port Adelaide Parade, in Adelaide, Australia, held on 25 November 1995.



Teams of Bahá'í children on the islands of Tabiteuea and Nonouti in Kiribati participated this year in a number of visits to each other's communities for the purpose of sharing the message of Bahá'u'lláh with the people.

Bahá'í students at Ouagadougou University in Burkina Faso participated in an exhibition organized by an association of students of the Science and Economy Faculty and held from 26 to 29 April 1995. A similar informational activity was organized by students of the Faculty of Medicine.

Bahá'ís participated in Havana, Cuba's International Book Fair, held from 7 to 13 February 1996. The exhibition takes place biennially and is a major event in Central America, with more than 30,000 people attending this year. This was the local community of Havana's first opportunity to present the Bahá'í Faith to a broad cross-section of society, and the booth was one of the most popular at the fair. About 100 titles were available at the Bahá'í stall.

The Bahá'í community of Hungary participated in Budapest's International Book and Video Fair this year. The Hungarian Head of State, President Árpád Gönez, visited the Bahá'í stand and was presented with a copy of *The Promise of World Peace* and some additional information. An exhibition of Bahá'í literature was also offered at the State Scientific Library in Liberec, Czech Republic.

Organized campaigns of teaching took place all over the world. Sierra Leone, Madagascar, South Africa, Uganda, and Rodrigues Island (with the efforts of Bahá'ís from Mauritius and the Seychelles) all reported teaching projects. The Light of Unity Campaign in West Africa comprised two teaching groups: a French-speaking drama and dance group, which visited Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Togo; and an English-speaking musical and dance group, which visited Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria. The Enoch Olinga teaching project in the Kumi and Soroti districts of Uganda was kicked off with a special teaching conference. Another teaching project named after the Hand of the Cause Enoch Olinga was operating in Senegal this year. That effort includes literacy classes in several communities, so that new Bahá'ís will be able to read the Bahá'í scriptures for themselves. Women have been the focus of several activities. The Liberian Bahá'í community engaged in a flurry of activity in January 1996, sharing the message of Bahá'u'lláh in Barnersville, Johnsonville, and Schefflin, and holding two study classes in Monrovia.

An unusual campaign of teaching was carried out in Zambia from December 1995 to March 1996. Those who took part were Bahá'ís who were refugees from Rwanda, and they contacted people in the four main francophone compounds around the town of Lusaka. Related initiatives include language classes in the Lusaka Bahá'í Center and ongoing courses for women.

Projects undertaken in the Americas this year included the Cabudare Project in Lara State, Venezuela; a special project in Canada aimed at reaching the East Indian population in British Columbia and Ontario, assisted by the participation of a member of the National Assembly of India; and an ongoing teaching

project in Woodburn, Oregon, United States, which aims at bringing the Bahá'í Faith to migrant workers from Mexico.

In Paraguay, following the success of National Bahá'í Week in July 1995, which involved much radio and television coverage and intensive teaching, the National Spiritual Assembly called for a National Day of Teaching to take place on 17 September. Bahá'ís in many communities responded by holding introductory meetings in their homes and going out to visit interested people.

The community of Nicoll's Town on the island of Andros in the Bahamas has submitted a series of articles which have been printed in the local newspaper, the *Chicharney Times*. Topics covered have included world order, happiness, love, the environment, and agriculture.

The Fazli Teaching Project was initiated in Andhra Pradesh, India, and the Marian Jack VII Project traveled across Russia, Siberia and Mongolia, with participants from Alaska, Canada, Russia and the United States. This year the Bahá'ís of Uzbekistan embarked on a special project to introduce the Faith to the people of Karakalpakstan and to its officials and other prominent people. An effort was made in Japan to acquaint members of media organizations with the true nature of the Bahá'í Faith through an explanatory letter.

In Papua New Guinea a series of traditional teaching projects has been undertaken, each relying on local expressions of culture. Projects and campaigns to reach the indigenous peoples of the Pacific inspired by or growing out of the Ocean of Light Project carried forward efforts to introduce the Bahá'í Faith to traditional chiefs in the Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Tuvalu. The Holy Mariner Project reached out to the Maori people of New Zealand; the Heart of Australia Calling Project made strides in its efforts to reach aboriginal people. Related events included a cultural exchange visit by Maori Bahá'ís from New Zealand to the Amooguna tribe of Napperby, Australia. New Zealand also saw the Ephraim Te Paa Project in Mangere, Auckland, in which Bahá'ís invited interested people to participate in weekly activities.

A mixed group of Uzbek, Tajik, Kazakh, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz Bahá'ís in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, prepares for an activity to share Bahá'u'lláh's message with others, June 1995.



In 1992 a group of Maori Bahá'ís from New Zealand traveled across Canada on their return from the Second Bahá'í World Congress and visited Native American Bahá'ís, finding bonds of commonality wherever they traveled. In 1994 a different group of Maori Bahá'ís traveled from New Zealand to Canada, making contacts with prominent Native American people, encouraging isolated Bahá'ís, and visiting communities. In July 1995 Maori Vision III began with the arrival in British Columbia of a Maori Bahá'í family from New Zealand, with the explicit purpose of teaching the Bahá'í Faith. A reciprocal trip of Native Canadian Bahá'ís to New Zealand was planned.

Efforts to share Bahá'u'lláh's message with the people of the former Yugoslavia have been made in Pula and Zagreb, Croatia; Velika Gorica, Slovenia; Belgrade, Serbia; and in the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia.

Turkish Bahá'ís from Germany and Turkey traveled to the town of Komrad in Moldova from 8 to 12 October 1995 to visit the Bahá'ís there and to help with the teaching work among the Gaugasian people—Moldovans of Turkish background.

In Iceland, a teaching campaign which began in October 1995 each week featured introductory meetings in several locations, a study class, and a public meeting. A "home page" on the World Wide Web was established with information about the Bahá'í Faith given in Icelandic and Faroese. The youth of the Faroe Islands embarked on an effort to bring Bahá'u'lláh's message to the people of Tórshavn and Toftir, while the Hackney Project

in England is resulting not only in declarations of faith in Bahá'u'lláh but also in personal transformation. A successful teaching project was carried out in Nøtterøy and Tønsberg, Norway, from 8 to 10 March 1996, which introduced the Bahá'í Faith to students. 15 to 20 April was "Bahá'í Week" in Lillehammer, and the event evoked a very positive response from the public. Activities included a midnight prayer gathering at the top of the Olympic Park. Local and regional media covered the events.

Communities all across the globe are encountering greater receptivity to the message of Bahá'u'lláh. In Gujarat, India, 95 students of the Vallabh Uttam Buniyadi Girls High School, with the consent of their parents, became Bahá'ís. In the Marshall Islands, training has been provided for those wishing to teach on the outer islands. As a result of the subsequent teaching endeavors over 100 people enrolled as Bahá'ís and four new Local Spiritual Assemblies were formed.

In Bangladesh, partly through the efforts of a youth volunteer, all the inhabitants of 88 villages became Bahá'ís and Local Spiritual Assemblies were elected. In Zambia, a chief and seven



Guests assembled for presentations on the Bahá'í Faith, as part of a traditional teaching project in the Chimbu province of Papua New Guinea, February 1996.

of his family members and visitors became Bahá'ís. Two new Local Spiritual Assemblies were also elected in that area. In Spain a number of Gypsies declared themselves to be Bahá'ís this year. Because of teaching efforts associated with a summer

school in Girne, Cyprus, involving Bahá'ís from both the north and the south of the island as well as from several other countries, a sizeable group of people declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh. Remarkable and dramatic teaching successes have been reported for Guinea-Bissau and Haiti.



*A Bahá'í gathering
in Ulaan Baatar,
Mongolia,
summer 1995.*

During August 1995, three youth from Portugal visited Maputo, Mozambique, initiating workshops and activities for introducing the Faith to the people, and then making themselves available for discussions, resulting in a number of enrollments in the Faith.

More than one hundred Bahá'ís gathered at Shin Hyub Institute near Taejon in South Korea to participate in the summer school held from 28 to 30 July 1995. After this event, a teaching project dedicated to the Hand of the Cause Raḥmatu'lláh Muhájir was launched, during which nine people declared their faith in Bahá'u'lláh, and one new Local Spiritual Assembly was formed.

Institutes

The absence of clergy in the Bahá'í Faith places responsibility on the shoulders of every Bahá'í. As a result, each Bahá'í community needs many individuals who are knowledgeable about the Faith and have the spiritual qualities and other skills and capacities necessary to promote its functioning. It follows that some sort of systematic training is needed to assist people to fulfill their own potentialities. Such a system exists in the Bahá'í community in various forms, one of which is that of the institute.

An institute is not defined by a venue or by paid staff; institutes are simply organizational structures dedicated to systematic training with the purpose of endowing ever-growing contingents of Bahá'ís with the spiritual insights, the knowledge, and the skills necessary to carry out the many tasks occupying the community.

Through the prompting and guidance of the Universal House of Justice, increasing numbers of communities are engaged in this institute process. Due to the large numbers of people who became Bahá'ís in Haiti in the summer of 1995, teams from the Anís Zunúzí School held successful institutes in three of the affected localities during November.

The National Deepening Institute of the Bahá'í community of Kazakhstan held its tenth course from 4 to 10 January 1996, in Almaty. The program was the first which was especially designed to train teachers of children's classes.

Institute courses and programs have also taken place in communities as diverse as Tonga, Singapore, Myanmar, Colombia, Malaysia, the United States, the Solomon Islands, Togo, Uzbekistan, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Brazil, Norway, Niger, and India, among many others.

Scholarship

In Bangladesh, the Institute of Personal Law and Research, which is recognized by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, held its first certificate course on Bahá'í Personal Law in the first week of



*Students attending
the Anís Zunúzí
School in
Port au Prince,
Haiti, 1995.*



A group of Bahá'ís consults on a new Bahá'í radio program during an institute held in Monrovia, Liberia, September 1995.

December 1995. Nineteen people participated, including an assistant attorney general, a former assistant attorney general, and eleven other advocates of the Supreme Court.

The inauguration of Lucknow University's Chair for Bahá'í Studies, endowed by the National Spiritual Assembly of India, took place on 14 December 1995, in the auditorium of the University. His Excellency the Governor of Uttar Pradesh and Chancellor of the University formally inaugurated the Bahá'í Chair, which is situated in the Department of Western History.

Dorothy Nelson delivered the Second Annual Bahá'í Lecture at the University of Maryland at College Park on 15 May 1995. The event was held under the auspices of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace and the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the university. Her paper, "Alternative Forms of Conflict Resolution: A Pathway to Peace," was well received by an audience of over 200, including university administrators, faculty and staff, and Bahá'ís from Washington D.C., Virginia, and Maryland.

An interfaith symposium on religion and the environment, organized by the Association for Bahá'í Studies in Ghana, was held on 26 July 1995, chaired by the Minister of Environment, Science and Technology. Three speakers addressed the gathering on the role of religion in the conservation of nature. This activity was also the inaugural event of the Association.

The fourth annual conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies in Japan took place in Yamaguchi in December 1995, with the theme "Family, Community, and the World." Con-



The Ruhi Institute, Colombia, March, 1996.

ference activities included a display of works by Bahá'í artists, speakers on community development from Tonga, the premiere performance of a play about Lady Blomfield, an early British Bahá'í, and the presentation of a suggested model for the future Japanese House of Worship.

The annual conference of the Association of Bahá'í Studies for English-Speaking Europe was held on 14 October 1995 at the London School of Economics and Political Science, with a theme of "The Role of Morality and Ethics in Society." Workshops were offered on ethics in business, the new morality, and morals and education.

The annual conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, North America, was held for four days in San Francisco, California, in mid-October 1995, with about 800 participants from more than a dozen countries. The theme was "Anarchy into Order: Uniting the Nations." The event featured a seminar for leaders of community organizations outside the Bahá'í Faith to discuss with Bahá'ís various issues related to local community challenges, and it included a number of guest presentations in addition to presentations by Bahá'ís active in community work. The plenary sessions featured the participation of three guest speakers: Justice Frank Newman of the California Supreme Court, who spoke on human rights; Ben Crow of Stanford University, who spoke on global prosperity; and Betty Reardon of Columbia University Teachers College, who spoke on the advancement of women. On the last evening Amin Banani

future. They are open to people of all faiths—or those professing no particular faith—for prayer and meditation. Services are non-denominational. There are no sermons, only readings and prayers from the Bahá'í writings and scriptures of other world faiths and music by an *a capella* choir. This preserves for worshippers the sacredness of the experience of hearing and meditating upon the Holy Word without the interference of man-made concepts.

Aims, Objectives, and Activities

As the Universal House of Justice stated in a message addressed to the peoples of the world, written in October 1985 on the eve of the United Nations International Year of Peace, “Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind.” The ultimate aim of the Bahá'í Faith is the establishment of unity among all the peoples of the world, and it is because of its orientation towards unity on an international scale that the Bahá'í community has been active at the United Nations since that organization's inception. Today the Bahá'í International Community, an extremely active nongovernmental organization (NGO) which represents the collective voice of the national Bahá'í communities around the world, enjoys consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is particularly involved in addressing human rights issues, the needs of women and children, and environmental concerns, as well as pursuing sound sustainable development policies. To coordinate its international efforts in these areas, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office and Office of Public Information, as well as Offices of the Environment and for the Advancement of Women, collaborate with National Spiritual Assemblies around the world in various projects and representations at international gatherings.

The activities of the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations have earned it a reputation as one of the most effective religious NGOs in the UN system. Its national and international representatives have taken active roles in major international events such as the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993, the World Summit for Social

Development in Copenhagen in March 1995, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995.

Beyond the scope of the United Nations, Bahá'ís look towards a day when a new international order will be established, a commonwealth to which all the nations of the world will belong. As Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1936,

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, . . . enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system.

Shoghi Effendi went on to describe the tremendous benefits to humanity resulting from such a world order:

The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.¹

1. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 203–04.

offered the Hasan Balyuzi memorial lecture on the subject of Ṭáhirih.² A four-day children's program emphasizing virtues in everyday life was held in the hotel.

Landegg Academy in Wienacht, Switzerland, this year began to offer Master of Arts programs in ethics, conflict resolution, Bahá'í studies, and spiritual psychology. These programs are oriented along the parameters of a new field of study designated as "Applied Spirituality." Landegg's programs focus on training scholars who are universal in perspective, scientific in approach, ethical in conduct, and humble in attitude.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the United States announced the establishment of a four-year study program focusing on "Spiritual Foundations for a Global Society." The



Program for the inauguration of the Chair for Bahá'í Studies at Lucknow University, Lucknow, India, 14 December 1995.

program aims at imparting knowledge; developing reading, writing, research, analytical, and teaching skills; strengthening the desire to serve others; and fostering Bahá'í identity.

Europe's first Irfán Colloquium in Persian was held in June 1995 at the Bahá'í Permanent Teaching Institute in Acuto, Italy. The word "irfán" in Persian indicates mystical, spiritual, or theological knowledge. Irfán Colloquia, sponsored by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, are devoted mainly to scriptural studies and are conducted separately in English and Persian. Newcastle University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, United Kingdom,

2. Ṭáhirih was one of the disciples of the Báb, called Letters of the Living, and an outstanding heroine of Bábí history. She is renowned for her audacity and courage in championing of the rights of women.

was the venue from 8 to 10 December 1995 for the eighth Irfán Colloquium and the semiannual meeting of the Religious Studies Seminar of the Association for Bahá'í Studies for English-Speaking Europe, cosponsored by the Institute for Bahá'í Studies, Wilmette, United States. The ninth Irfán Colloquium was held at the Bahá'í National Center in the United States from 29 to 31 March 1996, with a theme of "anti-Bahá'í polemic" and ways of responding to it.

Arts

Bahá'í individuals and communities continued to strive this year for excellence in the realm of the arts. A representative sample of efforts is provided below.

In South Africa, as part of the Johannesburg Art Biennial, the Karen Mckerron Art Gallery invited the National Spiritual Assembly to cosponsor an exhibition of art works by the winners of the 1995 awards in honor of Bahá'í artist Reginald Turvey and of a small collection of Turvey's later works. Four works were shown by each of the four merit award winners: Scott Bredin, Belinda Chapman, Arik Reiss, and Hester Pullinger. This year's bursary winner, Henk Serfontein, exhibited thirteen works.

Bahá'ís in Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, organized a multicultural concert and art exhibition from 18 to 24 March 1996. Local radio and a newspaper covered the event.

An exhibition of painting and sculptures by Bahá'í artist Sima Baher de Caballero opened at the National Library in Montevideo, Uruguay, with a ceremony which was attended by almost one hundred people. The theme of the work was "Nature: The Sublime Expression," and the invitation for the exhibition featured Bahá'u'lláh's words "Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world."

Syble Douglas, a Bahá'í from Georgetown, Guyana, participated in November 1995 in the Guyanese Women Artists' Exhibition at Casteleni House, showing some of her paintings. She and her son, Allister Douglas, also mounted an exhibition of paintings and textile art at the Hadfield Foundation Gallery in Georgetown.

Radio Bahá'í Ecuador sponsored "Ñucanchic-Tono," the 15th Andean Music Festival, on 10 September 1995. The event

was attended by more than 3,000 people. On the evening of the first day of the convention for the election of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Baltic States, the Bahá'ís held a Baroque concert in Tallinn, Estonia, with three themes which were expressed through music and through the reading of the words of Bahá'u'lláh in Estonian, Russian, and several other languages. The themes were "Love and Harmony," "Compassion," and "Unity."



Youth who participated in a performance of a play about Lady Blomfield, an early Bahá'í in England, during a meeting of the Association for Bahá'í Studies in Japan.

The musical group Light in the Darkness toured Europe in summer 1995, visiting Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, and Lithuania. The Wilmette Choir performed in Paris, France, on 23 March 1996 as part of a tour of Europe. The Northern Ireland Bahá'í Choir was part of a six-thousand-voice World Choir singing with the Irish National Symphony Orchestra to an audience of over 16,000 people at Landsdown Road Stadium in Dublin in the presence of President Mary Robinson of the Republic of Ireland.

On 18 February 1996, a drama group sponsored by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Kampemba, Zambia, gave a presentation in the town's family center of a cultural play entitled "The White Robe." It demonstrated the importance of spiritual qualities for individuals and institutions.

About three hundred Bahá'ís made their way to Southport, United Kingdom, for the two-day "Arts Awakening" gathering. It included exhibitions, carnival displays, videos, slide shows, a Persian tea garden, and a mural for the children to help paint. In the Performance Café, people shared their poetry, dance, music,

songs and even jokes. The evening "Stage Light" performance included songs from Gershwin, "West Side Story," "The Phantom of the Opera," and "Miss Saigon."

A workshop entitled "Finding Our Creativity" was held in the National Bahá'í Center in Santiago, Chile, this year. A three-day drama and music program entitled "The Dawnbreakers" was held in May 1995 in Sri Lanka, in which stories from *Nabil's Narrative*³ were depicted through drama, poetry, songs, and speech.

In January 1996, over 200 Bahá'ís from various countries visited Reno, Nevada, in the United States, for a weekend of arts and media activities, held in conjunction with the newly formed media and arts association. Events included the multicultural stage presentation "Global Village," in which eighteen differing ethnic and religious groups performed and made presentations to an audience of over 400. NBC television news ran a special segment on the Saturday evening news featuring visual artists and a theater piece. A Bahá'í drama series titled *To Catch a Glimpse* was also filmed in a Reno television studio before an invited audience. The Local Spiritual Assembly of Reno was subsequently invited to work on a state arts foundation to secure a grant for a future exhibition of religious paintings.

3. *Nabil's Narrative* is an early history of the Bábí Faith.

THE BAHÁ'Í
INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY
Activities 1995-96

Bahá'ís have been involved with the United Nations (UN) since its inception. Bahá'í representatives were present in San Francisco fifty years ago when the UN Charter was signed, and the first official observer to the United Nations was appointed in 1947. The Bahá'í International Community was granted consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1970 and with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1976. Over the years, the Bahá'í International Community has become known as an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) actively engaged in efforts to promote the advancement of women, human rights and responsibilities, universal education, and sustainable, participatory approaches to development. The Bahá'í International Community represents more than 5 million people in at least 235 countries and dependent territories and has 174 national and regional affiliates around the world. Its United Nations Office is based in New York with a branch in Geneva, and there are representations to regional UN agencies in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Nairobi, Rome, Santiago, and



United Nations Under-Secretary General Gillian Sorensen, center, receives the statement

Turning Point for All Nations from Bahá'í International Community representatives Bani Dugal, left, and Techeste Ahderom, right.

Vienna. Its Office of Public Information, based at the Bahá'í World Centre and with a branch in Paris, disseminates information about the Bahá'í Faith around the world and oversees the production of an award-winning quarterly newsletter, *One Country*. The Bahá'í International Community has in recent years established an Office of the Environment and an Office for the Advancement of Women as part of its permanent United Nations Office.

Through NGOs like the Bahá'í International Community, the people of the world contribute substantially to the programs and projects carried out under UN auspices. Indeed, one of the great accomplishments celebrated during the United Nations' fiftieth anniversary year was the steadily increasing participation by civil society in the work of the organization, as anticipated and provided for in the opening words of the UN Charter: "We the peoples of the United Nations."

High Points

The fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations (UN 50) provided the Bahá'í International Community and many of its national affiliates an occasion for both celebration and reflection.¹ Reflection on the challenges ahead for the United Nations took a variety of forms. The Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office produced a major statement entitled *Turning Point for All Nations*, which was published as a contribution

1. Celebrations around the world either sponsored or supported by Bahá'í communities and the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office are covered in an article beginning on p. 159 of this volume.

to the consultations about the future of the United Nations during the observation of its fiftieth anniversary. The statement reflects on past accomplishments—and shortcomings—of the UN and recommends modifications in the current structure that could equip the organization to meet the challenges that lie ahead.²

On the same theme, invited guests took part in a one-day seminar entitled "Turning Point for All Nations" to reflect on humanity's collective future. Sponsored by the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office, the seminar touched generally on the need for reform of the UN but focused on two specific issues: peacekeeping and the need for an international auxiliary language. The two dozen individuals from government



Seminar on Turning Point for All Nations held at the Bahá'í International Community's offices at the United Nations in New York, 18 October 1995.

missions, UN agencies, academia, and nongovernmental organizations who attended the seminar generally agreed that any restructuring of the United Nations would require both a long-term vision for the organization and a strong partnership between governments and nongovernmental organizations. "We can't restructure the United Nations without a vision of where we are going," said Ruth Engo, Senior Liaison Officer with the office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries in the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, who chaired the afternoon session.

The keynote address by President Amata Kabua of the Marshall Islands set the tone for discussion by acknowledging that the United Nations had entered a new era and by calling for a

2. *Turning Point for All Nations* is published in its entirety, pp. 241–83.

response at once pragmatic and principled. "The immutable law of change and decay necessitates the need for the United Nations to dispassionately examine its performance, revise its aims, and reassess its structures in a genuine search for practical and long lasting solutions," said President Kabua. "There is no choice. The current political landscape is vastly different from that of fifty years ago. There is now more than a threefold increase in the number of nations with membership in the United Nations. The rapidly increasing desire on the part of civil society and corporations to become more fully engaged in the change process itself has added a prominent dimension to the nature of active agencies in the field."

UN Under-Secretary General Gillian Sorensen, who oversaw the United Nations' fiftieth anniversary commemorations, welcomed ideas for reform, assuring participants that new ideas represented an "opportunity and not a threat" to the organization. The morning session was chaired by John Biggar, first secretary of the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN.

Three presentations laid the groundwork for the consultation. First, Virginia Strauss, executive director of the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, gave an overview of current proposals for UN restructuring. Her talk focused on the response to the recent book, *Our Global Neighborhood*, the report of the Commission on Global Governance. Next, Brian Leopard, an assistant professor of law at the University of Nebraska, reviewed the successes and failures of UN peacekeeping operations over the last 50 years and pointed to the need for public support for a UN force that can respond quickly and impartially to global crises. Finally, Jeffery S. Gruber, a professor of linguistics at the University of Québec, explored how a universal auxiliary language, promoted under UN auspices, could help address the underlying sources of conflict, poverty, and miscommunication that so challenge the international community today.

The concerns of women also emerged as an important theme in the ensuing discussions. "In all the conflicts in the world today, it is men who made the decision in the conflicts and women who are the sufferers," said Misrak Elias, senior advisor,

women's development program, UNICEF. "What would make the force effective and useful is the degree to which women are decision makers." Ms. Elias and others urged that any restructuring of the UN also address underlying issues of conflict. "When I look at issues of peace and violence," Ms. Elias continued, "it is clear to me that conflict among nations has to be closely related to conflict in the country and conflict in the family."

Other participants stressed the practical importance of having a standing force that can step in quickly when efforts to prevent conflict fail. Participants agreed that NGOs have a special responsibility to contribute to a long-term vision for the UN which is based on efforts to eradicate the underlying sources of conflict—whether poverty, human rights violations, or misunderstanding. It is anticipated that this event will be followed by other seminars designed to provide a forum for discussions on the key issues facing humanity at the end of the 20th century.

Human Rights

The protection of human rights, particularly those of Bahá'ís in various parts of the world, is an important part of the work of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Offices in New York and Geneva.³ Protection, however, is only half the work; the other half is the promotion of human rights, including human rights education. Among the human rights issues with which the Bahá'í International Community is actively involved are those of the child, of women, and of minorities, including indigenous people; freedom of religion or belief; and the elimination of racism, genocide, torture, and extreme poverty.

During 1995–96 representatives of the Bahá'í International Community attended and monitored annual sessions of the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in Geneva and the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, presenting statements to these bodies on human rights education; the rights of minorities; and economic,

3. Developments during the past year in the human rights situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran are treated at length in a separate article on pp. 139–44 of this volume.

Environment, Development, and Global Prosperity

At Windsor Castle in the United Kingdom, a Bahá'í delegation joined religious leaders representing nine major faiths at a ground-breaking Summit on Religions and Conservation. The representatives discussed among themselves and with key officials from several major secular institutions how the world's religious communities might become more involved in protecting and preserving the earth's environment.

This auspicious gathering, held from 29 April to 4 May 1995, was the second session of the Summit on the Alliance between Religions and Conservation, sponsored by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Pilkington Foundation, and MOA International, a Japanese humanitarian foundation. The first session was held three weeks earlier in Japan.⁴ Prominent representatives from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Taoism, and the Bahá'í Faith were invited to attend. By one count, the assembled leaders represented more than two billion religious adherents—roughly one third of the earth's population.

The Bahá'í delegation was headed by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum and included Kimiko Schwerin, International Counsellor, and Lawrence Arturo, director of the Office of the Environment. Arthur Dahl attended as a representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Rúhíyyih Khánum's talk, which covered theology, history, environment, the importance of involving children in the work of conservation, and the need for a world parliament, opened the way for substantial Bahá'í contributions during the three days of discussions between secular leaders and the various religious representatives. The discussions produced concrete results, including a plan for religious communities to collaborate with UNEP in monitoring changes in the local environment; and agreements for meetings between religious leaders and key directors of the World Bank, major industrialists, and global broadcasters, both public and commercial.

The 1995 Summit was called primarily to assess the work

4. See *The Bahá'í World 1994–95*, pp. 148–49, for a report of that meeting.

done since 1986 when the WWF convened what was perhaps the first major international interfaith meeting on environmental issues. At that gathering in Assisi, Italy, representatives from five major religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islám—created the Network on Conservation and Religion. In 1987 the Bahá'í Faith joined the network; in 1988, the Sikhs and Jains also became members; and at this meeting the Taoists were welcomed into membership.

“The crucial point of why we held the Summit,” explained Martin Palmer, director of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education and Culture (ICOREC), which organized the Summit on behalf of the three sponsors, “is that some religions—and the Bahá'ís would stand as a notable example here, along with the Buddhists and some Christian groups—have done a tremendous amount of work in promoting conservation since Assisi. They have been busy creating new offices, funding projects, and producing material for their schools.” A major goal of the Summit was to stimulate other religions into action. The final statements of the nine faiths including their action plans were bound and distributed by the WWF.

The Office of the Environment was also heavily engaged in



Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, center, with Buddhist representative Kushok Bakula, left, and Xie Zongxing of the Taoist religion, at the Summit on the Alliance between Religions and Conservation.

preparations for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) scheduled for June 1996 in Istanbul. At the international level, the Office participated in sessions of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the UN conference, where the draft agenda for Habitat II (the Statement of Principles and Commitments and Global Plan of Action) was negotiated; at the national level in Turkey, the Office supported the efforts of the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkey to assist the UN and the NGO organizing committee to prepare for the conference and NGO Forum in June.

Bahá'í participation in the third and final session of the PrepCom, which was held in New York City in February, was marked by a new level of involvement. Although NGOs with consultative status have for a long time been involved in shaping UN programs, documents, and processes, their participation in government meetings has often been strictly constrained, with genuine interaction confined to caucuses and working groups. At this PrepCom, however, as with the second PrepCom in Nairobi, local authorities and NGOs were allowed to offer text from the floor on each paragraph as governments negotiated the specific language of the conference documents. This process was not always smooth, but Dr. Wally N'Dow, the Secretary General of the conference, did not allow the PrepCom to retreat from this procedure even in the face of governmental opposition. The Bahá'í International Community distributed suggested changes to the text of the draft *Habitat Agenda* along with Bahá'í International Community publications *The Prosperity of Humankind* and *World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development*.

At least 14 Bahá'ís took part, including representatives of the European Bahá'í Youth Council, Health for Humanity, and the National Spiritual Assemblies of Brazil, Turkey, and the United States. Bahá'ís actively participated in numerous caucuses including those on family, human rights, Latin America, peace, rights of the child, sustainable societies, urban-rural linkages, the US citizens' network, values, and youth. Many of these caucuses adopted text suggested by Bahá'ís participating in their deliberations.

Advancement of Women

The Office for the Advancement of Women was deeply involved in the process leading up to and including the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the parallel NGO Forum in Huairou. Held in September 1995, twenty years after the United Nations convened its first global conference on women in Mexico City, the conference and the accompanying forum for nongovernmental organizations drew more than 500 Bahá'í women and men from around the world.⁵

As part of the preparations for the Conference in Beijing, a survey of the participation of women in Bahá'í community life—the third such survey in 20 years—was conducted by the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women. The survey found that the percentage of women in positions of leadership in the Bahá'í Faith compares favorably with the percentage of women in positions of political leadership worldwide. Women compose on average about 30 percent of the elected membership of national-level Bahá'í governing councils and some 47 percent of the membership in special Bahá'í appointed positions for the sub-national and regional level. The average percentage of women members in the world's parliaments is about ten percent, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

While these percentages fall short of an idealized 50 percent, they reflect the earnest efforts of a highly diverse worldwide community to live up to and put into practice a religious value that often runs counter to traditions and culture. "The equality of women and men is a cardinal principle for Bahá'ís," said Rebequa Getahoun, one of the team that conducted the survey for the Office for the Advancement of Women. "The fact that women compose an average of 30 percent of our elected governing councils at the national level shows the degree to which Bahá'ís—who use secret ballots when voting—have already begun to overcome traditional prejudices."

5. See pp. 145–58 for a full report of these activities. The text of the Bahá'í International Community statement distributed to all delegates at the Conference is on pp. 285–87.

“Further,” Ms. Getahoun continued, “the fact that appointed positions do approach a 50/50 ratio shows that the community’s leadership is making an earnest effort to further combat the trends in society at large.” A report of the results of the survey appear in a book, *The Greatness Which Might Be Theirs: Reflections on the Agenda and Platform for Action for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Equality, Development and Peace*. Published by the Office for the Advancement of Women, this compilation of essays and Bahá’í International Community statements offers a Bahá’í perspective on nine of the twelve topics on the agenda of the conference in Beijing. Distributed in Beijing in English and Chinese, it is now available in both French and Spanish as well.

Around the world, national Bahá’í communities are promoting the advancement of women as an effort to influence the processes toward peace. Offices for the Advancement of Women have been established in Australia, Canada, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, and Puerto Rico. With support from the Bahá’í International Community’s Office for the Advancement of Women, national Bahá’í communities are strengthening relations with their governments, UN agencies, and organizations of civil society by advancing this principle.

Recently the crisis in the family has drawn the attention of governments and NGOs alike. On this topic, 1995 saw the release of a publication entitled *The Violence-Free Family: Building Block of a Peaceful Civilization*, the text of which is based on the keynote address by H.B. Danesh, M.D., to the Symposium on Strategies for Creating Violence-Free Families, an event initiated in 1994 by the Bahá’í International Community and cosponsored by UNICEF and UNIFEM. The book, an Association for Bahá’í Studies publication, was distributed widely at the Fourth World Conference on Women, to all UN missions in New York, and to all Bahá’í National Assemblies.

Building on the success of last year’s symposium in New York, a number of spin-off seminars on Creating Violence-Free Families have been held at the national and regional levels. For example, the Bahá’í community of Antigua, in collaboration

with UNIFEM, cosponsored a symposium in May 1995, at which 31 participants, including representatives of 11 Caribbean nations and UNICEF, gathered to consult on strategies for eradicating family violence. The Bahá’í community reported heartening results: “One participant shared afterwards that all her life she has been angry, fighting injustice, and that she dreads meetings about violence against women because they reactivate her anger. At this meeting, she added, she realized for the first time that love was a much more effective way to address the problem, and that this is the first meeting on this subject that she is leaving with a sense of hope.”

One effort made in a number of communities to change family dynamics has been the Traditional Media as Change Agent project, which seeks to improve the status of women by changing the attitudes and behavior of men. The project was undertaken in Bolivia, Malaysia, and Cameroon, with funds from UNIFEM. The first phase of the project was completed in 1993, and responsibility for the second phase of the project was transferred to national communities. In Cameroon, part of the second phase was a formal evaluation which found evidence in project villages that men have begun assisting their wives with tasks usually considered to be women’s work, that women are becoming more involved in community affairs, and that beliefs about male and female attributes related to work and making decisions are changing. Further, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) funded a mill for grinding grain to ease the burden of work borne by women.

Because of its ongoing involvement in development in many parts of Africa, the Bahá’í International Community was one of a select group of NGOs invited to participate in the midterm review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s to take place in September 1996. When asked to submit a report on exemplary Bahá’í development projects in Africa, the Bahá’í International Community selected two: the Traditional Media as Change Agent project in Cameroon and the Masethla Institute in Zambia, which operates the Banani Rural Secondary School for Girls.

Meetings

Meetings and UN sessions monitored by the Bahá'í International Community during 1995–96 included the Commission on Sustainable Development in New York; the Commission on the Status of Women in New York; the Substantive Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council; the meeting of the UNICEF Executive Board in New York; and Planning Meetings of the Second Biennial Session of the Youth Forum of the United Nations System in New York and in Brussels.

Much of the work of NGOs in consultative status is carried out through NGO committees which address specific issues. During this last year, a Bahá'í International Community representative chaired the New York NGO Committee on Human Rights and another chaired the New York NGO Committee on the Family.

Conclusion

The Bahá'í International Community, working with National Spiritual Assemblies around the world, undertook numerous and varied activities during 1995–96, mainly focusing on women, the environment, and human rights. Certain highlights, such as the Fourth World Conference on Women, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the Summit on the Alliance between Religions and Conservation, marked the year, but numerous other endeavors, enacted on a smaller scale in various parts of the globe, also helped the Bahá'í International Community pursue its cherished goal of promoting the establishment of a peaceful planetary civilization.

Update: The Situation of THE BAHÁ'ÍS IN IRAN

The 300,000-member Iranian Bahá'í community has suffered severe persecutions since the ascendancy of the Islamic Revolutionary Government in 1979. In the past seventeen years, 201 Bahá'ís have been killed or executed, fifteen are missing and presumed dead, and hundreds have been imprisoned. Property confiscations (totaling 150 in the city of Yazd last year alone), dismissal from public sector employment, expulsion from institutions of higher learning, discriminatory treatment in the judicial system, arbitrary arrests, and prohibition of all forms of religious community life, including worship meetings, are some of the difficulties experienced by this beleaguered community. In recent years, more than one hundred Bahá'ís throughout the country have been arrested, detained for periods ranging from 48 hours to six months, and then released, in an effort to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear in the community. Numerous cases of torture and summary trials have been documented. As of March 1996, eight Bahá'ís were in prison, three under sentence of death. The situation of the Iranian Bahá'í community continued to receive the close attention of the United Nations

To make its aims and objectives widely known and to promote its perspective on various issues, the Bahá'í International Community has been active not only in collaborating with like-minded organizations in and out of the United Nations but has also been engaged in public relations efforts designed to bring spiritual and social principles of the Faith to the attention of the generality of humankind. Information about the Bahá'í Faith became much more widely disseminated than it had been as international news media reported the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran which came in the wake of the 1979 Iranian revolution. More than 200 members of the Faith were executed for their belief, considered as heresy by the regime, and thousands more were imprisoned, fired from their jobs, or had their homes confiscated or their pensions cut off as a result of government orders. Bahá'ís around the world responded in unity to the situation in Iran—the land in which their religion was born—by petitioning their governments to take action against this treatment; and it is, to some degree, as a result of these efforts that the persecutions were not more extreme. Executions have ceased, although Iran's Bahá'ís are still denied fundamental rights and freedoms.

The Bahá'í community has also taken a proactive approach in promulgating its views. The statement on peace issued by the Universal House of Justice in 1985, entitled *The Promise of World Peace*, sparked a worldwide campaign of presentations and public education projects that lasted throughout the International Year of Peace and beyond and encompassed government figures and leaders of thought, as well as the general population. To mark the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's passing in 1992, the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information published *Bahá'u'lláh*, a statement about the Faith's Founder, detailing His life, His teachings, and His mission. Events of the year itself, notably the commemoration in the Holy Land in May 1992 of the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, involving some 3,000 participants from all over the world, and the Bahá'í World Congress held in New York City in November 1992, which attracted some 27,000 Bahá'ís from around the globe, caused much publicity for the Faith. In January 1995, the Office of Public

Information released another major statement on social development, entitled *The Prosperity of Humankind*. Widely disseminated at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995, the statement promises to lead to further engagement of the Bahá'í community with leaders of thought in this field. Most recently, a statement entitled *Turning Point for All Nations* was released to contribute to the discussions on the future of the United Nations that marked the organization's fiftieth anniversary.²

Aside from large-scale public relations activities and the publication of statements on different themes, the Bahá'í community has been continually engaged in a series of international teaching plans, and it has seen rapid expansion in different parts of the world, most notably in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where national Bahá'í communities have been established in recent years following the collapse of long-standing political barriers. Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the former USSR were the first, in 1991; Albania, Azerbaijan, the Baltic States, Central Asia, Hungary, Poland, and Russia, Georgia, and Armenia, as well as the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, followed in 1992. In 1994 five National Assemblies, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, were established where the single community of Central Asia had existed before. Slovenia and Croatia also elected their first Regional Spiritual Assembly, and National Spiritual Assemblies came into existence in Cambodia and Mongolia. Five National Assemblies were formed in 1995 as well—Armenia, Georgia, and Belarus each formed its own National Assembly, as did Eritrea and Sicily.

The existence and growth of the Bahá'í community offers irrefutable evidence that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work together in harmony. While Bahá'ís are not unaware of the turmoil in the world surrounding them, their view is succinctly depicted in the following words, taken from *The Prosperity of Humankind*:

2. See pp. 241–83 for the full text of this statement.

during 1995–96, particularly in reports issued by the Special Representative on Iran and the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, and the sentencing of another Bahá'í to death on the charge of “religious apostasy” prompted a number of governments around the world to further action.¹

The Case of Dhabíhu'lláh Maḥramí

In the winter of 1995–96, the Bahá'í community learned that a Bahá'í in the city of Yazd in Iran, Mr. Dhabíhu'lláh Maḥramí, had been charged with religious apostasy, or abandoning the Faith of Islám. The Bahá'í community was permitted to hire a lawyer to defend Mr. Maḥramí, a right that has only been recently granted to Bahá'ís. While the defense did not succeed in freeing Mr. Maḥramí and the death sentence was passed on him on 2 January 1996, Iran's Supreme Court rejected the Revolutionary Court's decision on the grounds that it was incompetent to hear the case. The case was then referred to the civil court in Yazd, from which a verdict has still not been heard.

When the facts of the case involving Mr. Maḥramí became known around the world, Bahá'í communities took a variety of actions. One result was the adoption by the European Parliament of a resolution on human rights abuses in Iran, which made reference to the suffering of the Bahá'ís in Iran and to Mr. Maḥramí's case in particular. Bahá'í communities in Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States all received support from their governments. Significant media coverage included short pieces in *Le Monde* and *Libération* in France, and Reuter and AFP (Agence France Presse) publicized the story. The BBC World Service Persian Service, the BBC World Service Arabic Service, and other arms of the British Broadcasting Corporation also reported the story.

1. For a detailed account of these human rights violations, see “The Case of the Bahá'í Minority in Iran” by Douglas Martin, in *The Bahá'í World 1992–93*, pp. 247–71. See also “Update: The Situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran” in *The Bahá'í World 1993–94*, pp. 139–45, and in *The Bahá'í World 1994–95*, pp. 133–38.

Other actions regarding the situation of Iran's Bahá'ís

Bahá'í communities around the world also wished to make the general situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran better known to their elected representatives. In Uruguay, this resulted in three senators urging a favorable vote supporting the human rights of Iran's Bahá'ís, in which they stated, “A vote in this sense will not only be in accordance with the country's tradition, but shall encourage the members of this community to continue their benevolent work within Uruguay and the rest of the world.” The Great and General Council of the Republic of San Marino unanimously approved a proclamation condemning persecutions against the Bahá'í community of Iran.

A special exhibit documenting responses by the United States and other countries to the repression of the Bahá'í community in Iran was displayed in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., in early May 1995. At a reception held to mark the exhibit's opening, the American Bahá'í community honored Representatives Ben Gilman and Lee Hamilton. Together with Representatives John Edward Porter and Tom Lantos, who sponsored the current exhibit, Messrs. Gilman and Hamilton have been leading backers of a series of congressional resolutions calling on the U.S. government to work to extend internationally recognized human rights to the Bahá'ís in Iran.



The exhibit “Defending Religious Liberty” in the Cannon Rotunda of the U.S. House of Representatives, May 1995.

United Nations

Again this year, the Bahá'í International Community was successful in appealing for the assistance of the United Nations. The 50th Session of the UN General Assembly's latest resolution condemning the human rights situation in Iran once more makes specific mention of the Bahá'ís. The Bahá'í International Community also presented statements to both the 52nd Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights and to the 47th Session of the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Perhaps most notable, however, was the release of two significant reports which mentioned the Iranian Bahá'í community in some detail.

Report of the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance

The report of the new United Nations Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, Abdelfattah Amor of Tunisia, to the 52nd Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights regarding religious intolerance in the Islamic Republic of Iran devotes a section to the Bahá'í situation, outlining aspects of discrimination in the religious, sociocultural, educational, and professional fields, in the field of justice, and in the security of persons. Noting the banning of Bahá'í administrative institutions in Iran since 1983, the report concludes that "Since, by virtue of its fundamental principles, the Bahá'í faith [has] no clergy, the very existence of the Bahá'ís as a viable religious community [is] apparently being threatened in the absence of those institutions." The Special Rapporteur makes a number of significant recommendations concerning the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. First, he states: "Considering the religious principles of the Bahá'í community, the Special Rapporteur believes that there should not be any controls that might, through prohibition, restrictions or discrimination, jeopardize the right to freedom of belief or the right to manifest one's belief." The report continues:

For this reason, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the ban on the Bahá'í organization should be lifted to enable it to organize itself freely through its administrative institutions, which are vital in the absence of a clergy, and so that it can engage fully in its religious activities. Likewise, all the

community and personal property that has been confiscated should be returned and the places of worship that have been destroyed should be reconstructed, if possible, or, at least, should form the subject of compensatory measures in favor of the Bahá'í community. The Bahá'ís should also be free to bury and honor their dead. Concerning freedom of movement, including departure from Iranian territory, the Special Rapporteur believes that the question on religion should be deleted from passport application forms and that this freedom should not be obstructed in any way.

Further recommendations are that no discrimination should bar Bahá'ís from study in universities or from employment in the governmental or private sectors, that "the physical integrity of any person should not be affected by the person's religion or belief," and that death sentences passed on Bahá'ís should be reviewed or set aside through amnesties or other appropriate measures. To address problems faced by Bahá'ís and members of other religious minorities in the judicial system, the report recommends that judicial and administrative personnel should be trained in human rights, "particularly with regard to tolerance and non-discrimination based on religion or belief."

Report of the Special Representative on Iran

Maurice Danby Copithorne of Canada, appointed as the new United Nations Special Representative on Iran to replace Professor Reynaldo Galindo-Pohl, also submitted a report to the 52nd Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, an eight-paragraph section of which focuses specifically on the Bahá'ís. This section opens with an endorsement of Professor Amor's recommendations concerning their situation.

Some specific instances of discrimination against Bahá'ís in the judicial system are detailed, including a case in September 1995 where the family of a deceased person was not permitted rights of succession because they are Bahá'ís and another case in May 1995 when people found guilty of manslaughter were exempted from paying "blood money" to the victims' families because the deceased and other family members are Bahá'ís. Instead, the defendants were ordered to pay money to a government fund. Another case, where an individual was denied reinstatement to a

job from which he had been dismissed unless he renounced his Faith in a “widely distributed newspaper,” is cited by the Special Representative as an example of discrimination in employment against the Bahá'í community. A crucial concern, as noted by the Representative, is “the right of the Bahá'í community to maintain its administrative institutions.” The Special Representative concludes that “Overall, while there appears to be some improvement in the lot of the Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic of Iran, there continue to be grave breaches of human rights, which in the Special Representative’s view are only likely to disappear with a significant change of attitude on the part of the Iranian authorities.”

Report of the UN Secretary General

The United Nations Secretary General’s report on “The Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities,” also submitted to the 52nd Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, comments in two paragraphs about the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran, reiterating the request “that careful consideration be given to the legal situation of Bahá'ís who [are] in prison, particularly those who [have] been sentenced to death or accused of apostasy,” and demanding an end to the harassment and discrimination faced by Bahá'ís.

Conclusion

During 1995–96, the plight of Iran’s Bahá'í community, and specifically that of Mr. *Dhabíhu'lláh Maḥramí*, was well documented through the reports of the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance and the Special Representative on Iran. Governments, encouraged by many Bahá'í communities, once again voiced their opposition to the injustice suffered by this religious community. While the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran remains that of an oppressed minority, the spotlight shone upon them by the world’s governments and media has not only reminded people in all parts of the globe of their suffering, but also appears to have constrained the level of their persecution.

EQUALITY,
DEVELOPMENT,
AND PEACE:

Bahá'ís and the United Nations
Fourth World Conference on Women
and NGO Forum

United by their belief that full and equal partnership between women and men is necessary to bring about the peace that humanity desires, some 500 Bahá'ís—of both sexes—made what were in many cases long and difficult journeys to China in the fall of 1995. Their goal was to contribute to two gatherings of monumental proportions called by the United Nations to address the existing inequalities which continue to prevent the realization of full partnership. Representing a diverse worldwide community with a 150-year commitment to promoting equality,¹ they came from more than 50 countries and a wide range of occupations, ages, and backgrounds, from a Russian reindeer herder to a United States appellate court judge to a 16-year-old author from Malaysia. They came to share, learn, celebrate, contribute, and be of service, and to offer hope that true equality can be achieved.

1. For an overview of this history, see *The Bahá'í World 1993–94*, pp. 237–75.

It would have been easy for them to be daunted by the gravity of the world situation they came to address. Just two weeks prior to the opening of the Forum, a new study of the status of women worldwide was released, and it showed that in no country are women offered the same education and health opportunities as men, women seriously lag behind men in economic and political status, and violence against women is rampant. The study was prepared by independent experts commissioned by the United Nations Development Program to gather statistics on women for international comparison. It found that more than 900 million women are living in poverty; an estimated 1 million children, mostly girls, are forced into prostitution annually; an estimated 1 in 6 women in several major Western countries is raped during her lifetime; and women occupy only 14 percent of top managerial jobs in the world, 10 percent of national legislative seats, and 6 percent of cabinet level positions. The report estimated the annual value of the unpaid and underpaid work done by women to be \$11 trillion.

In the foreword to the report, United Nations Development Program administrator James Gustave Speth wrote that the report is "a major indictment of the continuing discrimination against women in most societies." He also asserted that "investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development."

The Bahá'í community shares the view that the status of women is not a "women's issue" but is fundamentally linked to the well-being and progress of all people. As the Universal House of Justice wrote in 1985 in a statement addressed to the peoples of the world, "Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge." This was the central concept which Bahá'ís shared at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing 4–15 September 1995 and at the NGO (nongovernmental organization) Forum on Women which began several days earlier in nearby Huairou.

The NGO Forum

The "sudden emergence of a university, full of highly intelligent, intensely curious women learning all about everything," was how one participant characterized the NGO Forum on Women '95, held 30 August to 8 September 1995, with the theme "Equality, Development and Peace." Despite press emphasis on the logistical problems associated with the site chosen for this companion event to the UN conference for government leaders, Bahá'í participants reported that the opportunities for exchange in Huairou were unprecedented and the extraordinary capacity demonstrated by the approximately 30,000 women and men who attended testified to the progress underway and the potential for even greater change.

The Forum opened with a ceremony on the theme of peace which involved 5,000 performers, the release of 20,000 doves, and the arrival of a peace torch which had begun its journey in Africa. Then the representatives of more than 2,500 NGOs and community-based organizations proceeded to share their ideas and experiences with each other through some 5,000 workshops, seminars, and other activities. The Forum marked the culmination of two years of regional fora organized to help NGOs develop recommendations for presentation to governments at the Fourth World Conference.

Bahá'í participation in the Forum also began years before the actual event. The Director of the Bahá'í International Community Office for the Advancement of Women, Mary Power, chaired the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in New York from 1991 to 1995 and served on the Global Forum Facilitating Committee responsible for organizing the Forum. Another Bahá'í, Giovanni Ballerio, chaired the NGO Forum Working Group of the Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva. A Bahá'í International Community representative also acted as Rapporteur for the Asia/Pacific NGO Working Group in Bangkok. All over the world, Bahá'í communities participated in the regional forums leading up to Huairou.

Once the Forum began, Bahá'í participants put their energy into three main areas: sponsoring workshops, maintaining a special "Quiet Space" to meet participants' needs for a calm

environment in which to reflect and meditate, and volunteering to help the entire event run smoothly.

Bahá'ís sponsored, coordinated, or organized more than 30 workshops at the Forum. The Bahá'í International Community, as an NGO, cosponsored "Community Reconstruction: A Consensual Framework for Global Peace and Security" with the International Peace Research Association and the Association of African Women on Research and Development. Participants examined the components of a paradigm of global security, exploring the practice of conflict resolution, the concept of consultation, and the processes of reconciliation and reconstruction as vital aspects of community building and social reintegration. The Bahá'í International Community also offered a video presentation and discussion about the Traditional Media as Change Agent project undertaken in Bolivia, Cameroon, and Malaysia in cooperation with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to help local communities use theater, dance, songs, and storytelling to examine and change existing attitudes about gender roles. A workshop presenting program models that aim to address gender roles in the family was also cosponsored by the Bahá'í International Community with UNICEF, the YMCA, and Save the Children, and another workshop called "The Right to Food" was convened by BIC and presented by Advocates for African Food Security.

Among the topics addressed by other Bahá'í agencies in their workshops were consultation in the family; young women and a violence-free society; the impact of development on indigenous families; women, work, and family; and women and men in partnership promoting equality. Some of these presentations were made by Bahá'í institutions, such as the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Greece, and others were made by organizations founded by Bahá'ís, such as l'Association médicale bahá'íe. In one case, a Bahá'í agency, the Office for the Advancement of Women of the Bahá'í Community of Malaysia, was appointed as a South East Asian Focal Point for Family and Young Women's Issues for the Forum, and in that capacity presented several workshops.

Whenever Forum participants found the need for some time away from the lively exchange of some 30,000 voices, they were able to make use of "The Quiet Space." Facilitated by the Bahá'í International Community at the request of the NGO Forum Office, the space was arranged with flowers and potted plants placed amidst the chairs, a rug on the floor, and quiet music from different parts of the world playing in the background. Hanging in the tent was an 8' x 12' tapestry called "Threads of Unity" created by artist Vickie Hu Poirier with contributions from more than 60 Bahá'ís; the design included Bahá'í quotations in a variety of languages woven throughout. Many people came regularly to "The Quiet Space" and often expressed their appreciation for having such a haven.



"The Quiet Space," facilitated by the Bahá'í International Community at the NGO Forum in Huairou. See p. 81 for a photograph of the tapestry "Threads of Unity" which was displayed in "The Quiet Space."

Volunteers at the Bahá'í International Community booth at the NGO Forum on Women '95 in Huairou.



Prior to the Forum itself, as Bahá'ís prepared themselves for the event, it was suggested that those who would participate might draw inspiration from the figure of Bahíyyih Khánúm, daughter of Bahá'u'lláh and an example to all women of how leadership and strength can be combined with humility and service to humanity. Thus when they arrived at the Forum, a number of Bahá'ís found that a natural way of expressing Bahá'í principles and ideals was to use their talents in service to their fellow attendees. One Bahá'í acted as a facilitator of scores of volunteers, helping to link them with needs throughout the Forum. The volunteers also helped make possible distribution of the daily NGO newspaper, managed the marketplace at which women from all over the world sold their crafts, and assisted with maintaining the atmosphere of "The Quiet Space."

Among the Bahá'í participants at the Forum were approximately 50 youth. In addition to volunteering and participating in activities throughout the Forum, the Bahá'í Youth Workshop from the United States—a diverse group of young people who use the performing arts to promote the principles of racial and sexual equality and the oneness of humanity—performed five times during the Forum, including once at a youth arts night before 500 people. They also presented "Partnership is the Key: Young Women and Young Men as Agents of Change," a panel discussion and question and answer period on developing attitudes of partnership within the Bahá'í Youth Workshop and the potential of the Workshop as a social and educational development tool. At the Forum's closing ceremonies, before a crowd of 15,000, the Workshop performed a dance portraying the need for both sexes to work together to achieve equality and a rap on the nobility and dignity of women. Members of the group were enthusiastically approached for more information by people from the Bougainvillea Islands in the South Pacific who were trying to find ways to stop gang violence; by others from Pakistan examining the role teenage boys play in the self-esteem of girls; and by a woman living as a refugee in Kenya who uses the arts to address the trauma of children in refugee camps.

The youth from Malaysia also played a significant role in the Forum. They offered a workshop on the increasing burden of

poverty on young women, and the final speech of the youth presentation at the closing ceremonies was given by Malaysian Bahá'ís Kim Siew Yen and Anyssa Ludher.

The torrential rains which regularly flooded some NGO tents at the Forum and the difficulties associated with the relatively late move of the Forum site from Beijing to Huairou did not in the end prevent the women and men who attended from carrying out the important work they had come to accomplish. "The tone of the women present at the closing of the NGO Forum is one of confidence and determination," wrote Dr. Elizabeth Bowen in one of a series of reports sent electronically to fellow members of Health for Humanity and through SatelLife to health care providers in Africa, Asia, Australia, and Canada. "The sense of unity and appreciation of diversity among the women in their quest for justice is impressive." The NGO Forum '95 provided more evidence of the truth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, spoken in 1912: "The world in the past has been ruled by force... But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be...an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced."

The United Nations Conference

Halfway through the NGO Forum, the Fourth World Conference on Women began at the Beijing International Conference Center. Although this Conference was organized to give government representatives an opportunity to forge a Platform for Action, nongovernmental agencies continued to play vital roles in the process. In fact, the Conference, held 4–15 September 1995, was described by conference officials as the largest international meeting ever convened under United Nations auspices, with some 17,000 people registered, including 5,000 delegates from 189 states and the European Union, 4,000 NGO representatives, and more than 3,200 members of the media. While continuing their educational and networking activities in Huairou, NGOs also contributed substantively to the conference in Beijing through direct participation in the debate about the Platform for Action. In

a message to the conference, United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali called this a demonstration of "the new partnership in international life which has been forged between governmental and nongovernmental organizations" and of the "new legitimacy of the organizations of civil society as actors on the international scene."²

Seven Bahá'í delegations were accredited to the conference: the Bahá'í International Community, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, the Bahá'í community of the Netherlands, the Bahá'í community of Canada, l'Association bahá'ie de Femmes (France), l'Association médicale bahá'ie (France), and the National Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women (Nigeria). In addition, two organizations founded by Bahá'ís sent delegations: Health for Humanity and Women for International Peace and Arbitration. Individual Bahá'ís were also selected to serve on the delegations sent by their countries.

The conference was called by the United Nations to review progress made toward implementation of the "Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women" adopted at the Third World Conference in Nairobi in 1985. By the end of the conference in Beijing it was determined that much remains to be done, and the government representatives adopted a Declaration and Platform for Action aimed at launching a global campaign to bring women into full and equal participation in all spheres of public and private life worldwide. The Platform addresses twelve critical areas of concern: poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, economic structures, power sharing and decision-making, mechanisms to promote the advancement of women, human rights, the media, the environment, and the girl child.

Caucuses were held on each of these issues, as well as on the common issues being faced by various regions of the world.

2. The role played by NGOs at international United Nations conferences has continued to grow significantly during the last several years, as witnessed by their prominence at the World Summit for Social Development. For a description of Bahá'í International Community involvement at that Summit, see *The Bahá'í World 1994-95*, pp. 37-46.

Through participating in these caucuses, NGO representatives were able to work collectively to develop language which could be recommended to the governmental working groups for inclusion in the Platform for Action. Brenda Maxwell, one of the delegates representing the Bahá'í community of Canada, worked long hours drafting a statement for the health caucus. Patricia Locke, representing the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, was elected chair of the indigenous women's caucus.

Two members of the Women for International Peace and Arbitration, an organization founded by Bahá'ís, played key roles in the peace caucus, helping to draft a statement which was delivered orally to the Conference. A portion of the statement read: "Equality is one of the most important though less acknowledged prerequisites to peace. Therefore, women must participate fully in all stages of peace processes and negotiations. From peace education, preventive diplomacy, non-violent peace building and peacekeeping to post-conflict peace building, women's skills and experience as mediators and conciliators in all spheres of society will make a qualitative difference in the effectiveness of these activities."

The selection of the girl child as one of the twelve priority areas of concern to be addressed in the Platform for Action was particularly gratifying to the Bahá'í International Community, whose members had worked for years to draw attention to this subject. As far back as the early 1970s, after the Bahá'í International Community became accredited to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and became an NGO observer at meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, it submitted a statement to the Commission calling attention to the importance of educating girls. In the early 1980s, a strong statement was made to the UNICEF Executive Board supporting the initiative taken by UNICEF's Women's Senior Programme Advisor to advocate for the girl child, and the Bahá'í International Community worked closely with UNICEF to promote awareness of the needs of girl children. In Geneva, BIC representative Giovanni Ballerio worked with representatives of the



A diverse group of participants at the NGO Forum on Women '95, held in conjunction with the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, September 1995.

International Federation of University Women and other international NGOs to promote inclusion of this issue in the Beijing Platform for Action. He also promoted the importance of the issue at the Economic Commission for Europe Preparatory Conference in Vienna in October 1994 and the final session of the UN Preparatory Committee in New York in March 1995. Continuing its work after the Beijing conference, the Bahá'í International Community gained representation on UNICEF's NGO Working Group on the Girl Child.

In addition to participating in issue caucuses, the Bahá'í International Community distributed a statement entitled "The Role of Religion in Promoting the Advancement of Women" to all delegations represented at the conference. The statement was going to be presented orally at the Conference, as the Bahá'í International Community had been one of approximately 50 NGOs selected to speak, but at the last moment organizers requested that a slot be relinquished to the Moscow Center for Gender Studies which was represented for the first time at a world conference. Given the importance of Eastern European women's gaining recognition for the challenges they face, the Bahá'í International Community decided to offer its place on the program and distribute its statement in print form only.

Applauding the fact that the Platform for Action addresses the advancement of women from the standpoint of moral principle and not just pragmatism, the Bahá'í International Community asserted in the statement that if the Platform is to receive the

worldwide support it requires for implementation, "the equality of men and women needs to be understood as an essential aspect of an even broader principle: the oneness of humanity. Properly understood in the context of the oneness of humanity, equality of the sexes must be embraced not only as a requirement of justice but as a prerequisite for peace and prosperity. Nothing short of a compelling vision of peace, and commitment to the values on which it must be based, will have the power to motivate the revolutionary changes in individual behavior, organizational structures, and interpersonal dynamics called for by the Platform for Action."

Specifically addressing the role of the religious community in this process, the Bahá'í International Community stated, "Because religion is such a potentially powerful force for progress, religious leaders and people of faith everywhere are urged to step forward as lovers of humanity to promote those eternal unifying principles—or spiritual values—that can inspire in both individuals and governments the will to implement the Agenda for Equality." Speaking to the contributions which must equally be made by both sexes, the statement said, "Men must use their influence, particularly in the civil, political and religious institutions they control, to promote the systematic inclusion of women, not out of condescension or presumed self-sacrifice, but out of the belief that the contributions of women are required for society to progress. Women, for their part, must become educated and step forward into all arenas of human activity, contributing their particular qualities, skills and experience to the social, economic and political equation."

Bahá'í perspectives on equality were also shared with both Conference and Forum participants through distribution of *The Greatness Which Might Be Theirs*, a collection of Bahá'í International Community statements and essays by Bahá'ís reflecting on the Agenda and Platform for Action. The booklet's title is drawn from the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibility, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs."

For the first time since the World Conferences on Women began in 1975, the United Nations invited youth to take an active

role. The Bahá'í International Community was among a small number of organizations selected by the UN to send representatives to youth consultations organized at the regional preparatory conferences in Jakarta, Mar del Plata (Argentina), Dakar, and Vienna. In Beijing, Ashley Avaregan was the only male on a panel of NGO youth representatives making a presentation called "International Youth NGOs: Actors in Implementation" on Youth Day. As mentioned earlier, youth also played an important role in the NGO Forum.

Near the end of the conference, the Bahá'í International Community celebrated the achievements of the Fourth World Conference on Women by hosting a reception for 300 old and new friends from 30 different countries at the Great Wall Sheraton in Beijing. Music, food, and conversation was shared with ambassadors, a princess, members of the Chinese community, government ministers, presidents of NGOs, United Nations personnel and others.

In her address to the final session of the Conference on 15 September, Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General of the Conference, exclaimed, "My dear sisters and brothers, we have made it! We have managed to transcend historical and cultural complexities; we have managed to transcend socioeconomic disparities and diversities; we have kept aflame our common vision and goal of equality, development and peace. In a number of areas, we have significantly expanded the horizons of previous conferences."

Of course the goals agreed upon in Beijing will not become a reality unless the conversation continues and inspires widespread action. The Bahá'í communities around the world worked to maintain the momentum begun at the Conference and Forum. In Canada, local communities had held "Beijing-connect" conferences at the same time as the World Conference, to inform those who couldn't travel to Beijing about the Conference's proceedings, and following the Conference, "Post-Beijing" gatherings kept the issues alive. The gatherings included panel discussions with various community leaders; an evening of song, poetry, story-telling and video clips from the Beijing conference; and a public discussion which kicked off a three-month series of events focusing on issues faced by women. In Anchorage,

Alaska, the Bahá'í Center filled up with people wanting to hear from those who had attended the NGO Forum in Huairou. The panel members, representing the Bahá'í community and seven community organizations, spoke about the history of UN activities related to women, the documents produced in Beijing, and the issues identified as priority areas of concern.

Some Beijing participants travelled beyond their home communities to present the results of the Conference. Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi, a university professor from California, shared her thoughts on Beijing with a number of audiences in Puerto Rico. Before a group of lawyers and educators she spoke about "Why Women are the Key to World Peace: The Bahá'í View"; at the Puerto Rican Bar Association she addressed the audience on "The United Nations 50 Years Later: Are We Closer to World Peace?"; and at University College, University of Puerto Rico, she took part in a symposium entitled "Gender and Law: Toward the Next Millennium."

Prominent people took part in post-Beijing events initiated by Bahá'í communities. The Prime Minister of Guyana, Sam Hinds, provided opening remarks for the Post-Beijing Symposium on Women cosponsored by UNICEF and the Bahá'í community of Guyana. Representatives from some 35 organizations attended and speeches were given by members of UN agencies in the region. The post-Beijing conference hosted by the Bahá'í Women's Group of Trinidad drew the country's First Lady, the Director of the Women's Affairs Division of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs, a UN representative from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Secretary of the Network for the Advancement of Women.

As these examples of follow-up activities suggest, the effects of the deliberations and the connections made at Beijing will continue to be felt for some time as women and men strive to forge entirely new relationships based on equality. One metaphor for the work ahead is that of weaving a tapestry: different kinds of thread are needed to make the tapestry beautiful, and each thread must support the others for a strong fabric to emerge. In Beijing, this metaphor was used to demonstrate the qualities of

women through the “Weaving the World Together” project, initiated in 1994 by Asia-Pacific women. They called on women around the world to contribute to a banner, which in the end was one kilometer long and reflected the talents of women from at least 122 countries. On 7 September, 200 women carried 200 meters of the ribbon to the Great Wall of China and displayed it. “Weaving means many elements are made into one strong piece, so it represents the diversity, the strength, the dignity and the unity of women,” said Chartikavanij Sumalee from Thailand, quoted in an article on the banner in *World Women*. The Bahá'ís who contributed chose to view weaving as a metaphor for harmony between women and men. The *World Women* article on the project finished by noting that the portion created by Bahá'ís used another metaphor for the work that must be done: “At the end of the ribbon, a huge banner from the Bahá'ís of Southeast Asia cried out the will of women all over the world: ‘The world of humanity has two wings: One is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly.’”

UN 50:

Bahá'ís Commemorate the
Fiftieth Anniversary of
the United Nations

The people on the island of Tanna in the South Pacific country of Vanuatu have long lived with a prophecy that one day all the nations of the world would come to the “Laminu nakamal,” a traditional dancing area regarded by Tannese as having great customary significance. Early in 1995, several of the Bahá'ís on Tanna expressed their desire to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, and eventually an offer was made by the National Spiritual Assembly of Vanuatu to the country's UN 50th Birthday Organizing Committee. Working with the Pacific Operations Center (EPOC) of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Vanuatu Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Tafea Provincial Council, the Bahá'ís began to put together a major event.

Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies from all over the island cooked enough food for 1,000 people, traditional dancers practiced their craft, speeches were written by representatives of EPOC, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the National Spiritual Assembly, and traditional chiefs from all over Tanna were invited

A world is passing away and a new one is struggling to be born. The habits, attitudes, and institutions that have accumulated over the centuries are being subjected to tests that are as necessary to human development as they are inescapable. What is required of the peoples of the world is a measure of faith and resolve to match the enormous energies with which the Creator of all things has endowed this spiritual springtime of the race.

The source of this faith and resolve is the message of hope offered to humanity by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. It is a message that deserves the thoughtful consideration of all those who yearn for peace and justice in the world.

WRITINGS
AND
MESSAGES

to attend. The day before the gathering, which was scheduled for 24 October, the Bahá'í community cleared vegetation at the celebration site, made a pole for the UN flag, and erected shelters for the invited guests. When the day arrived, spectators began to gather under the shade of three enormous banyan trees at the Laminu nakamal. The ceremony began when students marched from their primary school around the celebration site and to the Niko Letan Center, headquarters of the Tanna Island Council of Chiefs. Speeches were interspersed with performances of traditional dances, two of which had never before been performed in public and one choreographed specially in honor of the United Nations. When the UN flag was raised to the sound of a traditional conch shell being blown, the Custom Chief of the Laminu nakamal, pointing out that it was the first time the people on Tanna had seen the flag, asserted that the prophecy was fulfilled. Although events officially ended in the afternoon, many guests remained until sunset simply to gaze at the flag.

The celebration on Vanuatu was one of many events sponsored by Bahá'í communities around the world to commemorate the anniversary, events that bear witness to the widespread and deeply felt commitment among Bahá'ís to the ideals reflected in the United Nations Charter. The optimism about the future of international cooperation that Bahá'ís brought to their commemorations contrasted with the focus on the UN's shortcomings apparent in the steady stream of editorials that appeared when the United Nations reached its 50th birthday. Commentators varied in their levels of patience with the organization, some advocating a complete overhaul of the UN bureaucracy and reevaluation of the organization's aims, particularly citing its nearly \$3 billion debt, and others counselling greater support for an institution attempting to achieve so much with relatively little serious financial and moral support. But virtually all the editorials lamented the fact that the UN had not yet lived up to its original aim of eliminating war, and expressed skepticism about its ability to reform enough to meet this and other goals. The Bahá'í community also raised its voice to call for UN reform but did so in the context of a belief in the deep significance of the UN's very formation and appreciation of its achievements thus far.

Bahá'ís view the establishment of the United Nations as an important sign of humanity's ever-increasing acceptance of its global interdependence, so they approached the 50th anniversary with the attitude that the UN's accomplishments are extremely significant given their uniqueness in the broad sweep of history. At the same time, its shortcomings must also be addressed if its great potential is to be realized. The Bahá'í perspective is informed by half a century of involvement with the UN; Bahá'ís were present at the historic San Francisco conference which gave birth to the institution, and since 1948 the Bahá'í International Community has been registered as a nongovernmental organization (NGO), now representing more than five million people from a wide diversity of ethnic, economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. It secured consultative status, Category II, with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1970, consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1976, and working relations with the World Health Organization in 1989. It also works with other UN agencies and programs, such as UNIFEM and UNEP and has participated in major UN conferences focusing on paramount issues of the day.

Support for the UN and practical suggestions for its reform are expressed in a statement issued by the Bahá'í International Community on the occasion of the 50th anniversary. *Turning Point for All Nations*¹ cites historical evidence for "the trend toward ever-increasing interdependence and integration of humanity" and describes the UN as "a unique institution standing as a noble symbol for the collective interests of humanity as a whole." It also acknowledges that the overall goals of the institution have remained elusive, and it urges world leaders to convene a world summit on global governance to examine how the international political order can be restructured to meet the needs of society as it is currently evolving. The statement suggests a number of specific, immediate courses of action to strengthen the capacity of the UN, but it also calls for a long-term view. "Judged in isolation from the reality in which it operates," the statement

1. See pp. 241–83 for a complete reprint of this statement.

operates," the statement reads, "the United Nations will always seem inefficient and ineffective. However, if it is viewed as one element of a large process of development in systems of international order, the bright light of analysis would shift from the UN's shortcomings and failures to shine on its victories and accomplishments. With an evolutionary mindset, the early experience of the United Nations offers us a rich source of learnings about its future role within the international regime."

The release of the *Turning Point* document and its presentation to a wide variety of people throughout the year and beyond was one element of the Bahá'í community's efforts to assert the significance of the United Nations and to stimulate discussion about its reform. One of the points made in the statement is that "with a focus on building institutions and creating a community of nations, international bodies have historically remained distant from the minds and hearts of the world's people" and "discussions about the future of the international order must involve and excite the generality of humankind." Thus Bahá'í activities on the occasion of the 50th anniversary reached out to world leaders and individual citizens alike.

International Events

In June 1995, a series of commemorative activities took place in San Francisco, the site of the original meeting at which the UN Charter was signed. The National Spiritual Assembly of the United States was represented at a meeting addressed by United States' President Bill Clinton, held at the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House, the location of the original signing. On 25 June an interfaith service was held in Grace Cathedral and attended by President Clinton, United Nations Secretary General Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Nobel Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, HRH Princess Margaret of England, a number of UN ambassadors, and members of the public. The Bahá'í World Choir of Northern California sang a selection of hymns, a Bahá'í read a section from the Parliament of the World's Religions' "Declaration Towards a Global Ethic," and another Bahá'í chanted a prayer. Bahá'ís also attended the United Nations Association's annual convention and a four-day

conference called "We the People," held to discuss the present and future role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the UN system.

Other Bahá'í contributions to the San Francisco celebrations included a public meeting called "Bahá'í Call to the Nations: Forum on Global Governance" at which presentations were made on the early years of the UN, the development of the nation-state, and meeting the challenges facing the United Nations; an exhibition entitled "A Vision of World Unity" at the Bahá'í Center; and a ceremony to honor youth who had demonstrated moral and ethical leadership within their communities.

The largest gathering of world leaders ever to take place occurred in New York in October when the UN's anniversary was officially commemorated. The Bahá'í International Community provided a venue for discussion by hosting a seminar called "UN Restructuring: Turning Point for All Nations." His Excellency the President of the Marshall Islands Amata Kabua and Under-Secretary General of the United Nations Gillian Martin Sorensen were among the presenters at the day-long meeting. Also attending were diplomats from Ireland, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States as well as senior staff members of the UN Secretariat and representatives of NGOs. Two papers presented by Bahá'ís were "The Creation of an International Force" and "Establishing a Commission to Explore the Adoption of an International Auxiliary Language."

An element of the official anniversary celebration was a seminar on religious dialogue for spiritual leaders from around the



His Excellency the President of the Marshall Islands Amata Kabua delivering the keynote address to the "Turning Point for All Nations" seminar held at the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Offices, October 1995.

world. One of the invited speakers was the current holder of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland, College Park, Dr. Suheil Bushrui. Dr. Bushrui also read a Bahá'í prayer before an audience of 2,000 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

National and Local Events

The events organized by national and local Bahá'í communities to demonstrate support for the UN and to draw attention to prospects for its improvement varied in scope, as communities large and small found their own unique ways to relate to the issues being faced by this international body. However, a common element of many of these events was the distribution, presentation, or discussion of *Turning Point for All Nations*.

Prior to the statement's release, an exhibit on its themes was mounted at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The exhibit opened on 17 August in the presence of 37 diplomats from 29 countries, three Sub-Commission Experts, staff of the UN Center for Human Rights, representatives of NGOs, and high officials of the UN. It was displayed for two weeks.

When *Turning Point* was released in the fall, it was presented formally to Gillian Martin Sorensen, the official in charge of the UN 50th Anniversary Secretariat.² On the same day, the statement was also presented to Farida Ayoub, Chief of the NGO Liaison Unit of the United Nations. During the rest of the year, the document was presented by national Bahá'í delegations to numerous officials, including the Prime Minister of Belize, the President of Hungary, the Prime Minister and Speaker of the National Assembly of Togo, and the Foreign Minister of Swaziland. In Mauritius, *Turning Point* was presented to the President of the Republic during a one-hour program attended by more than 30 dignitaries, including the Ambassador of Madagascar. The U.S. Bahá'í community presented the statement to local and national political leaders.

The National Spiritual Assembly of Swaziland and the UN office in that country cohosted a panel discussion on *Turning*

Point with participants from government ministries and NGOs, during which they gave time for comments from audience members. Likewise in Togo, the statement was introduced to the public during two meetings cosponsored by the National Spiritual Assembly and the United Nations Development Program. The first meeting was attended primarily by ministry officials, university professors, media representatives, and other leaders of thought, and the second meeting was held in a high school for students to explore the issues.

A United Nations building on the Green Line which has separated the northern and southern regions of Cyprus since 1974 was the venue for presentation of *Turning Point* to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Cyprus in October. On the same occasion, copies of the document were shared with the Chairman of the World Federation of UN Associations and local representatives of the Cyprus UNA. The repetition of the words of Bahá'u'lláh, "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens," by the UN representative was especially poignant at this border, which has divided neighbors and families for more than two decades.

Faculty members from Edith Cowan University, the University of Western Australia, and Curtin University of Technology, all in Western Australia, attended a dinner/reception sponsored by the Bahá'ís of Wannaroo to celebrate the UN's 50th anniversary. Following a keynote address, each of the guests received a copy of *The Prosperity of Humankind*.³ In Singapore, leaders of inter-religious organizations and civic societies were among the 100 people who took part in a public forum on *Turning Point* in October. In Tanzania, the readers of the daily newspaper *Express* learned about the Bahá'í perspective on the UN through an article highlighting points made in the Bahá'í International Community's statement.

An exhibit of posters and materials showing "Achievements of the UN at 50" greeted the 250 people who attended a function in New Delhi, India, to mark the anniversary. The proposals outlined in *Turning Point* were reviewed by a member of the

2. See also pp. 126–29.

3. See *The Bahá'í World 1994–95*, pp. 273–96 for the text of this statement.

Continental Board of Counsellors in Asia, Zena Sorabjee, after an inaugural address by former Chief Justice of India, R.S. Pathak and a keynote address by Dr. Hans von Sponeck, Resident Coordinator, UN system in India. At the end of the program, each guest was given a copy of the Bahá'í International Community's statement.



Dr. Hans von Sponeck, UN Resident Coordinator for India, receives Turning Point for All Nations at a UN 50 commemoration in New Delhi, India, October 1995.

Awareness of Bahá'í perspectives on issues facing the UN was also spread through press coverage of anniversary events. A celebration organized by the Bahá'í Association for World Peace at the University of the North-West in South Africa made headline news on Bophuthatswana Television, was one of the main items on Mmabatho Television, and was covered in several major newspapers. Photographs showed the 20 Bahá'ís and their 250 guests exchanging ideas on women and world peace, the rights of children, and the future of the UN. The university's 60-member choir filled the gathering with inspiring music. In Bangladesh, three important newspapers published articles on a public meeting sponsored by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Khulna to mark the founding of the UN. Tents on the grounds of the Bahá'í Center were filled with 50 Bahá'ís and 200 guests who listened to speeches and then enjoyed the performance of songs written by Bahá'í youth on the theme of unity and amity among the nations and races of the earth.

The presentation of World Citizenship Awards, a special service at a Bahá'í House of Worship, and an art exhibit were some other types of events that marked the anniversary in various locations. The Awards were established in Brazil by the National Spiritual Assembly and were given to eight international agencies and the two married couples who founded the School of the Nations in Brasilia, where each month teachers work with students on a theme related to spiritual and social virtues such as unity, protection of the environment, and the value of work. The special worship service was held at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Apia, Samoa; 250 people enjoyed the service and then moved to an adjacent building for speeches by a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Australasia and the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations Office in Western Samoa. The art exhibit, entitled "Vision of World Peace," was set up in the main entrance of Estonia's Pedagogical University in Tallinn and featured the work of Bahá'ís Nastia and Ksenia Stanishevski.

Bahá'í commitment to the United Nations was recognized when Bahá'ís were invited by others to take part in UN anniversary gatherings. For example, the Bahá'í community of the Netherlands was asked to send a representative to the country's official celebration, held in the Knights' Hall in The Hague and attended by Queen Beatrix. The secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Costa Rica spoke at an ecumenical gathering organized by the Ministry of External Relations and attended by two

Bahá'ís in Tallinn, Estonia, hosted an art exhibit and an international prayer meeting in commemoration of the United Nations' fiftieth anniversary, October 1995.



former presidents of Costa Rica, current vice presidents, and members of the diplomatic corps.

Bahá'ís also cosponsored Washington, D.C.'s largest UN 50 commemorative event and contributed two workshops: "Moral, Ethical, and Spiritual Values and the UN" and "Religious NGOs and the UN." This national gathering on the United States and the UN, organized by the United Nations Association and cosponsored by more than 100 organizations, was attended by more than 400 people from 35 states.

Youth Involvement

Some Bahá'í communities marked the anniversary with activities aimed to engage young people in the issues being faced by the UN. The Bahá'í community of Costa Rica sponsored an essay contest, and winners participated in the 50th anniversary celebrations in San Francisco. In India, the Bahá'í District Teaching Committee of Kannur organized a speech competition on the theme "One World: My Concept" in which students from seven of the district's twelve colleges took part. "The Bahá'í Faith and Education" was the theme of a Bahá'í booth at a UN 50 exhibition held in Hong Kong in October.

Bahá'ís also contributed to a program organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) for the children attending schools sponsored by members of the Association of NGOs working with ECLAC. Ten students from Colegio Bahá'í Nur and the school's headmistress participated, and six Mapuche Indians travelled 700 miles from their home in Labranza, Chile, to the site of the event in Santiago to perform music and dance for the children.

Two Bahá'í youth dramatically demonstrated their understanding of UN issues and willingness to take action. Thirteen-year-old Jordan Melic of Singapore worked on an article that was selected for publication in *A World in Our Hands*, a book produced by Peace Child International and Paintbrush Diplomacy for the 50th anniversary. Then he applied and was chosen to be one of 24 editors of the volume, which includes pieces on the history of the UN and views for its future written by young people between nine and twenty. In June 1995, Jordan was the only editor to be flown

to the United States for the official presentation of the book. In the U.S., he gave a 30-minute talk at the World Trade Center in New York to an audience of 200 distinguished guests, and he presented *A World in Our Hands* to Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali at the Hearst Theater in San Francisco, where the UN Charter had been signed 50 years earlier. After Jordan spoke the words, "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens," Dr. Boutros-Ghali asked him to inscribe them in his copy of the book.

Mariana Eghrari of Brazil, also thirteen, was invited by the organization Peaceways to represent the children of her country at the World Conference of Children in San Francisco, organized as part of the 50th anniversary events. The 150 participating children prepared a document called *Keeping the Promise Report* about the main challenges facing the children of the world. Mariana was among 15 of these children selected to travel to Geneva to present the document to UN officials and to consult with them.

Taking Stock

In one *International Herald Tribune* editorial (27 June 1995) about the UN at 50, some of the institution's accomplishments are listed: "Agencies of the United Nations have eradicated diseases (completely, in the case of smallpox), countered famine, housed 30 million refugees, probably halved child mortality and taught millions to read and write. Politically, the United Nations has sped decolonization, provided a forum for poor but populous new members and spotlighted, if selectively, human rights offenders." The Bahá'í International Community document *Turning Point for All Nations* likewise notes the UN's achievements: "As an international organization, the United Nations has demonstrated humanity's capacity for united action in health, agriculture, education, environmental protection, and the welfare of children. It has affirmed our collective moral will to build a better future, evinced in the widespread adoption of international human rights Covenants. It has revealed the human race's deep-seated compassion, evidenced by the devotion of financial and human resources to the assistance of people in distress."

The *Herald Tribune* article, like many other editorials, goes on to cite the UN's shortcomings, particularly its inability thus far

to prevent wars between and within member states. The Bahá'í International Community agrees that the UN has a long way to go to fulfill its potential, but it remains confident that solutions to its organizational and financial problems can be found if discussions about its future take into account the broader, evolving international order and if they involve and excite the generality of humanity. Viewed in historical context, this grand experiment to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...and reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be attained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" has been a singular success, if only for what its proponents have believed to be possible. The Bahá'í community commemorated the UN's anniversary by doing its part to bring these dreams closer to reality.

This article highlights print media coverage of the Bahá'í Faith during 1995-96.

The Bahá'í Faith in the
**EYES
OF THE
WORLD**

In surveying the attention afforded Bahá'í communities and events by the media this year, the steadily increasing tempo and diversity of such coverage becomes instantly apparent. Not only are more Bahá'í institutions formalizing mechanisms for offering material to the press, but to an increasing degree media agencies in every part of the world are finding Bahá'í initiatives and approaches to social issues newsworthy and are reporting on their developments, in English and in a wide variety of other languages. The following survey touches on some of the highlights, as well as those activities which received the most coverage.

The Bahá'ís of Iran

A number of articles on the plight of the Bahá'ís of Iran were published during the visits of Olya Roohizadegan to Austria, Belgium, and the United States. Mrs. Roohizadegan was imprisoned by the Iranian authorities for being a Bahá'í; her book, *Olya's Story*, details her experiences and those of her fellow Bahá'í prisoners. Among other articles on the Bahá'ís of Iran were those printed in *Bergens Tidende* in Norway on 21 February 1996; in

Mid-Day in South Africa on 25 April 1995; in three newspapers in India on 2 March 1996; in four New Zealand newspapers in February and March 1996; and in the *Iran Times* in the United States on 16 and 23 February. The special exhibit on the response of the United States government to the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, demonstrating its commitment to religious freedom, was announced in *Roll-Call*, the Capitol Hill newspaper, on 1 May 1995, and in the *Washington Post* on 6 May 1995.

Several articles were written for Irish newspapers reporting Bahá'í activities commemorating the tenth anniversary of the admission of 26 Iranian Bahá'ís as refugees by the government of Ireland. On 21 March 1996, the *Donegal Democrat* carried an item on a reception held at the Bahá'í National Center for the men and women of Ireland who aided the Iranian refugees, and *Derry People and Donegal News* printed a similar item on 22 March. On 6 April, the *Meath Chronicle* covered one Iranian Bahá'í man's visit with the Bahá'í couple in Slane who had helped him integrate into Irish life years before. The *Sligo Champion* on 28 February announced a segment of the *Would You Believe* program focusing on a Bahá'í couple's journey from persecution in Iran to becoming a real part of the Sligo community.

Bahá'í Community Life

A great deal of attention was accorded to Bahá'í holy days by the press worldwide. In American Samoa the *Samoa Journal and Advertiser* ran a piece on 23 October 1995 on the birthday of the Báb; in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, both the *Daily Telegrams* and the *Andaman Herald* on 19 October 1995 carried front-page announcements of celebrations of the birth of the Báb. On 11 November the *Daily Telegrams* printed a front-page item on the observance for the birth of Bahá'u'lláh, and on 12 November the *Andaman Herald* published a longer piece providing some details of Bahá'u'lláh's life. In the United States an announcement in the *Dallas Morning News* of the observance of the Declaration of the Báb was printed on 13 May; in the Shetland Islands, United Kingdom, the Bahá'í community advertised the observance of the Martyrdom of the Báb in the *Shetland Times*. The *Shetland Times* also carried an announcement about the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh, on 10 November 1995.

In New Zealand as well two articles were printed about the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh and the Bahá'í community published announcements about the Bahá'í fast and about the Riḍván Festival. The Azores newspaper *Correio dos Açores* printed on 23 April 1995 a description by the São Miguel Bahá'í community of the history and significance of Riḍván. The article included a photograph of the Riḍván Garden in the Holy Land. Newspapers all over India reported on local communities' observances of Bahá'í holy days. The Bahá'í celebration of Naw-Rúz—New Year—resulted in an article in the *Washington Post* on 18 March 1995, as well as in newspapers in New Zealand, Scotland, Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, Hawaii, the U.S.A., and Guyana.

The *Marianas Observer*, the *Pacific Star*, and the *Pacific Daily News* in the Mariana Islands all published stories covering that community's Eighteenth National Bahá'í Convention. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, on 2 June 1995 the *Vincentian* printed a photograph of the newly elected National Spiritual Assembly. The participation of a Manitoban Bahá'í in the National Convention of Canada was reported on 10 May in the *Opasquia Times*. The article also included information about the Bahá'í electoral process and historical facts about the Bahá'í administration in Canada. On 19 May, the *Marshall Islands Journal* reported on the national convention in that country. The same journal on 23 June carried a story on the visit to Majuro of three members of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Australasia. On 12 May, the *Shetland Times* reported that a member of the Shetland Bahá'í community would serve on the new committee appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom to direct the affairs of the Bahá'í community in Scotland.

The *Kyrgyzstan Chronicle's* 25 to 31 August 1995 issue reported on the first national Bahá'í conference and included the Bahá'í Faith among its list of religious organizations and institutions. More than 25 different articles appeared in an array of New Zealand newspapers announcing or reporting on the Pacific Horizons Conference, held in Auckland in January 1996 and sponsored by the Bahá'í community. At least twelve other articles were printed which followed the efforts of Bahá'ís who came to

New Zealand to attend the conference to share their cultures, talents, and the Bahá'í message with the people of various areas of New Zealand. The *Pioneer* and the *Times of India* on 15 December 1995 both published articles in English on the establishment of the Chair for Bahá'í Studies at Lucknow University, and articles on the subject were carried by two Hindi newspapers.

Advancement of Women

In Macau, an activity in support of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, in April 1995, in which children expressed their world citizenship by putting their handprints on a banner which was subsequently sent to the conference, received coverage from a number of Macau newspapers, including *Huaqiao Bao*, *Huaao Ribao*, *Daizhong Bao*, *Aomen Wenyu*, *Aomen Ribao*, *Zheng Bao*, *Xiandai Aomen Ribao*, and *Hauao Ribao*. The press in Malaysia printed several reports mentioning or highlighting Malaysian Bahá'í women's involvement in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. In addition, there were about seven articles reporting on a post-Beijing seminar sponsored by the Bahá'í community in November 1995. The *Guyana Chronicle* and the *Stabroek News* printed items on 16 August on the departure of two Guyanese Bahá'ís for the NGO forum at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, and then on 16 and 19 October the *Guyana Chronicle* reported on the post-Beijing symposium organized by the Bahá'í community and opened by Prime Minister Sam Hinds. In Hawaii, the *Sun Press* and the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* also carried items on local Bahá'í women who traveled to the Beijing conference. On 6 November the *Trinidad Guardian* reported on the post-Beijing conference on women hosted by the Bahá'í community and attended by the First Lady of Trinidad and Tobago. In Ontario, Canada, the *London Free Press* published an article which stated that the Bahá'í Faith "recognizes that women have untapped resources to offer the world." Articles were printed in the *Sunday Vanguard* of Nigeria on 12 November and 17 December written by a Bahá'í and commenting on the equality of women and men and the importance of proper parenting. In Swaziland, an article describing a panel discussion on the equality of men and women

to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, organized by the UN system in that country, the National Assembly, and the Ministry of Education, was published on 12 October in the *Times of Swaziland*.

Action on Social Issues

The *Honolulu Advertiser* on 14 October 1995 reported the Honolulu Bahá'í community's celebration for United Nations Day, and the *Sun Press* issue for 28 December 1995 to 3 January 1996 announced the community forum "Healing of Our Ohana," organized by the Bahá'ís of Wahiawa, Hawaii. Several American newspapers noted Bahá'í involvement in UN 50 activities in the United States, including the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, and the *Washington Post*. The *New Paper* of Singapore reported on 12 August 1995 on 13-year-old Bahá'í Jordan Melic's presentation of *A World in Our Hands* to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as part of activities to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. On 20 October, the Bahá'ís of the Solomon Islands published an article in the *Solomon Star* on UN 50.

On 31 January 1996 the *Barbados Advocate* published a photograph and a brief description of members of the Barbadian Bahá'í community presenting *Turning Point for All Nations* to that newspaper's editor. The *Derry Journal* in Northern Ireland ran a commentary on 14 November on *Turning Point for All Nations*, describing the portion dealing with the role of women as "a very worthwhile contribution to that issue." The writer then quoted and summarized that section of the document, ending by asking, "Is there much in the foregoing with which the majority of people in our culture could seriously disagree?"

Liberecký Den, a Czech newspaper, printed a report on 17 August 1995 describing a program observing the Year of Tolerance, organized by the Bahá'ís of Liberec. More than twelve articles were published in New Zealand newspapers, reporting on Bahá'í efforts to highlight issues of unity in diversity, tolerance, and racial harmony. On 26 June 1995, the *Border Mail* in Australia reported on the Bahá'í community of Albury-Wodonga's multicultural event in honor of Refugees

Week. The Bahá'í community of Altenkirchen, Germany, held a feast focusing on international understanding that spurred articles in *Rhein-Zeitung* on 18 May and 24/25 May 1995, as well as in *Mitteilungsblatt für den Bereich der Verbandsgemeinde Altenkirchen* on 1 June 1995. An account was published on 10 December in *Athens News* in Greece of the Bahá'í community's reception in celebration of United Nations Human Rights Day. The Bahá'ís of the Gambia printed statements on the United Nations and human rights in the *Point* on 29 May and the *Gambia Daily* on 19 June, respectively.

The *Cook Islands News* for 14 July published an announcement and description of a Bahá'í presentation on the theme of the prosperity of humankind. The *Guyana Chronicle* published articles on 10 and 19 May and the *Stabroek News* printed one on 19 May covering the Bahá'í-sponsored symposium "Unity in Diversity in the Quest for Global Prosperity," which was attended by President Cheddi Jagan. Once again on 29 March and 3 April 1996, the *Stabroek News* and the *Guyana Chronicle*, respectively, carried items about the Bahá'í community of Georgetown's panel discussion on eradicating poverty. On 5 July, a piece was printed in the *Gambia Daily* announcing the conference on "The Prosperity of Humankind" being organized by the Bahá'í community. An article was published on 3 July in the *Daily Observer* in Gambia, announcing the impending visit to that country from Ethiopia of Gila Michael Bahta, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Africa, who spoke at the Gambia's "Post-World Summit on Social Development Conference." Another article was published by that newspaper on 11 July reporting on Mr. Bahta's visit. The *Sunday Vision* in Uganda on 23 April carried an article on the response of the Ugandan Bahá'í community to the United Nations World Summit for Social Development.

The Bahá'í community of Mauritius submitted a number of statements to *Le Mauricien* throughout the year, some in English and some in French, dealing with such topics as World Religion Day, religious intolerance, drug abuse, and world peace. In Kyrgyzstan, the Bahá'í community published an extensive article

on world peace in the 25 to 31 October issue of the *Kyrgyzstan Chronicle*.

The *Marshall Islands Journal* printed a report on 12 May 1995 on the progress achieved in the Marshall Islands School Improvement Project for the seven public elementary schools in Majuro, which is being managed by Bahá'ís. On 26 May, the *Saipan Tribune* in the Mariana Islands reported on the luncheon held by the Bahá'í community during which suggestions were offered to delegates of the Third Constitutional Convention. The *Solomon Star* on 27 September published a photograph of the recipients of the Blums Community Service Award, which is presented by the Bahá'í community of the Solomon Islands.

On 11 April 1996, *Bray People* announced a public address by a leading family and teenage counselor on "The Challenge of Family Life and Education in the Nineties," sponsored by the Bahá'ís of County Wicklow, Republic of Ireland. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the *Vincentian* printed articles on 26 May and 2 June regarding a series of workshops on family development which covered such topics as violence-free families, communication in families, and the development of morality in children.

Over fifteen newspapers throughout India reported on the travels of John Huddleston, a Bahá'í who spoke about the status of women, the importance of religion in society, economics, and globalization, among other topics. Several newspapers also have highlighted the contributions Bahá'ís have been making to the discussion on communal harmony, while about seven articles were published delineating Bahá'í teachings on the equality of women and men.

In the issue of the *Malawi News* for 5 to 11 August, it was reported that a delegation of representatives of the Malawian Bahá'í community called on the President of that country, who encouraged the Bahá'ís to assist the government with primary education and health care. In the Gambia on 4 January 1996, the *Point* printed a report on the visit of Abbas Bashir Elahi, a Bahá'í physician from the United States who visited the mayor, a hospital, and a school of nursing and donated medical supplies

during his stay. On 7 March 1996, the *Tonga Chronicle* reported on the Ocean of Light International Primary School, which is administered by the Bahá'í community. The news article was accompanied by a large photograph of some of the children in one of the classes. The Bahá'ís in Malaysia organized a blood-drive to encourage non-Muslims to donate blood during the Muslim month of fasting, in order to offset a predicted shortage. The initiative was reported in February 1996 by the *Borneo Post* and the *Daily Express* in English, as well as the *See Hua Daily News*, the *Overseas Chinese Daily News*, and the *Asia Times* in Chinese. The *Examiner* published on 27 November 1995 a large photograph of a group of Bahá'í young women dressed in various national costumes as part of its coverage of the community-service-based Martha Root Project in Launceton, Australia.

In June 1995, the Slovak newspaper *Sme* printed the Bahá'í International Community's report that earth from that country was deposited into the Peace Monument in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The *Straits Times* in Singapore on 22 April 1995 reported on an international children's art exhibition organized by the Bahá'í community in honor of Earth Day. "Animals and Me," another international children's art exhibition which was sponsored by the Extended Education Center of the Education Department and the Spiritual Assembly of Macau, was the subject of an article in the Macau newspaper *Aomen Ribao* on 28 January 1996. On 23 July 1995, *Shimin Ribao* reported on children's activities for environmental protection in Macau, organized by the Bahá'í youth group. The international children's art exhibition held in Taiwan resulted in at least four articles in the *China Post* as well as about five articles in Chinese newspapers. An article was submitted by the Bahá'í community of Yekaterinburg, Russia, to *Klyuch Zemli* detailing Bahá'í teachings on the environment.

Sharing the Message of Bahá'u'lláh

On 21 September 1995, the Bahá'í youth workshop in Vienna, Austria, received newspaper coverage of its open-air theater presentation of Bahá'í principles. An announcement was printed in the *Marshall Islands Journal* of the Bahá'í youth summer

school which was held in Rita from 19 to 30 June. Eight different articles were published in various newspapers in Norway about the performances of the Bahá'í Youth Theater, which took to the streets to raise awareness about racism, religion, and the value of unity in diversity.

On 11 June 1995, Austrian Television (ORF) broadcast a twenty-minute film about the Bahá'í Faith as part of its regular religious program *Orientierung*. In Liberia, the Bahá'ís had a brief history of Bahá'u'lláh's life published in the *First National Poll* for 25 November to 2 December. An article on the Bahá'í Faith was submitted by the Bahá'í community of Yekaterinburg, Russia, to *Bratstvo Ver*. At least seven newspapers in Norway printed articles introducing the general public to the beliefs and principles of the Bahá'í Faith. In the United States, a number of newspapers printed such articles, including the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Dallas Morning Star*, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

Articles were printed on Bahá'í book exhibitions in India in *Janamukha* on 29 September, in *Agnishikha* on 29 September, in *Sambalashree* on 2 October, and in the *Sentinel* on 19 October. A 21 October 1995 advertisement in the *Times* newspaper in Malta announced the Eleventh Malta Book Fair, mentioning the Bahá'í Publishing Trusts among the participants.

On 15 July 1995 and 30 March 1996, the *Waikato Times* in New Zealand published articles on the trips of Shane Te Ruki, a Maori Bahá'í, to various Native American communities in Canada for the purpose of sharing his beliefs and his culture.

Eastern European press reports have taken note of the incursion of religious groups into the various countries of the formerly Communist area. The *New Reporter* in Albania on 1 December 1995 cited the Bahá'í Faith as one group which has grown significantly since 1989.

The Bahá'ís of Sri Lanka maintained a steady stream of announcements of community events in newspapers, as well as the "Thought for the Day" published regularly in the cover of the *Daily News*, featuring quotations from the Bahá'í writings. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahá'í community also sponsored regular articles in the *Trinidad Guardian*, covering such topics as

BAHÁ'Í SACRED WRITINGS

Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.

We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy.

unity in diversity, the purpose of creation, and world peace. Likewise, the Bahá'í community of Swaziland published articles in the *Yebo Weekend Observer Magazine* on life after death, religion as the source of morality, family, youth, and preserving marriages. In the Pas, Manitoba, Canada, the Bahá'í community submitted regular pieces to the *Opasquia Times* on a variety of subjects, including the destiny of native peoples as portrayed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, sustainable development, and the environment.

Interfaith Activities

On 23 March 1996, the *Washington Post* reported on an inter-religious conference held at Howard University, including the Bahá'í contributions to the event. The *Dallas Morning News* noted on 29 April 1995 the participation of the Bahá'ís of Dallas in the National Day of Prayer.

The *Drogheda Independent's* special supplement on the celebration of the 700-year anniversary of the ministry of the Augustinians in Drogheda, Ireland, reported the presence of a representative of the Bahá'í Faith and of a Bahá'í reading during the service, which was attended by President Mary Robinson. The *Limerick Leader* on 29 January 1996 reported the observance by the local Bahá'í community of World Religion Day through the distribution to all schools in the Limerick area of an information packet on the religions of the world.

Several newspapers in Singapore provided coverage of the events associated with the Bahá'í-organized observance of World Religion Day in January 1996. *Tamil Murasu* published two articles in the Tamil language; the Chinese newspaper *Lianhe Zhaobao* printed two reports; and the *Straits Times* carried four articles in English.

The Efforts of Individual Bahá'ís

The efforts, achievements, and experiences of individual Bahá'ís caught the attention of media representatives in many places this year. An exhibition on the life of August Forel—a Bahá'í doctor, entomologist, and social reformer—held in Bulgaria was reported in the issue of *Balkanite Dnes* for 14 to 20 July 1995.

An extensive, two-part profile of Robert Abbott—a Bahá'í and the founder of the *Chicago Defender*—was printed in the 11 to 15 November and 18 to 22 November issues of the *Tri-State Defender*. In Münster, Germany, on 21 September 1995, *Westfälische Nachrichten* reported an exhibition of the art work of Mark Tobey, citing the Bahá'í Faith as the inspiration for his work. The *Kauai Times* in Hawaii ran a front-page story on 4 June on Leonard Herbert, a Bahá'í artist, and announced an exhibition of his work. The Canadian magazine *Eye* on 3 August profiled two Bahá'í members of the band "Project 9," featuring them on the cover and including positive references to their statements about the Bahá'í Faith. The March 1996 issue of *exclaim!* featured a photograph on its cover of the band "Plains of Fascination," and printed a page-long article on the artistic vision and beliefs of the members, several of whom are Bahá'ís.

In Australia, the *North West Telegraph* on 30 August 1995 carried an interview with Sharghieh Moshirian, a Bahá'í from Iran who experienced imprisonment and torture at the hands of the government, which was trying to induce her to recant her faith. The *Sunday Guardian* in Trinidad on 6 August 1995 published a profile of Hamid Farabi, detailing the persecution he endured as a Bahá'í in Iran and how he has succeeded in spite of it.

The retirement of Wilma Ellis from her position as Administrator General of the Bahá'í International Community's Offices in New York and Geneva resulted in three newspaper articles in Bermuda: the *Bermuda Sun* on 26 January 1996; the *Bermuda Times* on 26 January; and the *Royal Gazette* on 27 January. Bermuda is one of the countries Dr. Ellis works with in her service as a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in the Americas.

An architect of Persian background who was born in Malaysia spoke at a forum held in Malaysia on the Bahá'í House of Worship in India, for which he was the resident chief engineer. Malaysia's *Daily Express* ran a profile on him on 14 March 1996, while *Yazhou Shibao*, the *Overseas Chinese Daily*, and *Shihua Ribao* all reported on the forum.

The *Guardian* in Tanzania on 20 and 27 January 1996 printed extensive features on Bahá'í families there, including several

large photographs with each article. Some nine articles were published in Norwegian newspapers profiling Bahá'ís in various parts of the country, describing their beliefs and way of life, and reporting personal events.

On 8 March 1996, the *Solomon Star* carried a photograph and short article on two Solomon Islands youth who were living in Israel, serving at the Bahá'í World Centre. In Papua New Guinea four articles were published in January 1996, three in English and one in Pidgin, on the return of a Papua New Guinean Bahá'í youth from her term of service at the World Centre. The *Augusta Chronicle*, a newspaper in Georgia, United States, printed an article with a large photograph, about a Bahá'í youth's plans to postpone college for a year in order to offer a year of service to the Bahá'í Faith.

An obituary on Salvatore "Tony" Pelle was printed in the *Honolulu Advertiser* on 30 August 1995, following his passing. Various articles were written in Samoa on the passing of Suhayl Ala'i, a Bahá'í of American Samoa who died while on a visit to Western Samoa. The *Samoa News* carried a report of his death on 18 August and ten days later reported on the post-funeral memorial service in American Samoa. The *Samoa Journal and Advertiser* published a photograph of the funeral, and the *Samoa Observer* printed a lengthy memorial on Mr. Ala'i. In addition, Mr. Ala'i's employees published a full-page appreciation in his honor in *Samoa News*.

In the Turks and Caicos Islands, the *Turks and Caicos News* and the *Free Press* reported the 1 February 1996 death of Bahá'í physician Francis Gilbert. Various newspapers in Uganda followed the unfolding story of the murder of Rodney Belcher, a well-respected Bahá'í physician (see pp. 309–11). Additionally, the *Washington Times*, a U.S. newspaper, carried the story of his death on 12 March 1996.

ESSAYS, STATEMENTS, AND PROFILES

Wendy M. Heller explores the religious origins of the organizing principles of civil society, tracks their secularization in the modern era, and examines the prospect of an inclusive global moral order based on the enduring concept of covenant.

COVENANT AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Over a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote of the impending disintegration and collapse of the established order of civilization: "Soon will the present-day order be rolled up," He proclaimed, "and a new one spread out in its stead."¹ In the interval, experience has borne out the prescience of revelation; this century has seen Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic terms, of disequilibrium and chaos, of the shaking of foundations, become so much a part of daily life that, because of the pervasiveness of such disintegration, some have been led to mistake an abnormal state for a normal one, and to conclude that there simply are no foundations for any human endeavor, and that, in consequence, strife and conflict are the inevitable condition of existence. Yet an increasing number of scholars are now willing to shed the "obtuse secularism"² that, as

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 7.

2. Perry Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," in *Religion in American Life*, ed. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), vol. 1, p. 336, n. 20.

a feature of contemporary frameworks of thought, has systematically excluded serious appraisal of the central importance of religion and spiritual reality in human life and society. Faced by the evidence of the bankruptcy of modernity, whose promises of prosperity through materialism and ideology have proven hollow, thinkers and scholars have begun to turn the light of critical scrutiny upon the far-reaching effects that the displacement of religion by secular ideology has had on civilization in the modern era. That same secularism which was once heralded as the emancipation of civilization is now increasingly identified as the root cause of its disintegration.

This conclusion had been anticipated in the Bahá'í writings, which affirm that social and moral deterioration is directly related to the decline of religion as a social force. "Religion," Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples. The weakening of the pillars of religion hath strengthened the foolish and emboldened them and made them more arrogant. Verily I say: The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion."³ Material civilization, cut loose from the moderating influence of spiritual values, He warned, "will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities..."⁴ Affirming the central role of religion in the civilizing of human character, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained:

Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service

3. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department, Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh, 2d ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), pp. 63–64.
4. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 343.

of mankind. It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization.⁵

In the 1930s Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, singled out as an agent of social decline the "prevailing spirit of modernism with its emphasis on a purely materialistic philosophy which, as it diffuses itself, tends to divorce religion from man's daily life," resulting in the erosion of "conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty" as the center of gravity shifts to the individual self. Symptoms of such a society that has lost its spiritual bearings, he wrote, include religious intolerance, racism and xenophobia, terrorism, crime, alcoholism, the weakening of the family, and the breakdown of political and economic structures, to name but a few.⁶

In the Bahá'í view, however, the current experience of disorder and turmoil is only one aspect of a two-fold process that is ultimately therapeutic and evolutionary, rather than solely destructive. It clears the way for a recovery and renewal of the true and enduring foundations upon which a global moral order can be constructed. Though grounded in eternal verities, this process of spiritual and social evolution is forward looking and cannot be confused with a return to a vanished and unrecoverable past.

Sociologist Robert Bellah has remarked that the characteristic modern attempt to substitute "a technical-rational model of politics for a religious-moral one does not seem to me to be an advantage. Indeed it only exacerbates tendencies that I think are at the heart of our problems. If our problems are, as I believe them to be, centrally moral and even religious, then the effort to sidestep them with purely technical organizational considerations can only worsen them." Although the contemporary combination of the morality of self-interest, capitalism, and technological rationality has departed from the earlier religious and moral world view, he argues, it does not follow that the only possible alternative to modern secularism is

5. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957), p. 98.
6. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955), pp. 183, 187.

the “literal revival of that earlier conception.” Indeed, he suggests, “only a new imaginative, religious, moral, and social context for science and technology will make it possible to weather the storms that seem to be closing in on us in the late 20th century.”⁷

The Covenantal World View

In the search for solutions to current social problems, attention has been drawn to the importance of social institutions such as the family and religion that represent “seedbeds of virtue”: the spiritual foundations provided by religion imbue individuals with the virtues on which both civic participation and governance depend.⁸ Yet the connection is even stronger. Religion provides not only the foundations but the bricks and cement of society—the shared beliefs and moral values that unite people into communities, as well as the world view and account of the meaning and purpose of life that infuses those moral values with sense.⁹ These, moreover, provide the basis of all legitimation for authority, the source of legal institutions, as well as the touchstone and standard for evaluating the direction of society.¹⁰

Many of those who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries influenced and fashioned modern Western political institutions understood the pivotal importance of religion to the coherence and maintenance of a social and political order. They were far less influenced than has often been thought, by that typically modern secular rationalism that displaces God by human reason;¹¹ on the contrary, the world view that informed their thinking was based on the scriptural account of human nature as having a spiritual purpose, which was summed up in the idea of the divine Covenant

7. Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. xiv.

8. Mary Ann Glendon and David Blankenhorn, eds., *Seedbeds of Virtue: Sources of Competence, Character, and Citizenship in American Society* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1995).

9. Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, p. ix.

10. Ibid.

11. Ellis Sandoz, “Philosophical and Religious Dimensions of the American Founding,” *The Intercollegiate Review* 30 (1995): 27–42; A. James Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985).

between God and humankind. The purpose of human reason was to know the existence of God, whose handiwork was evident in creation; the summit of human freedom was to recognize and to give assent to the superior authority of revelation, thus entering into a covenant to willingly obey His commands.

This covenantal account of human nature, shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is reaffirmed in the Bahá’í Faith as an eternal truth. So it is not surprising to find that some of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings about freedom and rights, for instance, bear a similarity to certain ideas of earlier ethical thinkers, for the very reason that the concepts of religious freedom and conscience are directly related to the idea of the divine Covenant. But to confuse this transhistorical continuity for simple influence would be a mistake underrating its great significance. John Locke (1632–1704), for instance, drew his vastly influential ideas on religious toleration and liberty directly from the Bible and the logical implications of the Covenant. According to Daniel J. Elazar, the long history of deliberation about the rights and obligations of parties to compacts in medieval Jewish public law anticipated the seventeenth-century political theorists precisely because “both schools flowed from a common source”—the biblical covenants.¹² David Little points out that modern doctrines of freedom of religion, including that in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, far from being reducible to the influence of Enlightenment rationalism, are “unthinkable” apart from the religious concept of conscience, a concept also asserted in the Qur’án.¹³

Much has been written about the tremendous impact of seventeenth-century covenant or “federal” theology on the founding of the American colonies and subsequent developments of the U.S. constitutional era. The pivotal concept of the covenantal view is a distinctive idea of freedom, which throughout its history and in various diverse settings has retained a remarkable unity and consistency. “Covenant liberty” has been conceptualized as a

12. Daniel J. Elazar, “Covenant as the Basis of the Jewish Political Tradition,” *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 20 (1978): 5–37, p. 18.

13. David Little, “The Western Tradition,” in David Little et al., *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures: Western and Islamic Perspectives on Religious Liberty* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 26.

dialectic of freedom and duty: the liberation gained was from the bonds of selfish desire; the supreme achievement of human freedom and agency was submission to the divine law. According to Bellah, the “profoundly social” nature of this “covenant liberty” was reflected in the words of the eighteenth-century New England Baptist, Isaac Backus:

The true liberty of man is, to know, obey and enjoy his Creator, and to do all the good unto, and enjoy all the happiness with and in his fellow creatures that he is capable of; in order to which the law of love was written in his heart, which carries in it's nature union and benevolence to Being in general, and to each being in particular, according to it's nature and excellency, and to it's relation and connexion with the supreme Being, and ourselves. Each rational soul, as he is part of the whole system of rational beings, so it was and is, both his duty and his liberty to regard the good of the whole in all his actions.¹⁴

In the nineteenth century, through a number of factors, not least of which was the corrosive effect of secularization and its resulting atomistic individualism, the social consensus in this religious vision of social and moral order became steadily eroded. Today that original religious concept of freedom as “true liberty” that “meant freedom to do the good and was almost equivalent to virtue,” a conception embedded in a context of social obligation and divine purpose, has been displaced by an ideological notion of freedom as the liberty of the isolated individual to pursue self-interest without interference.¹⁵

Locke on Religious Freedom

In the world view within which Locke composed his doctrine of religious toleration, the primacy of freedom of the individual conscience was due to the importance of genuine belief (that is, freely given consent to divine authority) in attaining salvation, for “Faith only and sincerity, are the things that procure acceptance with God.”¹⁶ Although Locke is usually identified with the theory of

social contract, his views on human nature, purpose, freedom, and the good were squarely within the covenantal perspective. For Locke the testimony of revelation was, as reason itself must conclude, of an authority necessarily superior to human reason, and as such “carries with it Assurance beyond Doubt, Evidence beyond Exception”; “faith” was the assent of reason to revelation and constituted the supreme degree of assent possible by human reason.¹⁷ The “highest perfection of intellectual nature” lay “in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness; so the care of our selves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our *liberty*.” That “real happiness” was spiritual, not material. The “great privilege of finite intellectual Beings” did not consist in freedom to do whatever the will chose, but rather “the great inlet, and exercise of all the *liberty* Men have, are capable of, or can be useful to them, and that whereon depends the turn of their actions. . . [consisted] in this, that they can *suspend* their desires, and stop them from determining their *wills* to any action, till they have duly and fairly *examin'd* the good and evil of it as far forth as the weight of the thing requires.”¹⁸

Within the covenantal world view, the perfection of human freedom was, in essence, to become determined by the good. Thus, Locke wrote, “If we look upon those *superiour Beings* above us, who enjoy perfect Happiness, we shall have reason to judge that they are more steadily *determined in their choice of Good* than we; and yet we have no reason to think they are less happy, or less free, than we are.” Rejecting the vulgar notion of liberty as license, he observed: “Is it worth the Name of *Freedom* to be at liberty to play the Fool, and draw Shame and Misery upon a Man's self? If to break loose from the conduct of Reason, and to want that restraint of Examination and Judgment, which keeps us from chusing or doing the worse, be *Liberty*, true Liberty, mad Men and Fools are the only Freemen.”¹⁹

Though all men desired happiness, and thus sought the good, it was evident that not everyone thought the same thing good. But the apparent existence of a plurality of goods, he argued, would

14. Quoted in Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, p. 20.

15. Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, p. xii.

16. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in *The Works of John Locke*, 10 vols. (London: 1823; reprint, Aalen: Scientia, 1963), vol. 6, p. 28.

17. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 4.xvi.14.

18. *Ibid.*, 2.xxi.51–52.

19. *Ibid.*, 2.xxi.49, 50.

only be true “were all the Concerns of Man terminated in this Life,” that is, if ultimate happiness could really be found in material pursuits and the satisfaction of desire. Were this the case, there could indeed be no way to judge between individuals’ conflicting choices, or conceptions of their highest good, such as “why one followed Study and Knowledge, and another Hawking and Hunting; why one chose Luxury and Debauchery, and another Sobriety and Riches.” The good would be defined by the object one pursued. Yet Locke dismissed this conflation of desire and human good as a dangerous delusion, remarking: “’twas a right Answer of the Physician to his Patient, that had sore Eyes. If you have more Pleasure in the Taste of Wine, than in the use of your Sight, Wine is good for you; but if the Pleasure of Seeing be greater to you, than that of Drinking, Wine is naught.”²⁰ For Locke, freedom of conscience was the necessary precondition for fulfilling one’s duty to God and thus attaining the object of existence (the good), for “the end of all religion is to please him, and that liberty is essentially necessary to that end.”²¹

Locke conceptualized the theory set forth in his Letter on Toleration (1689) as an explicitly religious idea, required by the scriptural command of “charity, meekness, and good-will in general towards all mankind, even those that are not Christians.”²² Indeed, he characterized the concept of religious toleration as the hallmark of true religion itself. While the Letter is a foundational document of modern liberalism, it is possible to see in it the extent to which Locke took seriously not only the rights of individuals but their social obligations, as well as the civil rights of communities. In proper perspective, individual rights were located within a context that took account of correlative responsibilities; rightly understood, the individual’s freedom of conscience did not conflict with, and thus did not supersede, the right of society to maintain the conditions of order upon which all its individual members depend. This was true with regard to religious, as well as civil, society.

20. Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.xxi.54.

21. Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration, Works*, vol. 6, p. 30.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

The principle that defined the scope of, and linked together, the domains of freedom and obligation was that the exercise of freedom in the act of recognizing an authority (that is, giving “consent”) entailed a strong obligation of obedience.²³ Provided that membership in a religious society was by choice and “absolutely free and spontaneous,” Locke argued, “it necessarily follows, that the right of making its laws can belong to none but the society itself, or at least, which is the same thing, to those whom the society by common consent has authorized thereunto.”²⁴ What of those who, having joined, later came to disagree with some part of the doctrine, or who disobeyed the code of conduct required of members? Individual freedom of conscience remained unabridged so long as one was as free to leave as to enter a religion. As for those who disobeyed the laws, Locke recommended that “The arms by which the members of this society are to be kept within their duty, are exhortations, admonitions, and advice. If by these means the offenders will not be reclaimed, and the erroneous convinced, there remains nothing farther to be done, but that such stubborn and obstinate persons, who give no ground to hope for their reformation, should be cast out and separated from the society.... I hold,” he wrote, “that no church is bound by the duty of toleration to retain any such person in her bosom, as after admonition continues obstinately to offend against the laws of the society. For these being the condition of communion, and the bond of society, if the breach of them were permitted without any animadversion, the society would immediately be thereby dissolved.”²⁵ Excommunication, he argued, was the just and reasonable way to treat those violations of norms which, as he correctly realized, if permitted unchecked, would dissolve the unity, order, and integrity of the community.

It is important to note that in arguing against the use of coercion in religious matters, Locke was arguing against the sometimes brutal, physical punishments notorious to the era (“galleys, prisons, confiscations, and death”²⁶) used by the civil authority in matters

23. Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration, Works*, vol. 6, p. 13.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

concerning belief, and especially when imposed on persons of a different religion. The use of force was appropriately exercised by the civil authority in enforcing civil laws, which did not concern belief. But far from considering expulsion to be coercive, he regarded it as a simple matter of holding people accountable to their solemn promises, freely given. Nor did it have anything to do with civil rights: "Excommunication," as such, Locke argued, "neither does nor can deprive the excommunicated person of any of those civil goods that he formerly possessed." For no one had "any civil right" to partake of the privileges that accrued to membership in a voluntary religious association.²⁷

Religion and Civil Order

To see how much the common understanding of the relationship between religion and civil order has changed, it is useful to look at what Locke says about religion and civil government in the Letter. In his argument about the separation of the "ecclesiastical" and the "civil," the distinction involved was not between a religious sphere and an irreligious one: Locke took for granted that religious principles were the foundation of the civil order. He also acknowledged the justice of theocracy in principle (by which he meant specifically a commonwealth in which civil and religious law and authority were combined). His famous contention that there could be no Christian commonwealth did not rest on any claim that theocracy itself was inherently unjust, but rather on the simple fact that no Christian commonwealth, or indeed any specific form of government, was prescribed in the Gospel; and only what was clearly warranted by the revealed scripture could be considered binding. However, where theocracy was ordained in the Holy Scripture itself, as it had been in the Law of Moses, Locke insisted, it was obligatory.²⁸

Locke was concerned, rather, with the just extent of the jurisdictions of civil and religious authority in a society where the

27. Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 17.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38. See also *The Reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures*, in *The Works of John Locke*, 10 vols. [London: 1823; reprint, Aalen: Scientia, 1963], vol. 7, pp. 13–16.

general consensus in Christianity among the majority of citizens was obscured and overshadowed by violent dissensus between denominations. This disunity was intractable in the absence of any universally recognized source of authority to adjudicate the competing interpretations which had led to the fractionation of the body of the religion into sects. In proposing that the "civil" should be separate from the "religious," by "religious" Locke was referring primarily to the contentious sources of difference between denominations, not to the broad foundation of religious morality which was uncontested. It seems he was also trying to apply to the problem at hand a conceptual distinction, familiar to Christians, between "the 'religious' duties owed directly to God," as contained in the first four of the Ten Commandments (concerning matters of faith and worship), and the "'moral' duties owed to fellow human beings" which made up the rest of the commandments (the social or moral laws concerning actions against persons and property, and so on).²⁹ While laws concerning inner belief applied only to believers, the laws concerning outward behavior justly applied to every citizen, regardless of belief, as they constituted the moral basis of the civil order.

But the origin of both these duties in the revealed scriptures underscores the fact that the domains of the spiritual and the temporal, the "religious" and the "civil," are ultimately not radically separate but are two aspects of one reality.³⁰ The relevant distinction in this case involved that of competence to judge, and thus to impose punishment: only God could judge the sincerity of one's belief; but human authorities could judge actions in society. Locke wanted to ameliorate a prevalent condition of his time—the subjection of people to civil punishments for not belonging to the state church or attending worship—by putting things in their proper order. He proposed that membership in religious associations should be voluntary and never compulsory; that different faiths should be free to practice their beliefs (provided they did not engage in sedition against the civil order), and that civil power

29. Little, "Western Tradition," p. 19; Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 39–43.

30. Cf. Little, "Western Tradition," p. 20.

should be used only to enforce the civil, public laws of morality, public security, and order, while religious institutions should hold only the members of their own community to be bound by that religion's beliefs, practices, and laws. In making these proposals, Locke was in effect articulating the religious—not secular—principles for the just governance of a religiously plural society. The theocracy of the Israelite Commonwealth, Locke pointed out, was the source of the concept of “separation” he was arguing for, and he cited this fact as the highest possible warrant of its justice.

Locke also argued against the use of physical punishment or deprivation of property, whether imposed by religious or civil authorities, on anyone at all in matters of belief and worship, primarily because it was unwarranted in the Christian scriptures, and secondarily because it was ineffective anyway as coercion could never procure belief.³¹ But it would distort him out of context, and collapse a crucial conceptual distinction, to read this classic argument against coercion in matters of religion as an extension of rights of conscience specifically pertaining to the civil domain, into the domain of the voluntary religious community, as if its internal life were also, like the civil sphere, a space undefined by any commitments to particular beliefs or a distinctive way of life. To do this, as Locke correctly saw, would condemn any association based on belief to dissolution.

It is important to recognize that for Locke, and, for example, the framers of the U.S. Constitution, the fact that the revealed social laws of religion were the moral foundation of the civil order was never in question. In the U.S. constitutional era the “disestablishment” issue primarily concerned doing away with public tax support for churches, which amounted to extracting compulsory contributions to religious funds from nonbelievers. Yet introducing that explicitly financial “disestablishment” did not contradict the general expectation by all that government ought to operate on the basis of the moral principles of religion.³² Thus it can be said that, in a broader sense of the term, the “establishment”—that is, institutionalization—of those religious laws

31. Cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 46.

32. Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life*, p. 113.

and values with civil application was never in question, nor even mentioned, except affirmatively, because it was the indispensable foundation of the society.

And it still is, for the deep structure of the Western legal system in general remains the biblical moral code and even church canon law, although the religious origins of the civil law have been largely effaced.³³ According to sociologist Mattei Dogan, in spite of a decline in religious belief “in Europe, Christian morals have been absorbed into the State. The philosophy of the Ten Commandments, the prophets and the apostles is embodied in the civil legislation of the whole of Europe.”³⁴ In the sense that a society's governmental structures, processes, and laws represent the institutionalization of the moral values of its people, no state can exist without an “established,” that is, institutionalized, set of beliefs that define its moral orientation. Those beliefs, implicitly, are prior to the institutional structures; without them, “institutions” are a hollow shell. And, inescapably, the moral authority of civil laws depends on an underlying belief in a legitimating conception of good that makes those laws right.

The Secular Turn

In the modern era, those distinctive concepts of freedom and of toleration became detached from their original religious foundations and anchored to another, secular system of thought that rejected any preexisting obligation of divine origin. The idea of the good was demoted from its universal transcendent position and relativized to the individual. This shift reflected the displacement, in modern secular philosophic liberalism, of the religious view of human nature as a creation of God, by a (sometimes tacit) materialist account of human nature as self-creating and autonomous, of ultimate good as something private and (potentially, at least) different for each individual. Individual freedom retained its prominent position, but instead of freedom to recognize the good (that is, God), it was

33. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 198.

34. Mattei Dogan, “The Decline of Religious Beliefs in Western Europe,” *International Social Science Journal* 145 (1995): 405–17, p. 417.

construed as freedom to choose between a plurality of goods or to create one's own good, but in any case, the self, not a transcendent source of that self, was the autonomous measure of its own good. The concept of covenant, as the origin of society, was replaced by social contract, in which the people themselves, and their private interests, were seen as the authoritative source of the social bond.³⁵ By the twentieth century, a process that had begun with the attempt to apply religious principles to mitigate the problem of religious disunity had resulted in the eviction of the religious basis of the entire collective moral system which had been taken for granted as an indispensable foundation and the purpose of championing religious liberty at all.

A key feature of the secular turn in modern moral philosophy has been the attempt to separate the right, or justice, from any substantive conception of human good, such as would be found in a religious world view—that is, an account of reality, human nature, and purpose which gives direction and meaning to human life. This conception of justice is regarded as prior to the good and as universally valid because it does not depend on, and thus give privilege to, any particular conception of the good. While it has been given various renderings, the neutral conception of justice is generally concerned with ensuring a maximum, or an equal amount of, liberty (and thus opportunity) for individuals to pursue their own self-chosen conceptions of the good life.

However, the view that it is possible to do right independently of reference to the good would have been foreign to the thinking of such a religious philosopher as John Locke. According to Locke,

A good life, in which consists not the least part of religion and true piety, concerns also the civil government: and in it lies the safety both of men's souls and of the commonwealth. Moral actions belong therefore to the jurisdiction both of the outward and inward court; both of the civil and domestic governor; I mean, both of the magistrate and conscience.³⁶

35. Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, ch. 1; Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," p. 335.

36. Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 41.

Likewise alien would have been the modern secular notion of an autonomous human reason able to formulate its own morality or ethics without reference to God. For Locke,

A dependent, intelligent being is under the power of and direction and dominion of him on whom he depends and must be for the ends appointed him by that superior being. If man were independent he could have no law but his own will, no end but himself. He would be a god to himself and the satisfaction of his own will the sole measure of all his actions.³⁷

Locke's conviction that belief in God was the essential ground for a commitment to justice is reflected in his refusal to grant atheism the status of a moral foundation equivalent to religion. For "Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all. Besides also, those that by their atheism undermine and destroy all religion, can have no pretense of religion whereupon to challenge the privilege of a toleration."³⁸ This often misunderstood passage did not imply atheists should not have the same *civil* rights as other citizens; it merely refused to allow religious toleration to extend, by sophistry, to an opposite, antireligious position that, because it denied the source of legitimation for "the bonds of human society," lacked the basic commitment to authority necessary to uphold any civil order (and, of course, lacked any reason to consider religion worthy of toleration).

Locke, in sum, thought that the right was intrinsically dependent on the good, that the good was necessarily the divine good, and that while the coercive enforcement of sectarian dogmas and forms of worship—quite correctly—had no place in civil government, religious principles and moral values were inseparable from it.

In recent years, the idea that justice can be conceptualized in the absence of any commitment to a set of transcendent values, or with a minimal set of values, has been abundantly criticized and its

37. Quoted in John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), frontispiece.

38. Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 47.

Aside from reporting on significant events in which the Bahá'í community is involved, *The Bahá'í World* offers selections from the Faith's sacred writings, this year focusing on remedies to pressing social problems, and highlights from major communications of the Universal House of Justice.

In the "Statements and Essays" portion of the volume, the reader will find major documents prepared by Bahá'í International Community agencies during the year, including *Turning Point for All Nations*, which was widely disseminated during the United Nations' fiftieth anniversary, and the statement made at the Fourth World Conference on Women. A major philosophical essay by Wendy M. Heller on the religious foundations of civil society can also be found here, as well as "World Watch," an article reflecting on contemporary social concerns from a Bahá'í perspective. Rounding out this section is a profile of a social and economic development project undertaken by Bahá'ís in Brazil.

Finally, the volume contains a collection of "Information and Resources" for those who wish to obtain statistics on the Bahá'í world community, locate various agencies in the directory provided, learn about new publications, have a basic reading list of Bahá'í books, or use the glossary to become more familiar with specific Bahá'í terminology. Brief memorial sketches of noted Bahá'ís from around the world are also located here. Those wishing to read a general discussion of the Bahá'í Faith and its worldwide community can consult the "Introduction to the Bahá'í Community" at the beginning of the volume.

The Bahá'í World volumes have been published at varying intervals since 1925, offering an authoritative account of the activities and achievements of the international Bahá'í community. In 1992, the series was revamped to appear on an annual basis, to include many more color photographs, and to be more accessible to the general reading public. Each volume covers the period from Ridván—an annual twelve-day festival in the Bahá'í Faith that commences on 21 April—to Ridván and seeks to provide a representative survey of the international undertakings, the achievements, and the perspective of this worldwide community.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

A young man of high caste in Bangladesh volunteers to live amongst the Poschima people, who are of a much lower caste, in the course of his efforts to promote the beliefs of a Faith that teaches the oneness of humankind. In Tasiilaq, Greenland, a small group gathering to study and enjoy fellowship welcomes two determined people who fly in to the remote settlement by helicopter. A princess from Western Samoa travels to Fiji in order to offer tribal chiefs and elders a document outlining a process of development that respects the dignity of all peoples. One hundred and sixty-five people come together in Recife, Brazil, and, in an atmosphere of reverence, mark the launching of the Portuguese translation of a holy book. A young Mongolian woman who has never before left her province walks 70 kilometers in the snow, then travels by truck, and finally catches a plane to Ulaan Baatar, where she participates in the election of her religion's national administrative body. In Salt Lake City, Utah, in the United States, organizers of "Color Me Human Week" devote their energies to the theme of "raising the first

Incline your ears to the sweet melody of this Prisoner. Arise, and lift up your voices, that haply they that are fast asleep may be awakened. Say: O ye who are as dead! The Hand of Divine bounty proffereth unto you the Water of Life. Hasten and drink your fill. Whoso hath been re-born in this Day, shall never die; whoso remaineth dead, shall never live.

O ye members of Assemblies in that land [England] and in other countries! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof; if ye be of them that scan heedfully. Regard the world as the human body which, though at its creation whole and perfect, hath been afflicted, through various causes, with grave disorders and maladies. Not for one day did it gain ease, nay, its sickness waxed more severe, as it fell under the treatment of ignorant physicians, who gave full rein to their personal desires, and have erred grievously. And if at one time, through the care of an able physician, a member of that body was healed, the rest remained afflicted as before. Thus informeth you the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. We behold it, in this day, at the mercy of rulers, so drunk with pride that they cannot discern clearly their own best advantage, much less recognize a Revelation so bewildering and challenging as this.

...That which God hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful, and inspired Physician.

The Great Being saith: O ye children of men! The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes

and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure. Our hope is that the world's religious leaders and the rulers thereof will unitedly arise for the reformation of this age and the rehabilitation of its fortunes. Let them, after meditating on its needs, take counsel together and, through anxious and full deliberation, administer to a diseased and sorely-afflicted world the remedy it requireth... It is incumbent upon them who are in authority to exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favorably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men... Please God, the peoples of the world may be led, as the result of the high endeavors exerted by their rulers and the wise and learned amongst men, to recognize their best interests. How long will humanity persist in its waywardness? How long will injustice continue? How long is chaos and confusion to reign amongst men? How long will discord agitate the face of society?... The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divideth and afflicteth the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective. I beseech God, exalted be His glory, that He may graciously awaken the peoples of the earth, may grant that the end of their conduct may be profitable unto them, and aid them to accomplish that which beseemeth their station.

...The heaven of statesmanship is made luminous and resplendent by the brightness of the light of these blessed words which hath dawned from the dayspring of the Will of God: It behoveth every ruler to weigh his own being every day in the balance of equity and justice and then to judge between men and counsel them to do that which would direct their steps unto the path of wisdom and understanding. This is the cornerstone of statesmanship and the essence thereof. From these words every enlightened

contradictions enumerated, from a variety of perspectives, particularly with respect to its implications for community life.

Modern secular liberal philosophy was never intended to constitute communities but rather to provide a theory of neutral arbitration among the various individuals and communities over which the modern state has jurisdiction. Thus it is not surprising that the principles of liberal polity, emphasizing difference and individualism, should be in tension with the concerns and needs of communities, which depend upon unity and mutuality. In the historical experience of irreconcilable religious sectarianism which gave rise to modern liberal political theory, the irreducibility of disunity arose, as Locke was keenly aware, from the fact that the points of contention involved the assertion of secondary doctrines and practices above and beyond what was clearly warranted in the scripture. But because such doctrines were not warranted—or were not clearly warranted—they could never gain consensus by a conclusive proof of their authority, and thus could only appeal to probability; hence they could always be disputed. In contrast, he observed, clearly warranted deductions caused no division.³⁹ Under the circumstances, without any universally recognized authority (for the same reason—absence of a clear scriptural warrant for any such institution), dissensus was inevitable and at best might be managed but never eliminated.

It is thus the absence of any infallible, scripturally warranted center of interpretive authority that is the root of the historical, religious problem to which the theory that would become modern secular liberalism was originally proposed as the solution. The presumption of irreconcilable difference, and hence of disunity, is ingrained in that system of thought; and this, along with the primacy of individual liberty (which as Locke noted became a practical necessity precisely because of dissension and the need to choose between competing sects), continues to shape contemporary concepts of the liberal polity. On the resulting model, the community, as Philip Selznick observes, is not to be “based on shared identity, shared purpose, or shared understanding of the

39. Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 57; cf. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 20–21.

common good; rather it is constituted by the principles of right ordering that govern liberty.” But that emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy meets its limitations precisely where community life begins: for communities are constituted by unity and sustained by commitments to shared purposes. Regulatory rules and procedures for ensuring individual liberty cannot account for or provide, for example, “ideals of caring and social justice—including care for children, health, families, the environment, aesthetic values, opportunity, and the well-being of future generations.”⁴⁰ Such goals guided by ideals are unintelligible apart from a vision of human good, excellence, and happiness.

The limiting consequences, as Selznick has noted, of conceiving the community as a mere “framework within which autonomous choices can be made” are that “The political quest for a distinctive *kind* of community is abandoned. We are not to seek, through politics and government, the kind of community that will best redeem the promise of fellowship or most closely approximate the potential for human growth, creativity, and responsibility.”⁴¹ As the strictly value-neutral state attempts to exclude from public institutions and governance any reference to the kinds of ultimate goals associated with a particular good way of life—and thus with religion—it precludes and indeed disqualifies itself from being able to “advance human excellence.”⁴² For to do that requires a conception of the good, something to which the neutral state disclaims any access.

As many have pointed out, modern liberal theory contains deep contradictions. It is now widely recognized that, despite disclaimers, a conception of the good and a theory of human nature—and thus a set of particular beliefs—is being implemented all the same in liberal theory, and this implies an exclusion of other beliefs:

Any conception of the human good according to which, for example, it is the duty of government to educate the members of the community morally, so that they come to live out that

40. Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 381.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

42. John Rawls, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 382.

conception of the good, may up to a point be held as a private theory by individuals or groups, but any serious attempt to embody it in public life will be proscribed. And this qualification of course entails not only that liberal individualism does indeed have its own broad conception of the good, which it is engaged in imposing politically, legally, socially, and culturally wherever it has the power to do so, but that in so doing its toleration of rival conceptions of the good in the public arena is severely limited.⁴³

According to Selznick, “fundamental values—not only basic requirements of justice and citizenship but broader ideals of personal and social well-being” are inevitably employed if only tacitly; for instance, merely to have decided that human beings need liberty is already to have committed oneself to a belief about human nature. “The presuppositions of liberalism represent genuine moral choices, and their reaffirmation is a continuous act of moral choice, the more so as liberalism takes seriously the quest for social justice.” As the pursuit of social justice becomes an aim and purpose in government, that endeavor embodies an ensemble of values far beyond any neutral or procedural concept of basic liberties. Thus, for example, “Education for basic skills may arguably be morally neutral, but not education for citizenship, for enlightenment, for social responsibility, for deferred gratification, for intellectual and aesthetic appreciation.”⁴⁴ And the same is true of a wide range of other social issues.

Ever more urgently, social theorists now call for recovering a balance between the individual and society, between rights and responsibilities within a coherent framework. “Our situation today,” Selznick writes, “calls for a more robust idea of community, one that gives greater weight to the claims of mutuality and fellowship. Liberalism’s thin theory of community weakens its capacity to speak with a clear voice where the public interest demands discipline and duty as much as (and in a given context perhaps more than) freedom and self-realization.” For that same insistence on

43. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 336.

44. Selznick, *Moral Commonwealth*, pp. 383, 384.

value neutrality and emphasis on individualism undermines the security and well-being of all when it eliminates any basis for calling upon individuals to sacrifice their individual preferences and concrete, short-term interests for the needs of a more abstract common good: “it is hard to justify sacrifice—a ban on gas-guzzling vehicles, a program of compulsory national service, a required course of study—when individual choice is held sacred.”⁴⁵

The idea that civil governance requires a value-neutral ethic that strictly avoids all reference to a transcendent good is a peculiarly modern secular development, which appears to be an attempt to extend the principle of noncoercion in matters of belief into a vastly altered context. In the new context, the possibility of moral consensus upon any religious foundation has been wholly abandoned, and instead it is taken as axiomatic that the only available ethical common ground is secular, that is, nonreligious. And yet, every attempt to construct such a secular public ethic or conception of justice with universal validity discloses a tacit dependency upon what turn out to be spiritual values.⁴⁶ When we trace the concepts and principles on which justice—including the essential ideas of human equality and obligation—order, governance, and citizenship depend, it becomes clear that any theory of these that was entirely stripped of all its borrowed religious values would be little different from the theoretical Hobbesian “state of nature”: a war of all against all. Such a condition, ruled only by the

45. Selznick, *Moral Commonwealth*, pp. 385, 386.

46. Some contemporary theorists acknowledge, in passing, the religious origin of the ideas as a once-helpful ladder that can now be kicked away. Locke wrote of the epistemic dependence of philosophers on revelation: “He that travels the roads now, applauds his own strength and legs that have carried him so far in such a scantling of time, and ascribes all to his own vigour; little considering how much he owes to their pains, who cleared the woods, drained the bogs, built the bridges, and made the ways passable; without which he might have toiled much with little progress.... It is no diminishing to revelation, that reason gives its suffrage too to the truths revelation has discovered. But it is our mistake to think, that because reason confirms them to us, we had the first certain knowledge of them from thence; and in that clear evidence we now possess them.” (*Reasonableness of Christianity, Works*, vol. 7, p. 145.)

unrestricted competition of self-interest, is nothing less than radical individualism.⁴⁷ Yet the consequence of unbridled individualism is ultimately the erosion of the altruistic values on which community, civil society, and, some argue, human evolution itself, depend.⁴⁸

It has been suggested that even after the modern secular turn, and the resultant weakening of the authority of religion, the social order continued to run on the “accumulated moral capital” of the past,⁴⁹ a fact that temporarily concealed the true social cost incurred by abandoning religion. As this reserve has gradually exhausted itself, we have witnessed an acceleration in the rate of social and moral deterioration, expressed in the loosening of every form of personal obligation, and have seen secular ideologies and theories go bankrupt, unable to create community, to teach moral values and virtues necessary to sustain the political order, or to stem the rising tide of conflict and violence. The progression of this disintegration has only thrown into relief the fact that “no matter how undermined, a remnant of the older morality provides much of what coherence our society still has.”⁵⁰ Such recognition has led to an emerging interest in the underlying principle at the basis of that morality, the idea of covenant, as “an idea whose time [has] come back.”⁵¹

The Concept of Covenant

Covenant, it has long been recognized, is not merely a theological concept but it has been termed the most powerful and

47. See also Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, p. 26.

48. Ronald Cohen, “Altruism and the Evolution of Civil Society,” in *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives on Altruism*, ed. Pearl M. Oliner et al. (New York: New York University Press, 1992), pp. 104–29.

49. James Q. Wilson, “Liberalism, Modernism, and the Good Life,” in *Seeds of Virtue: Sources of Competence, Character, and Citizenship in American Society*, ed. Mary Ann Glendon and David Blankenhorn (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1995), p. 19.

50. Bellah, *Broken Covenant*, p. xiii.

51. Daniel J. Elazar, “What Happened to Covenant in the Nineteenth Century?” in *Covenant in the Nineteenth Century: The Decline of an American Political Tradition*, ed. Daniel J. Elazar (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), p. 4.

enduring form of political foundation and one of the “fundamental political concepts illuminating the origins and basis of political life.”⁵² Since the earliest biblical covenants uniting the Israelite tribes, the idea that human political relationships, like the relationship between God and humanity, ought to be based on “compact, association, and consent” has provided various peoples the inspiration and pattern for community organization and state building. According to Elazar, the resurgence of this world view in sixteenth-century Reformed Protestant Christianity in Europe gave rise to the federal theology on which English and American Puritans, Huguenots, and Scottish Covenanters based their political theories and constitutional principles, and which influenced the development of federal states in Switzerland and the Netherlands as well as the federation of the New England colonies into the United States of America. Moreover, he notes, “the biblical vision for the ‘end of days’—the messianic era” includes an extension of this divine “grand design” for human polity to “a world confederation or league of nations, each preserving its own integrity while accepting a common divine covenant and constitutional order. This order will establish appropriate covenantal relationships for the entire world.”⁵³

The idea of covenant refers to a constellation of concepts: the free and willing recognition of a binding duty, originating in or guaranteed by a transcendent source, to act together in a collective enterprise defined by a purpose and according to a set of precepts or laws, with accountability in the form of blessing and benefits for fulfillment and punishment and retribution for failure.⁵⁴ The vast ramifications of this idea become apparent when we consider a few of the implications that can be traced to the idea of covenant. The element of free and willing recognition is the origin of the

52. Elazar, “Covenant as the Basis,” pp. 6, 10.

53. Daniel J. Elazar, *Exploring Federalism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), pp. 119, 126–27, 120.

54. Cf. a different rendering of elements in Donald S. Lutz, “The Evolution of Covenant Form and Content as the Basis for Early American Political Culture,” in *Covenant in the Nineteenth Century: The Decline of an American Political Tradition*, ed. Daniel J. Elazar (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), p. 35.

principle of consent, as the basis of free society and self-government. The recognition of a binding duty generates the concept of strong obligation through the recognition of authority. The location of the duty in a transcendent, divine source is the pivot of the idea of legitimation. In the summons to a collective, purposive enterprise the community is created, implying for each individual a commitment to participate and engendering a sense of identity, loyalty, and responsibility. The set of precepts that guide and direct this enterprise define the character of the moral and political order of the community. It is here we find the content of law, rights and responsibilities, the hierarchy of values, and the virtues entailed by them. It can also be seen here that, because of its centrality to the lives and well-being of all the individuals who belong to it, that collective enterprise is itself an entity which has rights (in virtue of its responsibilities), and all those who identify themselves with this community share an obligation to give attention and care to the protection of the community as a whole. And finally, the element of retribution and proportionality is the basic principle underlying all forms of accountability and is a fundamental component of all moral codes.⁵⁵

The vehicle for ensuring the orderly practice, maintenance, and transmission of a society's values is its institutions.⁵⁶ The specification of institutional structure can be considered as a separate formal element of a covenant,⁵⁷ but the history of revealed covenants is notable for the absence of provisions for institutions or the scope of their authority. That this absence has been the prime cause of intrareligious conflict and schism highlights the profound significance and unprecedented potentiality of the institutional arrangements in the Bahá'í Faith. The structures and principles of the Bahá'í Administrative Order are not only clearly specified in the texts whose authority is universally recognized by Bahá'ís, but

55. Alison Dundes Renteln, "A Cross-Cultural Approach to Validating International Human Rights: The Case of Retribution Tied to Proportionality," in *Human Rights: Theory and Measurement*, ed. David Louis Cingranelli (New York: St. Martin's, 1988).

56. Selznick, *Moral Commonwealth*, pp. 232–33.

57. Lutz, "Evolution of Covenant Form and Content," p. 37.

they are the subject of a special revealed covenant. The specific provisions of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant ensure the integrity as well as the flexibility and responsiveness of the system of governance, and guarantee the unity of the Bahá'í Faith itself by eliminating the historical cause of schism.⁵⁸

It has been pointed out that the covenantal element specifying the precepts governing social behavior is the historical source of bills of rights, not as a "legalistic limit on the power of government, but rather as a celebration of the fundamental value commitments of a people." According to Donald S. Lutz, the current concept of a "legalistic bill of rights... is a direct descendent of [this] foundation element found in covenants."⁵⁹ Numerous colonial Bills of Liberty exemplifying the people's "value commitments all point to the earlier covenants, and the Bible that underlies them, rather than to any Magna Carta or English common law tradition." It has also been suggested that, in addition to the tendency to federal structure, democratic participation and collective, consensus-oriented decision-making are intrinsic aspects of covenantal polity.⁶⁰

In the covenantal concept of authority, the obligation to obey the law arises as a consequence of the relationship one recognizes and freely affirms between oneself and the source of those laws. Bahá'u'lláh begins His Most Holy Book, his Book of Laws, with a renewal of the great Covenant. "The first duty" is recognition of the authority of the Lawgiver; the second is to observe His ordinances.⁶¹ Here, we can see, morality is grounded in belief as "conscious knowledge"⁶² and begins with a duty, not a right. Consequently, it can be seen, the right to religious freedom comes into being, as a *human* right, in order to be able to fulfill the *duty* of obedience to God. That is, it becomes a civil right as a result of being held as a religious conviction.

58. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 143–57.

59. Lutz, "Evolution of Covenant Form and Content," pp. 42–43.

60. Elazar, "Covenant as the Basis," pp. 17, 36.

61. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 1.

62. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith: Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 383.

The order of the two duties of recognition and obedience has an important implication. Obedience, in a covenant, follows only as a consequence of the genuine recognition of a source of authority higher than oneself. This is why the covenantal form of legitimation and authority can never be confused with authoritarianism because it is noncoercive by definition, beginning as it does with the free, uncoerced consent of individual reason. Thus, those who have seen coercion lurking wherever there is "transcendent authority," who feel that anyone who believes in a universal truth is bound to feel justified in forcing it on someone else, simply fail to recognize the critical point that coercion is entirely inconsistent with, and indeed, vitiates the principle of covenant. Although recognition of God is a duty, it cannot be performed at all unless it is consent willingly given, for coerced belief is no belief at all.⁶³ Thus, in the past when ecclesiastical institutions undertook, without warrant in their own scriptures, to make affiliation in a particular faith or sect mandatory and to use force upon those who were not believers, this was itself a contradiction of the most basic principle of the divine Covenant.⁶⁴

However, the voluntary principle means that once one has given consent, recognized the authority of the lawgiver, and become a party to the covenantal relationship, one has obligated oneself to the relationship, with all its provisions and implications. This conception of consent makes the covenantal relation very different from the social contract, and contemporary notions of contract, where individual interests are the measure of the contract itself. Selznick writes: "a social ethic is the linchpin of the covenant.... This social ethic is something more than a natural, unconscious acceptance of social norms." It "suggests an infeasible commitment and a continuing relationship." Moreover, as he has noted, covenant is the foundation for all other particular promises and

63. See Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 11.

64. Although the use of force is authorized in the Qur'an, it is permitted only in defense, and never against peaceful nonbelievers. See, for example, Mohamed Talbi, "Religious Liberty: A Muslim Perspective," in *Religious Liberty and Human Rights in Nations and in Religions*, ed. Leonard Swidler (Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press, 1985), pp. 175-87; Little, "Western Tradition," pp. 29-30.

contracts.⁶⁵ In a covenant, we enter into a relationship, which is not determined by purely individual interests. Entering it constitutes an affirmation that our own best interests are necessarily located within it, and that they are inextricably interrelated with those with whom we share membership in this collective enterprise. The covenant thus integrates the private and the public, the spiritual and the temporal, as through the personal covenant with God the individual enters the social covenant. Miller writes of this idea as it was once conceptualized:

The personal covenant of the soul with God is impaled on the same axis as the social, like a small circle within a larger. Before entering into both the personal and social covenants men have a liberty to go their own gait; afterwards they have renounced their liberty to do anything but that which has been agreed upon. The mutual consenting involved in a covenant, says Hooker, is the "sment" which solders together all societies, political or ecclesiastical; "for there is no man constrained to enter into such a condition unlesse he will: and he that will enter, must also willingly binde and ingage himself to each member of that society to promote the good of the whole, or else a member actually he is not."⁶⁶

The covenantal concept of social interdependence is expressed as an encompassing, global perspective in the Bahá'í writings, in the central principle of the oneness of humanity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching:

The Blessed Beauty saith: "Ye are all the fruits of one tree, the leaves of one branch." Thus hath He likened this world of being to a single tree, and all its peoples to the leaves thereof, and the blossoms and fruits. It is needful for the bough to blossom, and leaf and fruit to flourish, and upon the interconnection of all parts of the world-tree, dependeth the flourishing of leaf and blossom, and the sweetness of the fruit.

For this reason must all human beings powerfully sustain one another and seek for everlasting life; and for this reason must the lovers of God in this contingent world become the

65. Selznick, *Moral Commonwealth*, p. 479n (citing Pitkin).

66. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 90.

mercies and the blessings sent forth by that clement King of the seen and unseen realms. Let them purify their sight and behold all humankind as leaves and blossoms and fruits of the tree of being. Let them at all times concern themselves with doing a kindly thing for one of their fellows, offering to someone love, consideration, thoughtful help. Let them see no one as their enemy, or as wishing them ill, but think of all humankind as their friends; regarding the alien as an intimate, the stranger as a companion, staying free of prejudice, drawing no lines.⁶⁷

This view of human interdependence is reflected in Shoghi Effendi's explanation of the Bahá'í conception of society as based on the subordination of "every particularistic interest, be it personal, regional, or national, to the paramount interests of humanity, firmly convinced that in a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected."⁶⁸ As the Universal House of Justice has explained,

This relationship, so fundamental to the maintenance of civilized life, calls for the utmost degree of understanding and cooperation between society and the individual; and because of the need to foster a climate in which the untold potentialities of the individual members of society can develop, this relationship must allow "free scope" for "individuality to assert itself" through modes of spontaneity, initiative and diversity that ensure the viability of society.⁶⁹

The implications of such a model, and such a vision, to serve as the foundation of a global social order are developed in the Bahá'í International Community's statement, *The Prosperity of Humankind*:

Human society is composed not of a mass of merely differentiated cells but of associations of individuals, each one of whom

67. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), pp. 1–2.

68. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 198.

69. Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989), p. 20.

is endowed with intelligence and will; nevertheless, the modes of operation that characterize man's biological nature illustrate fundamental principles of existence. Chief among these is that of unity in diversity. Paradoxically, it is precisely the wholeness and complexity of the order constituting the human body—and the perfect integration into it of the body's cells—that permit the full realization of the distinctive capacities inherent in each of these component elements. No cell lives apart from the body, whether in contributing to its function or in deriving its share from the well-being of the whole. The physical well-being thus achieved finds its purpose in making possible the expression of human consciousness; that is to say, the purpose of biological development transcends the mere existence of the body and its parts.

What is true of the life of the individual has its parallels in human society. The human species is an organic whole, the leading edge of the evolutionary process. That human consciousness necessarily operates through an infinite diversity of individual minds and motivations detracts in no way from its essential unity. Indeed, it is precisely an inhering diversity that distinguishes unity from homogeneity or uniformity. What the peoples of the world are today experiencing, Bahá'u'lláh said, is their collective coming-of-age, and it is through this emerging maturity of the race that the principle of unity in diversity will find full expression....

...Because the relationship between the individual and society is a reciprocal one, the transformation now required must occur simultaneously within human consciousness and the structure of social institutions.⁷⁰

The principle of interdependence and the relationship of the interests of the individual and society naturally has crucial implications for the concepts of governance and of justice.

Governance as Trusteeship

Governance is frequently mentioned in the Bahá'í writings as trusteeship, as the administering of a trust. This itself is an enduring concept, and it is worth examining why. Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the governors and administrators of society as "trustees" or "trusted ones" of God. He writes: "Know ye that the poor are the

70. Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, reprinted in *The Bahá'í World 1994–95*, pp. 277–78.

trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust. Ye will most certainly be called upon to answer for His trust on the day when the Balance of justice shall be set.”⁷¹ The relation of trusteeship is itself a kind of covenant—an agreement concerning the exercise of power under a set of circumstances determined by a relationship with ethical obligations implying proportional recompense: reward for fulfilling the trust and punishment for breaking it. Thus we can see why the preeminent virtue of governance is trustworthiness, described by Bahá’u’lláh as the “greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people,” and “the supreme instrument for the prosperity of the world.”⁷²

The salient fact in trusteeship is that power is being exercised on behalf of some person or persons who, for some reason are not in a position to do so directly—because they are absent, young, old, and so on; this principle operates also in professional ethics, where power is exercised on behalf of a vulnerable client or group. We can include as vulnerable creatures to which we stand in the relationship of trustees such entities as the environment, future generations, in fact all those who will be affected by the exercise of power. Although all persons are equal before God, as Bahá’u’lláh indicates it is really the most vulnerable whose interests and rights we need to be most concerned to safeguard, those who are without wealth, without social status or prestige; rather, it is those who do not have a voice to speak up whose rights need to be protected—the poor. In a covenantal order, it is not merely the governors of society who have an ethical duty to care for the best interests of their people. The sense of responsibility to the common good is a civic virtue that devolves on each member of the polity; as an ethical duty it increases in proportion to the power and influence individuals exercise whether formally or informally in various social roles, for example, as leaders of thought, scientists, authors, and scholars.

71. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 251. This warning evokes the judgment upon Belshazzar in the “handwriting on the wall” read by the prophet Daniel: “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting” (Daniel 6:27).

72. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 37–38.

Anyone who governs or administers does so on the basis of this covenant of trusteeship. The content of the trust obligation thus is not reducible or subject to the desires or preferences of the individuals involved. They do not have a right to decide, for instance, to repeal a moral law because it is unpopular. And this is why mere majoritarianism (as the sum of the preferences of the many) is not a true entailment of any kind of representative government that occurs in a relationship of trusteeship, or covenant. Equity inevitably requires that some must get less than they might like to have so that others will not have to go without, and that some individuals must sacrifice their purely private interests when those conflict with the common good. Thus it is essential that there be a way to know what the common good is, in the cases where there is a conflict of preferences. And that means there must be a shared vision that characterizes that community as a moral order, defined by an idea of what constitutes human excellence: a set of values and principles that serve as terms of reference and the standard for evaluative decision making. In this perspective, the virtue of sacrificing self-interest for the common good is not something that can be imposed by an external source (otherwise it is not “sacrifice”), but it arises out of personal commitment and the genuine consciousness of a unity of interests that is best described as love. And where love is concerned, no sacrifice entails a net loss.

The virtue of trustworthiness implies strong accountability. The trustee, in this case the governors of society, will be “called upon to answer for His trust.” But accountability can only have motivating force if it is real and inevitable, and not merely a chance of getting caught. Our own “best interests” are really only fused with those of “the poor,” that is, an “other,” by a certainty that how we act toward others determines how we will be judged, and what we will receive. Thus ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

...a religious individual must disregard his personal desires and seek in whatever way he can wholeheartedly to serve the public interest; and it is impossible for a human being to turn aside from his own selfish advantages and sacrifice his own good for the good of the community except through true religious faith. For self-love is kneaded into the very clay of man,

and it is not possible that, without any hope of a substantial reward, he should neglect his own present material good.⁷³

The adoption of a spiritual perspective transforms that self-love into a reference point for understanding the needs of others and seeing their interests as linked with one's own: "O son of man!" Bahá'u'lláh reveals, "If thine eyes be turned towards mercy, forsake the things that profit thee and cleave unto that which will profit mankind. And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbor that which thou choosest for thyself."⁷⁴

From a Bahá'í perspective governance is really a spiritual practice, for the judgments we make are dependent on the inner orientation of the heart. In religious scriptures, the metaphor of the balance is invoked as the image of the administration of justice which is the measure of good governance. (Thus, even the familiar image of the scales of justice is an ancient religious concept.) Bahá'u'lláh, in His tablets, speaks of governance as spiritual accountability:

It behoveth every ruler to weigh his own being every day in the balance of equity and justice and then to judge between men and counsel them to do that which would direct their steps unto the path of wisdom and understanding. This is the cornerstone of statesmanship and the essence thereof. From these words every enlightened man of wisdom will readily perceive that which will foster such aims as the welfare, security and protection of mankind and the safety of human lives.⁷⁵

Using a balance, or any measuring instrument, is a two-step process: before the scale can be used to weigh anything the justice of the instrument itself must be ensured, and this is only possible by orienting it to a standard that is outside of and transcends the self. The one who would govern must first govern the self, must come under the rule of divine justice, must set aside the self's inclination to place a thumb on its side of the scale, and must

73. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 96–97.

74. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 64.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 166–67.

become a servant of the interests of the people, regarding their interests as one's own. In this respect it is worth recalling that to have "scruples" comes from the term for some of the tiniest of weights.

The covenant perspective also calls forth the virtues and the vision that make governance more than mere management, that is, the sense of being entrusted with "the care of a community."⁷⁶ Governance, as trusteeship, is described in the Bahá'í writings as the care of a living organism, and institutions of governance as a channel through which the spirit that gives it life, that is, the promised blessings of the Covenant, flow. Bahá'u'lláh's exhortations to the rulers of His day invoke this sense of transcendent, loving obligation for the care of society as a living being: "Take ye counsel together," He wrote to Queen Victoria, "and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof... Regard the world as the human body which, though created whole and perfect, has been afflicted, through divers causes, with grave ills and maladies."⁷⁷ To know what profits mankind and betters its conditions requires reference to a vision of human good, just as the physician must know not only what disorder the patient suffers from, but what remedy is required for the patient to become healed—something that depends entirely on a clear vision of what "health" is.

The Spirit of Covenant

What makes a covenant work is the spirit it engenders, which has been referred to as "loving-kindness" and "grace," and which Shoghi Effendi refers to as "transcending love." Elazar suggests that the spirit that characterizes covenantal relationships

really means the obligation of a partner to a covenant to go beyond the narrowly construed contractual demands of the partnership in order to make the relationship between them a truly viable one... A covenant is, after all, a contract and the tendency in contractual systems is for people to act like lawyers, that is to

76. Selznick, *Moral Commonwealth*, p. 290.

77. Quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 39–40.

say, to try to construe the contract as narrowly as possible when defining their obligations and as broadly as possible when defining the obligations of the other parties.

In contrast, the covenant spirit impels one to interpret "one's contractual obligations broadly rather than narrowly, the broader the better."⁷⁸

The collective, social purpose of the great Covenant between God and humanity has always been the spiritual advancement of civilization, and this is reflected in the fact that, as Elazar has remarked, "one of the greatest achievements of covenantal societies" is "the institutionalization of reform," that is, the dedication, on principle, of political institutions to the improvement of social and economic conditions of all citizens. Citing the role of covenantal thinking in the abolition of slavery, and nineteenth-century reform movements in law and prisons, education, and mental health, he says: "a strong case can be made that the very idea of reform emerges from the covenant world view and is only possible where that world view exists." In fact, he claims, "The progress of civilization can be traced as corresponding to the periods in human history when the historical vanguard has recognized the covenant idea and sought to concretely apply it to the building of human, social, and political relationships."⁷⁹

It has been suggested that the power of covenantal unity is expressed in its ability to create a "founding synthesis": the basis of covenantal polity, not in common descent but in common consent, creates "kinships of greater dignity and sanctity" than mere ties of birth or ethnicity.⁸⁰ Covenants, therefore, are more than instruments that bind, but are in fact "liberating devices that call into existence new entities," that create relationships and forge bonds of mutuality between different and formerly hostile peoples.⁸¹ It is this powerful concept which, Bahá'is believe, has the potential to unite the peoples of the world in a global political and moral order. In the idea of "founding synthesis," we can see

78. Elazar, "Covenant as the Basis," p. 29.

79. Elazar, "What Happened to Covenant," pp. 14-15; Elazar, "Covenant as the Basis," p. 10.

80. Elazar, "Covenant as the Basis," pp. 27, 25.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

the mutual relation of such Bahá'í principles as the unity and equality of humankind, the oneness of religion, and the abolition of prejudice. These bring together diversified elements, change their existing beliefs about one another, and change their relationship to one another, uniting them into a new structure.⁸² In contrast, the ideology of rights-based individualism has no way to account for or evoke an altruistic ethic which moves people to become more concerned with giving to others than with getting their own share, an ethic that goes beyond respect for others at a distance to loving sacrifice so that others will have more than oneself. An altruistic ethic arises from a relationship that encompasses otherness as an embrace.

That call to human unity is expressed in Bahá'u'lláh's writings in the classic language of the eternal Covenant, as a summons to unite in a global moral community, authorized by a sacred obligation, in order to obtain the promised blessing of peace and prosperity:

O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth! Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you. Then will the effulgence of the world's great Luminary envelop the whole earth, and its inhabitants become the citizens of one city, and the occupants of one and the same throne....

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you. Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you. This, verily, is the most exalted Word which the Mother Book hath sent down and revealed unto you. To this beareth witness the Tongue of Grandeur from His habitation of glory.⁸³

82. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 155.

83. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 217.

The unity of the human race that is both made possible and mandated by the Covenant, as Shoghi Effendi has explained, “implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded.”⁸⁴

A Universal Moral Community

It has been argued here that the foundations of civil society are themselves religious, that the structures and principles of law, order, and governance are dependent upon a world view which locates the purpose of life in a transcendent spiritual destiny that is realized in the idea of the eternal Covenant, and which entails a particular conception of human freedom as sacred. Like freedom, tolerance is not a secular, but a religious idea. The dignity of all humans, from which human rights arise, is a religious concept and depends upon a definition of human nature as spiritual in essence. Rejecting the notion that “an innate sense of human dignity will prevent man from committing evil actions and insure his spiritual and material perfection,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “if we ponder the lessons of history it will become evident that this very sense of honor and dignity is itself one of the bounties deriving from the instructions of the Prophets of God,” and is instilled only by education.⁸⁵

The duty to respect each person’s dignity, that is, as tolerance or “civility,” is itself dependent upon “piety” as reverence for a higher authority to which one is accountable.⁸⁶ It is piety that both justifies and commands tolerance as a duty which is inextricable from righteousness. Bahá’u’lláh writes:

The heaven of true understanding shineth resplendent with the light of two luminaries: tolerance and righteousness.

O my friend! Vast oceans lie enshrined within this brief saying. Blessed are they who appreciate its value, drink deep therefrom and grasp its meaning, and woe betide the heedless....

84. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 203.

85. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 97–98.

86. See Selznick, *Moral Commonwealth*, ch. 14.

He goes on to recount: “At present the light of reconciliation is dimmed in most countries and its radiance extinguished while the fire of strife and disorder hath been kindled and is blazing fiercely,” and then He delivers a warning against committing injustice and tyranny against people because of their religion, specifically in reference to the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe. Significantly, it is “two great powers who regard themselves as the founders and leaders of civilization and the framers of constitutions” who “have risen up against the followers of the faith associated with Him who conversed with God [Moses].”⁸⁷ Clearly secular civilization and even constitutions are not sufficient to guarantee basic human rights.

The protection of tolerance depends upon having an order in which unity is based upon guiding principles anchored in a spiritual view.⁸⁸ These alone enable us to determine the “constructive limits of freedom” that are essential if tolerance itself is not to be exploited for purposes of domination. Only spiritual principles enable us to answer the question, “Where does freedom limit our possibilities for progress, and where do limits free us to thrive?”⁸⁹

An important feature of the divine Covenant in history has always been its power of renewal, through which guiding norms can be adapted to the requirements of the times, in light of the overall goal of the advancement of civilization. Today the critical requirement of the times is the consciousness of the oneness and wholeness of humanity. It is this concept which provides the perspective from which social discourse can be rescued from sterile

87. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 170.

88. See Glenn Tinder, *Tolerance: Toward a New Civility* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), pp. 152–58. A vital Bahá’í principle, articulated by Shoghi Effendi, is that “Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community enlisted under the banner of Bahá’u’lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.” (*The Advent of Divine Justice* [Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990], p. 35).

89. Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms*, p. 8.

man of wisdom will readily perceive that which will foster such aims as the welfare, security and protection of mankind and the safety of human lives. Were men of insight to quaff their fill from the ocean of inner meanings which lie enshrined in these words and become acquainted therewith, they would bear witness to the sublimity and the excellence of this utterance. If this lowly one were to set forth that which he perceiveth, all would testify unto God's consummate wisdom. The secrets of statesmanship and that of which the people are in need lie enfolded within these words. This lowly servant earnestly entreateth the One true God—exalted be His glory—to illumine the eyes of the people of the world with the splendor of the light of wisdom that they, one and all, may recognize that which is indispensable in this day.

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.

The purpose of religion as revealed from the heaven of God's holy Will is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife. The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind. It behoveth the chiefs and rulers of the world, and in particular the Trustees of God's House of Justice, to endeavor to the utmost of their power to safeguard its position, promote its interests and exalt its station in the eyes of the world. In like manner it is incumbent upon them to enquire into the conditions of their subjects and to

acquaint themselves with the affairs and activities of the divers communities in their dominions. We call upon the manifestations of the power of God—the sovereigns and rulers on earth—to bestir themselves and do all in their power that haply they may banish discord from this world and illumine it with the light of concord.

It is incumbent upon everyone to firmly adhere to and observe that which hath streamed forth from Our Most Exalted Pen. God, the True One, beareth Me witness, and every atom in existence is moved to testify that such means as lead to the elevation, the advancement, the education, the protection and the regeneration of the peoples of the earth have been clearly set forth by Us and are revealed in the Holy Books and Tablets by the Pen of Glory.

We pray God—exalted be His glory—and cherish the hope that He may graciously assist the manifestations of affluence and power and the daysprings of sovereignty and glory, the kings of the earth—may God aid them through His strengthening grace—to establish the Lesser Peace. This, indeed, is the greatest means for insuring the tranquillity of the nations. It is incumbent upon the Sovereigns of the world—may God assist them—unitedly to hold fast unto this Peace, which is the chief instrument for the protection of all mankind. It is Our hope that they will arise to achieve what will be conducive to the well-being of man. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries. If they attain unto this all-surpassing blessing, the people of each nation will pursue, with tranquillity and contentment, their own occupations, and the groanings and lamentations of most men would be silenced. We beseech God to aid them to do His will and pleasure. He, verily, is the Lord of the throne on

contentious polarities, reconciling and integrating the necessary aspects of unity and diversity—equality and equity, rights and responsibilities, freedom and limits, individual and community.

But the current deification of difference for its own sake, the ideology of individualism and particularism, and its consequent aggressive anti-universalism, are all forms of mistaking the illness of the age—disunity—for normalcy. The danger is that a retreat inward to particularism (with the competition and adversarial struggle that implies) only exacerbates the problem and draws us away from the solution. The narrowing of the moral community to those most like oneself is a recipe for disaster, because it vitiates those conditions that foster respect for others and creates instead exactly the conditions that justify indifference to the suffering of others, prejudice, hostility, and violent conflict.⁹⁰

To consider unity as the core truth of humankind is not to advocate a vague abstraction or a stifling notion of uniformity, but to stress the relationship of diverse parts to one another in a complex interdependent system. In contrast, when atomistic difference is viewed as the core truth, relationship is precluded; indeed, such concepts as equality, and even the very idea of universal human rights, become incoherent the more the idea of radical diversity is pressed, for such ideas as equality and human rights cannot be invoked without appealing to principles with universal validity, and without tacitly referring to a higher-order category in which the two entities being contrasted can be recognized as two kinds of one thing. The exclusion, in secular theories, of the possibility of a transcendent basis for a sense of human unity marks the limit of those theories to provide any integrating principle or framework for human community beyond criteria of shared material conditions such as location, kinship, class, and culture.

Yet even some who stress the urgency of locating shared human values find that project confounded by the fact of diversity in the existing communities of humankind.⁹¹ As philosopher Paul

90. See Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

91. See Sissela Bok, *Common Values* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995).

Gomberg argues, a universal morality must be grounded in the possibility of universal community, and this is dependent upon a universal identity. Only such an identity can provide a more inclusive perspective than that of “parochial moralities” which confine the scope of obligation to the group.⁹² As long as people’s identities are formed with reference to small groups, that identity will determine the limits of their moral community and conception of justice. But there is no merely rational way to climb out of that impasse. Something else, beyond reason and enlightened self-interest, must create a larger sense of identity with others who are very different. The only possible source of such an identity, and consequently of global community, must be a spiritual one: only the spirit of transcending love has the power to unite people who are dissimilar in material conditions and background.

Bahá’u’lláh’s charter for world order offers to the human civilizing process, at this critical moment in history, the renewal of the society-building power of the great Covenant. It is the transcendent principle implicit in the divine Covenant that has always been the agency of spiritual and social development, enabling the passage to each new stage in the history of the cumulative integration of human society. The Covenant is the fulcrum on which human vision is lifted to new heights of unity, where the moral community, previously confined to those who are akin, is expanded to embrace, integrate, and unify formerly contending peoples and kindreds into a single polity.

That vision is expressed in the words of Shoghi Effendi:

The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh has assimilated, by virtue of its creative, its regulative and ennobling energies, the varied races, nationalities, creeds and classes that have sought its shadow, and have pledged unswerving fealty to its cause. It has changed the hearts of its adherents, burned away their prejudices, stilled their passions, exalted their conceptions, ennobled their motives, coordinated their efforts, and transformed their outlook. While preserving their patriotism and safeguarding their lesser loyalties, it has made them lovers of mankind, and the determined

92. Paul Gomberg, “Universalism and Optimism,” *Ethics* 104 (1994): 536–57.

upholders of its best and truest interests. While maintaining intact their belief in the Divine origin of their respective religions, it has enabled them to visualize the underlying purpose of these religions, to discover their merits, to recognize their sequence, their interdependence, their wholeness and unity, and to acknowledge the bond that vitally links them to itself. This universal, this transcending love which the followers of the Bahá'í Faith feel for their fellow-men, of whatever race, creed, class or nation, is...both spontaneous and genuine. They whose hearts are warmed by the energizing influence of God's creative love cherish His creatures for His sake, and recognize in every human face a sign of His reflected glory.

Of such men and women it may be truly said that to them "every foreign land is a fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign land." For their citizenship, it must be remembered, is in the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh.⁹³

Ann Boyles looks at contemporary concerns surrounding identity, values, and governance from the perspective of an evolving global society.

WORLD WATCH

In April 1995, the *New York Times* invited its readers to send in suggestions for names characterizing the age in which we live. Common offerings were what one might expect: the Age of Anxiety, the Age of Uncertainty, the Age of Fragmentation, the Age of (Great and Failed) Expectations, the Age of Disillusion (and Dissolution), the Age of Tribalism, the Age of Fundamentalism, the Age of Deconstruction, the Age of Greed, and approximately twenty variations on the Millennial or Messianic Age. Editors reported that the word "global" was very common in entries, as were the prefixes "dis," "re," "post," "cyber," and "fin de." The Transnational Era and the Age of Kakistocracy (government by the worst people) were other names reflecting readers' preoccupations.¹ On a more scholarly level, eminent historian Eric Hobsbawm titled his history of the twentieth century, published in 1995, *Age of Extremes*. The book's first major section, covering the years 1914 to 1945, is "The Age of Catastrophe," while the final section, covering the last two decades, is "The Landslide."

93. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 197–98.

1. *International Herald Tribune*, 3 April 1995.

Such descriptions indicate the deep scepticism and pessimism with which our age is generally regarded. They reflect, too, upon the issue of identity: how we see ourselves as individual citizens and as a society. As Hobsbawm puts it, "Since the middle of the century...the branch of [the old civilization has begun] to crack and break.... The old maps and charts which guided human beings, singly and collectively, through life no longer represent the landscape through which we move, the sea on which we sail.... We do not know where our journey is taking us, or even ought to take us."²

Hobsbawm, as an historian rather than a futurist, does not offer many specific suggestions for the direction of humanity's journey at either the individual or the collective level, but he does advance the idea that some sort of political organization beyond national boundaries will be necessary to deal effectively with a world in which global economic integration is taking place. At the same time, he recognizes that strong forces are at work against such integration. Benjamin R. Barber also treats this subject in his 1995 volume *Jihad Vs. McWorld*, characterizing the struggle as one between an emerging globalism characterized by uniformity ("McWorld," or rampant, unregulated Western consumerism) and its opponents ("Jihad," or "violent and dogmatic particularism").

A chief characteristic of the individual living in McWorld is encapsulated in the following passage from Charles Durning's *How Much Is Enough: The Consumer Society and the Future of Earth*, a report for the WorldWatch Institute. Durning makes the observation that "the words 'consumer' and 'person' have become virtual synonyms" and that such identification has serious implications for individuals and their society. He continues, "The world economy is currently organized to furnish 1.1 billion people with a consumer life-style long on things but short on time." Such an economy, he points out, is not concerned with matters of social justice, with issues of unemployment or of poverty.³

2. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus Books, Little, Brown and Co., 1995), pp. 16–17.

3. Charles Durning, *How Much Is Enough: The Consumer Society and the Future of Earth* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), pp. 21–22; cited in Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld* (New York: Times Books, Random House, 1995), p. 223.

The view of the individual primarily as a consumer is commonplace today in many parts of the world. Advertising urges us to become associated with a particular cigarette, a brand of perfume, a line of clothing, a car, or other such items. Now we can go to almost any part of the planet and consume the same kinds of fast foods found originally in America, or stay in the same hotel chains, or partake of the same soft drink, or watch many of the same television programs or movies or listen to the same music. In fact, at least on a superficial level, it seems as though one of the chief characteristics of the "global village" in which we are reputed to live is our common consumerism. Certainly this is one of Barber's central points.

While the life of consumerism depicted in McWorld is less than soul-satisfying, the forces that, in Barber's view, oppose that life are no more comforting. Narrow-minded nationalistic or ethnic interests blind their adherents to any conception of life beyond their own particular view of how it should be lived. Barber refers to Jihad's "recidivist tribalisms" and the "micro-wars" it promotes as "noisier and more obviously nihilistic than [the forces of] McWorld." He sees them as creating instability in the short term, but in the long run, Barber predicts that the forces of McWorld will prove stronger: "McWorld's homogenization is likely to establish a macropeace that favors the triumph of commerce and its markets and to give those who control information, communication, and entertainment ultimate (if inadvertent) control over human destiny." He concludes, "Unless we can offer an alternative to the struggle between Jihad and McWorld, the epoch on whose threshold we stand—postcommunist, postindustrial, postnational, yet sectarian, fearful, and bigoted—is likely also to be terminally postdemocratic."⁴

Critics have attacked Barber for his sweeping generalizations. In *The New Republic*, for example, Fareed Zakaria criticized Barber for a diatribe against the effects of what he called "unchecked participation by the masses,"⁵ pointing out that the increased

4. Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld*, p. 20.

5. See "Paris Is Burning" by Fareed Zakaria in *The New Republic*, 22 January 1996, pp. 27–30.

prosperity at the root of the struggle depicted by Barber is an important transformation in our society:

The rise of a mass consumption society produces political, economic and cultural side effects that are troubling. But surely the criticism of this world, and of the liberal capitalism which created it, must first recognize its accomplishments. The political and economic changes that have created McWorld are, on the whole, admirable ones. Giving people the ability to live longer, to move where they want, own a house, to enjoy such pleasures as vacations and restaurants and shopping is good, even noble.⁶

The point is no doubt well taken, but one must also consider this startling statistic: The gulf separating the rich and the poor around the world is widening, according to the United Nations Development Program, which reported in July 1996 that 1.6 billion people in 89 countries are poorer now than they were ten years ago. Further, the world's 358 billionaires have more assets than the combined incomes of countries housing 45 percent of the world's population. If such is the result of the kind of globalization described by Barber, it is worth questioning its value. Is consumerism or an excessive preoccupation with material concerns a good foundation, a conscionable basis, for any kind of global society?

Consideration of such inequities has informed recent discussions concerning the definitions and characteristics of government that are appropriate to this evolving world. Commentators have engaged in strenuous debates concerning various systems. Yet most agree that democracy—in a form giving less emphasis on consumerism and more on the responsibilities inherent in citizenship—is the answer. Barber refers to this shift as taking people “from elementary animal being (the thinness of economics) to cooperative human living (the robustness of strong democracy).”⁷ He asserts that

6. Zakaria, “Paris Is Burning,” p. 30.

7. Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld*, p. 291.

Strong democracy needs citizens; citizens need civil society; civil society requires a form of association not bound by identity politics; that form of association is democracy. Or: global democracy needs confederalism, a noncompulsory form of association rooted in friendship and mutual interests; confederalism depends on member states that are well rooted in civil society, and on citizens for whom the other is not synonymous with the enemy; civil society and citizenship are products of a democratic way of life.⁸

These are noble sentiments, but as Barber himself notes, civil society and citizenship are not necessarily products of a democratic way of life—or at least of the democratic way of life as it is lived in the West at present. Czech President Vaclav Havel, writing of the widely perceived shortcomings of Western-style culture and its current values, shares this view:

The main source of objections would seem to be what many cultural societies see as the inevitable product or byproduct of these values: moral relativism, materialism, the denial of any kind of spirituality, a proud disdain for everything supra-personal, a profound crisis of authority and the resulting general decay, a frenzied consumerism, a lack of solidarity, the selfish cult of material success, the absence of faith in a higher order of things or simply in eternity, and expansionist mentality that holds in contempt everything that in any way resists the dreary standardization and rationalism of technical civilization.⁹

These, then, are the “values” widely associated with democracy, rather than those of civic duty, responsible citizenship, and so on.

Havel has touched upon a point to which Western commentators have recently become very sensitive. In the West, the common conception of values has been that they are something that should be relegated to the private sphere, with no place in the realm of discourse about our collective social life. Stephen L. Carter's 1993 volume, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American*

8. Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld*, p. 291.

9. Vaclav Havel, “The Spiritual Roots of Democracy,” in *Lapis: The Inner Meaning of Contemporary Life* (Summer 1995), p. 29.

Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion, discusses the implications of such a viewpoint, covering topics as diverse as the issue of prayer in public schools and the abortion debate.

Carter's book has been seminal in the discussion about the role of moral values in the public realm, and a growing number of thoughtful people are now calling for a resuscitation of values in what they see as our morally impoverished society. The growth of political movements such as the communitarians is also a reaction against the excessive emphasis in Western democracies on the rights rather than the responsibilities of citizens. One recent volume, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*, by Michael J. Sandel, has provoked much discussion because of its treatment of this theme. Sandel writes:

The global media and markets that shape our lives beckon us to a world beyond boundaries and belonging. But the civic resources we need to master these forces, or at least to contend with them, are still to be found in the places and stories, memories and meanings, incidents and identities, that situate us in the world and give our lives their moral particularity.

The public philosophy by which we live bids us to bracket these attachments, to set them aside for political purposes, to conduct our political debates without reference to them. But a procedural republic that banishes moral and religious argument from political discourse makes for an impoverished civic life. It also fails to answer the aspiration for self-government; its image of citizens as free and independent selves, unencumbered by moral or civic ties they have not chosen, cannot sustain the public spirit that equips us for self-rule.¹⁰

Sandel's call for recognition that moral and religious issues do have a place in public discourse is well argued, but he does not resolve important questions such as how these issues can be satisfactorily addressed in a pluralistic society. How, for example, can a society find common ground when values may be widely different among the groups that make it up? How does the concept of "public spirit" translate from one culture to another?

Thus, while Sandel and others are clear about the need for

10. Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 349–50.

moral content in political discourse, they are less clear about the means of introducing and regulating it in a society where different values and faiths flourish. Sandel has been chided about just this point. In the *Times Literary Supplement* review of Sandel's book, Michael Rosen comments:

Sandel tells us that the republican favors those qualities of character that "promote citizenship". What precisely those qualities are, and to what lengths the State is entitled to go in requiring that individuals show them, he does not make entirely clear, but he does say explicitly that his vision of republican politics is not one of uniformity. While deploring liberalism for the supposedly debilitating consequences of neutrality, Sandel claims that republicanism itself embodies a "higher pluralism." But how, the more mundane of us will ask, is such a pluralism supposed to work in practice?¹¹

While Sandel's and the communitarians' call for the reintroduction of values into the climate of governance is welcome and useful, the basic assumption that a renewed and morally strengthened Western-style democracy, with its unexamined embrace of adversarial governance, is the only model for enlightened government is open to debate.

Havel, for example, cautions against the view of democracy as a "closed" system, pointing out

the limited ability of today's democratic world to step beyond its own shadow, or rather the limits of its own present spiritual and intellectual condition and direction, and thus its limited ability to address humanity in a genuinely universal way. As a consequence, democracy is seen less and less as an open system, which is best able to respond to people's basic needs, that is, as a set of possibilities that continually must be sought, redefined and brought into being. Instead, democracy is seen as something given, finished, and complete as is, something that can be exported like cars or television sets, something that the more enlightened purchase and the less enlightened do not.¹²

11. Michael Rosen, "Against the Unencumbered Self," in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 October 1996, p. 14.

12. Havel, "Spiritual Roots of Democracy," p. 29.

In such a context, democracy becomes just another product in a consumer society—not an evolving system capable of great change.

Sandel himself seems uncertain as to the global application of reversing “the loss of mastery and the erosion of community that lie at the heart of democracy’s discontent”: “The difficulty,” he says, “actually involves two related challenges. One is to devise political institutions capable of governing the global economy. The other is to cultivate the civic identities necessary to sustain those institutions, to supply them with the moral authority they require. It is not obvious that both these challenges can be met.”¹³

Gertrude Himmelfarb frames the basic difficulty in these words: “If we are to revitalize civil society, must we not also re-moralize civil society, which is a far more difficult task?”¹⁴ And Havel takes the point even further when he affirms the need for the spiritual within the democratic system and cautions against placing too much faith in the mere machinery of the system:

The separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers, the universal right to vote, the rule of law, freedom of expression, the inviolability of private ownership and all the other aspects of democracy as a system that ought to be the least unjust and the least capable of violence—these are merely technical instruments that enable man to live in dignity, freedom, and responsibility. But in and of themselves, they cannot guarantee human dignity, freedom and responsibility. The source of these basic human potentials lies elsewhere: in man’s relationship to that which transcends him.¹⁵

Yet Himmelfarb and Havel stop short of speaking directly about religion in this process. Similarly, communitarian leader Amitai Etzioni, while arguing in *The Spirit of Community* for the promotion of individuals’ responsibilities towards the nurturance of community, declines to discuss the role of religion in such an

13. Michael J. Sandel, “America’s Search for a New Public Philosophy,” in *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1996), p. 72.

14. Gertrude Himmelfarb, “The unravelled fabric—and how to knit it up: Mixed motives among the new communitarians,” in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 May 1996, p. 13.

15. Havel, “Spiritual Roots of Democracy,” p. 30.

endeavor. Daniel A. Bell calls this “a glaring omission in a book that aims for nothing short of a new moral crusade in what is perhaps the most religious country in the world [America].”¹⁶

“Re-moralizing,” in Himmelfarb’s words, or reinforcing “man’s relationship to that which transcends him,” in Havel’s, is properly the task of religion, but there is a general reluctance on the part of commentators, even Stephen Carter, to allow religions to take a role in the assertion of values in the public sphere. Carter wants them to maintain their independence, their status as independent critics of the political process or moral watchdogs. He writes,

...if the religions are able to impose their own meanings, there is no longer any distinction, and, thus, no longer important work for the triumphant religions as autonomous agencies to do. This abandonment of the role of external moral critic and alternative source of values and meaning will make sense when the Second Coming is at hand, but not before. Until that time, it is vital that the religions struggle to maintain the tension between the meanings and understanding propounded by the state and the very different set of meanings and understandings that the contemplation of the ultimate frequently suggests.¹⁷

Certainly, introducing values into the public sphere in societies that are multicultural and multifaith seems like an impossible undertaking, which would mean a dramatic shift away from the secular underpinnings of modern Western societies; it would mean either giving precedence to one set of religious values over the others or searching for the root values inherent in all faiths. The task of legislating morality was easier in the past, when societies were more homogenous. Nationalistic or ethnic or tribal movements that promote closed societies may be, in part, an attempt to return to such times, when identity was more readily defined and standards of appropriate behavior were more easily regulated.

Yet, while the likelihood of finding common ground—or even of generating the will to do so—may seem remote, another

16. Daniel A. Bell, “Together Again?,” review of *The Spirit of Community* by Amitai Etzioni, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 November 1994, p. 6.

17. Carter, *Culture of Disbelief*, p. 273.

commentator has observed that it is impossible for us to retreat to the world of the past. Patrick Glynn, writing in the journal *New Perspectives Quarterly*, says,

...we are at an important transition point in Western culture, moving out of the great modern era, with its deeply secular premises, into a new age that will not only be “postmodern,” but also, in an important sense, “postsecular.” The great dividing-line between church and state, between revelation and reason, is...being fundamentally renegotiated. And this is occurring not just in popular culture or politics, but at the very cutting-edge of human inquiry. Indeed, some of the most impressive signs of change—of the gradual emergence of a “new paradigm” opening the way to a more explicitly spiritual view of human life and even to a more universal acceptance of the existence of God—can be found in the most advanced of the physical sciences, such as quantum mechanics and cosmology. This is not a backward-looking rejection of modernity, but rather building upon modernity’s achievements.¹⁸

Glynn’s assessment, that humanity must move forward to embrace an emerging paradigm of existence that incorporates spirituality in a profound and all-pervasive way, accords with the view advanced in the writings of the Bahá’í Faith. At the foundation of the spiritual teachings given by Bahá’u’lláh is the assertion that humanity has reached a stage of maturity which demands both fresh understanding of the nature of the individual and a new pattern of community life. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the son of Bahá’u’lláh and the Center of the Covenant He established with His followers, has elaborated on this theme of the maturing of humanity:

All created things have their degree or stage of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit-bearing... The animal attains a stage of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the light of his intelligence attains its greatest power and development.... Similarly there are periods and stages in the collective life of humanity. At one time it was passing through its stage of childhood, at another its period

18. Patrick Glynn, “Prelude to a Post-Secular Society,” in *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Spring 1995), p. 17.

of youth, but now it has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent... That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race can neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day, this period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former state of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity.¹⁹

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, also addressed this theme in a message to the Bahá’ís in the West in 1936:

The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend.²⁰

The discussion of the need for spirituality to play a more central role in public as well as private life can be seen as a move towards that maturity to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi allude.

The maturing process of humanity as a collective entity also presupposes a similar process at the level of the individual. Far from conceiving of people as consumers, Bahá’u’lláh has described human beings as “the noblest and most perfect of all created things.”²¹ Our nature, the Bahá’í writings assert, is essentially

19. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991), pp. 164–65.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

21. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 179.

spiritual, and in this age of the maturation of the human race, we are responsible for developing the noble qualities latent within us. "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value," Bahá'u'lláh states; "Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom,"²² and further, He says, "The potentialities inherent in the station of man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality, must all be manifested" in this age of the maturation of humanity.²³

In the same vein, the Universal House of Justice states,

...the Writings of the [Bahá'í] Faith not only acknowledge that each individual has a God-given identity, but they also set out the means by which this identity can achieve its highest development and fulfillment. Bahá'u'lláh attests that through the Teachings of the Manifestation of God "every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed."²⁴

From the Bahá'í perspective, there exists a deep and inseparable connection between the practical and spiritual dimensions of human existence. In this paradigm, every human being has unique capacities which he or she has the responsibility to develop, a task best accomplished by following the teachings given by God through His Manifestations—in this age, Bahá'u'lláh, Who revealed laws and principles and established an administrative order for His followers to enable them to transform both themselves and the society in which they live. In accordance with the process of maturation, the Bahá'í Faith teaches that the individual must exercise autonomy in deciding whether or not to avail himself or herself of these spiritual guidelines for life. There must be no compulsion in matters of faith; one must be entirely free to investigate truth for oneself.

22. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 260.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 340.

24. Universal House of Justice, letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 11 September 1995.

It is the transformational force of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh that motivates members of the Bahá'í community around the world. As each member of society "mines" the "gems of inestimable value" inherent in his or her soul and thus develops his or her capacities, so society is transformed, and we see evidence of "an ever-advancing civilization." Service to humankind thus becomes the purpose of both individual life and all social arrangements. "Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns," Bahá'u'lláh writes, "let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men."²⁵ And further, "The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God."²⁶

The divinely ordained order established by Bahá'u'lláh is concerned intimately with the development of the individual soul—a concern far beyond the scope of calls for "good citizenship"—though through developing spiritual qualities Bahá'ís become good citizens, too. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written,

And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.²⁷

Thus, interwoven with the Bahá'í teachings about the nature of the individual is a model of collective life. "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens," Bahá'u'lláh says. This embryonic world civilization asserts the earth as one homeland for the entire human family, whose Founder claimed as His chief

25. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 93–94.

26. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 129–30.

27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994), pp. 2–3.

desire “the good of the world and the happiness of the nations.”²⁸

The analogy of society to the family is found throughout the Bahá’í writings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said, for example,

Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families. Therefore, as strife and dissension destroy a family and prevent its progress, so nations are destroyed and advancement hindered.²⁹

Further, speaking of the relationship between the rights of the individual in the family and the group, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said,

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed... All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.³⁰

This balance of individual and collective rights is elaborated further by the Universal House of Justice, which quotes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that “the moderate freedom which guarantees the welfare of the world of mankind and maintains and preserves the universal relationships is found in its fullest power and extension in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh,” and then continues to discuss how this is enacted in the Bahá’í administrative order:

28. Words uttered by Bahá’u’lláh to Cambridge University orientalist Edward Granville Browne during his interview in the Holy Land, spring 1890.

29. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 157.

30. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 168.

Within this framework of freedom a pattern is set for institutional and individual behavior which depends for its efficacy not so much on the force of law, which admittedly must be respected, as on the recognition of a mutuality of benefits, and on the spirit of cooperation maintained by the willingness, the courage, the sense of responsibility, and the initiative of individuals.... Thus there is a balance of freedom between the institution, whether national or local, and the individuals who sustain its existence.³¹

The system delineated by Bahá’u’lláh, it can be seen from these passages, incorporates elements of democracy but is not limited to conceptions drawn specifically from it. The Bahá’í Faith attaches great importance to the diversity of human thought and experience, but it does not encourage extreme individualism that would threaten the common good. The benefits provided to the individual in the social environment created when he or she surrenders a degree of personal freedom to an accepted system of order far outweigh any sacrifice, in the Bahá’í view.

Writing of the unique character of the Administrative Order of the Bahá’í Faith, Shoghi Effendi clarified that while that Order is not patterned specifically after autocratic, aristocratic, or democratic forms of government, it “embodies, reconciles and assimilates within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them.”³² For example, the authority of the sacred texts of the Faith is upheld, as are the interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, who followed in the line of hereditary succession from Bahá’u’lláh. Democratic elections, conducted by secret ballot and characterized by an absence of features such as nominations, electioneering, factionalism, and concern for power, are held either by direct or indirect vote for all governing councils that administer the affairs of the community around the world. Yet, once elected, members of the institutions are not responsible to those who elect them but have the

31. Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, a letter to the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in the United States of America, 29 December 1988 (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1989), p. 9.

32. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 152.

obligation “to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience” without being swayed by “the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful.”³³

Since elections are carried out in a spiritual atmosphere, the electorate expects that those it chooses will be spiritually responsible—a concept entirely foreign to secular forms of governance. Moreover, its emphasis on non-adversarial and cooperative decision-making, the devolution of power to the grassroots of society, and the necessity of involving the voices of women and the dispossessed, stand in sharp contrast to the machinery of prevailing democratic forms of governance. It is a model that simultaneously educates and engages, and provides powerful tools for effecting meaningful changes where unproductive habits have impeded progress. As Shoghi Effendi states,

...this divinely revealed Order, which can never be identified with any of the standard types of government referred to by Aristotle in his works, embodies and blends with the spiritual verities on which it is based the beneficent elements which are to be found in each one of them. The admitted evils inherent in each of these systems being rigidly and permanently excluded, this unique Order, however long it may endure and however extensive its ramifications, cannot ever degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery which must sooner or later corrupt the machinery of all man-made and essentially defective political institutions.³⁴

In short, the order delineated by Bahá'u'lláh is spiritual in nature; values are not grafted onto it but inherent in it. The Bahá'í Faith offers a model of a changed society, a new paradigm suited to the needs of a “postsecular” global world. In the words of Shoghi Effendi:

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual

unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the *coming of age of the entire human race*. It should be viewed...as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture...should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.³⁵

Looking to the future, Eric Hobsbawm echoes the uncertainty of many contemporary thinkers when he concludes *Age of Extremes* with the words, “We do not know where we are going,” but he surely makes a profound observation when he continues, “However, one thing is plain. If humanity is to have a recognizable future, it cannot be by prolonging the past or the present. If we try to build the third millennium on that basis, we shall fail. And the price of failure, that is to say, the alternative to a changed society, is darkness.”³⁶

Earlier in the century, historian Arnold Toynbee, in *A Study of History*, drew a parallel between the general obscurity of the Christian church in the second century of its existence and the corresponding lack of awareness of the Bahá'í Faith on the part of most educated Westerners midway through the twentieth century, going on to speculate about “how utterly the future might be hidden...from the mental vision of a Western student” today.³⁷ Hobsbawm's remark points up the continuing relevancy of Toynbee's observation. Yet the vision of the future held by members of the Bahá'í community, however little it may be understood as yet by the majority of the planet's inhabitants, refutes the idea of encroaching darkness; the Bahá'í vision is, in contrast, one of great promise. Expression to it was given in a letter written in 1988 to the

33. Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1972), p. 6.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

35. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 163.
36. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 585.
37. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 117.

high and of earth below, and the Lord of this world and of the world to come. It would be preferable and more fitting that the highly-honored kings themselves should attend such an assembly, and proclaim their edicts. Any king who will arise and carry out this task, he, verily will, in the sight of God, become the cynosure of all kings. Happy is he, and great is his blessedness!

...The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment. And in another connection He hath uttered the following in the eloquent tongue:¹ Justice hath a mighty force at its command. It is none other than reward and punishment for the deeds of men. By the power of this force the tabernacle of order is established throughout the world, causing the wicked to restrain their natures for fear of punishment.

...Take heed, O concourse of the rulers of the world! There is no force on earth that can equal in its conquering power the force of justice and wisdom. I, verily, affirm that there is not, and hath never been, a host more mighty than that of justice and wisdom. Blessed is the king who marcheth with the ensign of wisdom unfurled before him, and the battalions of justice massed in his rear. He verily is the ornament that adorneth the brow of peace and the countenance of security. There can be no doubt whatever that if the day-star of justice, which the clouds of tyranny have obscured, were to shed its light upon men, the face of the earth would be completely transformed.

...Among the things which are conducive to unity and concord and will cause the whole earth to be regarded as one country is that the divers languages be reduced to one language and in like manner the scripts used in the world be confined to a single script. It is incumbent upon all nations to appoint some men of understanding and erudition to convene a gathering and through joint consultation choose one language from among the varied

1. Arabic.

existing languages, or create a new one, to be taught to the children in all the schools of the world.

The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he was entering his own home. These things are obligatory and absolutely essential. It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.

Bahá'í community of the United States, focusing on individual rights and freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, in which the Universal House of Justice says,

The spirit of liberty which in recent decades has swept over the planet with such tempestuous force is a manifestation of the vibrancy of the Revelation brought by Bahá'u'lláh. His own words confirm it. "The Ancient Beauty," He wrote in a soul-stirring commentary on His sufferings, "hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty."

Might it not be reasonably concluded, then, that "true liberty" is His gift of love to the human race? Consider what Bahá'u'lláh has done: He revealed laws and principles to guide the free; He established an Order to channel the actions of the free; He proclaimed a Covenant to guarantee the unity of the free.

Thus, we hold to this ultimate perspective: Bahá'u'lláh came to set humanity free. His Revelation is, indeed, an invitation to freedom—freedom from want, freedom from war, freedom to unite, freedom to progress, freedom in peace and joy.³⁸

In summary, the Bahá'í model of social organization or collective life incorporates the spiritual principles and the moral values which contemporary social commentators are seeking, and at the same time it provides a framework for governance that protects individual rights. Inclusive rather than exclusive, it affirms the spiritual truth at the heart of all the major religions of the world. The balance of rights and responsibilities it promotes is suited to the needs of this new age, an age destined to move towards light, not darkness.

38. Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms*, pp. 21–22.

*This statement was issued
in October 1995 by
the Bahá'í International Community
on the occasion of the 50th anniversary
of the United Nations.*

TURNING POINT FOR ALL NATIONS

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.

Shoghi Effendi, 1936

I. Overview: An Opportunity for Reflection

The twentieth century, one of the most tumultuous periods in human history, has been marked by numerous upheavals, revolutions and radical departures from the past. Ranging from the collapse of the colonial system and the great nineteenth century empires to the rise and fall of broad and disastrous experiments with totalitarianism, fascism and communism, some of these

upheavals have been extremely destructive, involving the deaths of millions, the eradication of old lifestyles and traditions, and the collapse of time-honored institutions.

Other movements and trends have been more obviously positive. Scientific discoveries and new social insights have spurred many progressive social, economic and cultural transformations. The way has been cleared for new definitions of human rights and affirmations of personal dignity, expanded opportunities for individual and collective achievement, and bold new avenues for the advancement of human knowledge and consciousness.

These twin processes—the collapse of old institutions on the one hand and the blossoming of new ways of thinking on the other—are evidence of a single trend which has been gaining momentum during the last hundred years: the trend toward ever-increasing interdependence and integration of humanity.

This trend is observable in wide-ranging phenomena, from the fusion of world financial markets, which in turn reflect humanity's reliance on diverse and interdependent sources of energy, food, raw materials, technology and knowledge, to the construction of globe-girdling systems of communications and transportation. It is reflected in the scientific understanding of the earth's interconnected biosphere, which has in turn given a new urgency to the need for global coordination. It is manifest, albeit in a destructive way, in the capacities of modern weapons systems, which have gradually increased in power to the point where it is now possible for a handful of men to bring an end to human civilization itself. It is the universal consciousness of this trend—in both its constructive and destructive expressions—that lends such poignancy to the familiar photograph of the earth as a swirling sphere of blue and white against the infinite blackness of space, an image crystallizing the realisation that we are a single people, rich in diversity, living in a common homeland.

This trend is reflected, too, in steady efforts by the nations of the world to forge a world political system that can secure for humanity the possibility of peace, justice and prosperity. Twice in this century humanity has attempted to bring about a new international order. Each attempt sought to address the emergent recognition of global interdependence, while nevertheless

preserving intact a system which put the sovereignty of the state above all else. In the perspective of the century now ending, the League of Nations, a breakthrough in the concept of collective security, marked a first decisive step toward world order.

The second effort, born from the cataclysm of World War II and based on a Charter drawn up principally by the victors of that conflagration, has for 50 years provided an international forum of last resort, a unique institution standing as a noble symbol for the collective interests of humanity as a whole.

As an international organization, the United Nations has demonstrated humanity's capacity for united action in health, agriculture, education, environmental protection, and the welfare of children. It has affirmed our collective moral will to build a better future, evinced in the widespread adoption of international human rights Covenants. It has revealed the human race's deep-seated compassion, evidenced by the devotion of financial and human resources to the assistance of people in distress. And in the all-important realms of peace-building, peace-making and peace-keeping, the United Nations has blazed a bold path toward a future without war.¹

Yet the overall goals set out in the Charter of the United Nations have proved elusive. Despite the high hopes of its founders, the establishment of the United Nations some 50 years ago did not usher in an era of peace and prosperity for all.²

Although the United Nations has surely played a role in preventing a third world war, the last half decade has nevertheless

1. Boutros Boutros-Ghali. 1992. *An Agenda for Peace: Peace-making and Peace-Keeping*. Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council, January 31, New York: United Nations.

2. Surely the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations is among the most inspired passages in the history of human governance:

“WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED
“to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice
in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
“to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and
worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and
of nations large and small, and

been marked by numerous local, national and regional conflicts costing millions of lives. No sooner had improved relations between the superpowers removed the ideological motivation for such conflicts, than long-smoldering ethnic and sectarian passions surfaced as a new source of conflagration. In addition, although the end of the Cold War has reduced the threat of a global, terminal war, there remain instruments and technologies—and to some extent the underlying passions—which could bring about planet-wide destruction.

With respect to social issues, likewise, grave problems persist. While new levels of consensus have been reached on global programs to promote health, sustainable development and human rights, the situation on the ground in many areas has deteriorated. The alarming spread of militant racialism and religious fanaticism, the cancerous growth of materialism, the epidemic

2. (cont.)

“to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

“to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

“AND FOR THESE ENDS

“to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and

“to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

“to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institutions of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and

“to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

“HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS.

“Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.”

(United Nations. 1994. *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*. United Nations Department of Public Information. DPI/511-93243-April 1994-40M.)

rise of crime and organized criminality, the widespread increase in mindless violence, the ever-deepening disparity between rich and poor, the continuing inequities faced by women, the inter-generational damage caused by the pervasive breakdown of family life, the immoral excesses of unbridled capitalism and the growth of political corruption—all speak to this point. At least a billion live in abject poverty and more than a third of the world's people are illiterate.³

As the twin processes of collapse and renewal carry the world toward some sort of culmination, the 50th anniversary of the United Nations offers a timely opportunity to pause and reflect on how humanity may collectively face its future. Indeed, there has emerged of late a wide range of useful proposals for strengthening the United Nations and improving its capacity to coordinate the responses of nations to these challenges.

These proposals fall roughly into three categories. One group addresses primarily bureaucratic, administrative and financial problems within the United Nations system. Another group comprises those that suggest reconfiguring bodies like the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council and the Bretton Woods economic institutions. Still others propose to undertake changes in the United Nations political structure, calling, for example, for an expansion of the Security Council and/or a reconsideration of the United Nations Charter itself.⁴

Most of these works are constructive, some are also provocative.

3. The World Bank, *World Development Report* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 162–63.

4. There have been a number of recent proposals which discuss the need for reforms in the United Nations system within a particular issue area. For example, *Our Common Future*, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), suggested a number of changes, such as the creation of a special UN “Board for Sustainable Development” to coordinate UN action in promoting development while protecting the environment.

Likewise, the report of the Brandt Commission, *Common Crisis North-South: Co-operation for World Recovery* (London: Pan Books, 1983), makes suggestions for reform in the critical areas of finance, trade and energy, as they affect North-South imbalances.

The literature proposing widespread changes in the United Nations is

Among them, one of the most balanced and thoughtful is the report of the Commission on Global Governance, entitled *Our Global Neighborhood*, which argues for the widespread adoption of new values, as well as structural reforms in the United Nations system.⁵

It is in the spirit of contributing to the ongoing discussion and consultation on this issue of paramount importance that the Bahá'í International Community has been moved to share its views. Our perspective is based on three initial propositions.

First, discussions about the future of the United Nations need to take place within the broad context of the evolution of the

4. (cont.)

also voluminous and continues to grow, especially in anticipation of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. The first major and serious reassessments of the United Nations began in the 1950s, in anticipation of the tenth anniversary of the Charter. In this regard the publication in 1958 of *World Peace Through World Law* by Grenville Clark and Louis B. Sohn, which was among the first solid proposals to suggest eliminating the veto power, must be considered a milestone. (Grenville Clark and Louis B. Sohn, *World Peace Through World Law*, 3d. ed. enl. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).

More recent proposals range from the Stockholm Initiative, which offers a generalist vision of what might be done to strengthen the United Nations, to Harold Stassen's recent *United Nations: A Working Paper for Restructuring*, which gives an article-by-article proposal for rewriting the UN Charter. Benjamin Ferencz's latest book, *New Legal Foundations for Global Survival*, offers a series of hard-headed and legal-minded suggestions for reform based on the premise that nations, peoples and individuals must be free to pursue their destinies in whatever way they may see fit—providing it does not jeopardize or destroy the fundamental human rights of others to live in peace and dignity. The Stockholm Initiative on Global Security and Governance 1991, *Common Responsibility in the 1990's* (Stockholm: Prime Minister's Office, Stockholm, Sweden). Harold Stassen, *United Nations: A Working Paper for Restructuring* (Minneapolis: Learner Publications Company, 1994). Benjamin Ferencz, *New Legal Foundations for Global Survival* (Oceana Publications, 1994).

5. The Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

international order and its directions. The United Nations has co-evolved with other great institutions of the late twentieth century. It is in the aggregate that these institutions will define—and themselves be shaped by—the evolution of the international order. Therefore, the mission, role, operating principles and even activities of the United Nations should be examined only in the light of how they fit within the broader objective of the international order.

Second, since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This relationship between the individual and the collective constitutes the moral foundation of most of the human rights which the instruments of the United Nations are attempting to define. It also serves to define an overriding purpose for the international order in establishing and preserving the rights of the individual.

Third, the discussions about the future of the international order must involve and excite the generality of humankind. This discussion is so important that it cannot be confined to leaders—be they in government, business, the academic community, religion, or organizations of civil society. On the contrary, this conversation must engage women and men at the grass-roots level. Broad participation will make the process self-reinforcing by raising awareness of world citizenship and increase support for an expanded international order.

II. Recognizing the Historical Context: A Call to World Leaders

The Bahá'í International Community regards the current world confusion and the calamitous condition of human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet.

The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the

culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.⁶ The process of global integration, already a reality in the realms of business, finance, and communications, is beginning to materialize in the political arena.

Historically, this process has been accelerated by sudden and catastrophic events. It was the devastation of World Wars I and II that gave birth to the League of Nations and the United Nations, respectively. Whether future accomplishments are also to be reached after similarly unimaginable horrors or embraced through an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. Failure to take decisive action would be unconscionably irresponsible.

Since sovereignty currently resides with the nation-state, the task of determining the exact architecture of the emerging international order is an obligation that rests with heads of state and with governments. We urge leaders at all levels to take a deliberate role in supporting a convocation of world leaders before the turn of this century to consider how the international order might be redefined and restructured to meet the challenges facing the

6. Many thinkers have recognized the reality of oneness and understood its implications for the development of human society, including paleontologist Richard Leakey: "We are one species, one people. Every individual on this earth is a member of 'homo sapiens sapiens,' and the geographical variations we see among peoples are simply biological nuances on the basic theme. The human capacity for culture permits its elaboration in widely different and colorful ways. The often very deep differences between those cultures should not be seen as divisions between people. Instead, cultures should be interpreted for what they really are: the ultimate declaration of belonging to the human species." Richard E. Leakey and Rodger Lewin, *Origins: What New Discoveries Reveal about the Emergence of Our Species and Its Possible Future* (New York: Dutton, 1977).

In general terms, the writings of Shoghi Effendi offer a thorough and extended exposition on the concept of the oneness of humanity. A brief summary of the concept, as Bahá'ís view it, can be found in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974; reprint, 1982), pp. 42–43.

world. As some have suggested, this gathering might be called the World Summit on Global Governance.⁷

This proposed Summit might build on the experience gained from the series of highly successful United Nations conferences in the early 1990s. These conferences, which have included the World Summit for Children in 1990, the Earth Summit in 1992, the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, have established a new methodology for global deliberations on critical issues.

A key to the success of these deliberations has been the substantive participation by organizations of civil society. Pains-taking negotiations among government delegations about changes in the world's political, social and economic structures have been informed and shaped by the vigorous involvement of these organizations, which tend to reflect the needs and concerns of people at the grass roots. It is also significant that in each case, the gathering of world leaders, in the presence of civil society and the global media, gave the stamp of legitimacy and consensus to the processes of the conference.

In preparing for the proposed Summit, world leaders would be wise to heed these lessons, to reach out to as wide a circle as possible and to secure the goodwill and support of the world's peoples.

Some fear that international political institutions inevitably evolve toward excessive centralization and constitute an unwarranted layer of bureaucracy. It needs to be explicitly and forcefully stated that any new structures for global governance must, as a matter of both principle and practicality, ensure that

7. We are not alone in making this proposal. The Commission on Global Governance writes in *Our Global Neighborhood* (p. 351): "Our recommendation is that the General Assembly should agree to hold a World Conference on Governance in 1998, with its decisions to be ratified and put into effect by 2000."

the responsibility for decision-making remains at appropriate levels.⁸

Striking the right balance may not always be easy. On the one hand, genuine development and real progress can be achieved only by people themselves, acting individually and collectively, in response to the specific concerns and needs of their time and place. It can be argued that the decentralization of governance is the sine qua non of development.⁹ On the other hand, the international order clearly requires a degree of global direction and coordination.

Therefore, in accordance with the principles of decentralization

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8. Two commonly used maxims illustrate this principle. "Small is beautiful," a maxim coined in the early '70s as an economic principle, applies equally to governance. Schumacher explains: "In the affairs of men, there always appears to be a need for at least two things simultaneously, which, on the face of it, seem to be incompatible and to exclude one another. We always need both freedom and order. We need the freedom of lots and lots of small, autonomous unities, and, at the same time, the orderliness of large-scale, possibly global, unity and coordination." E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 65.

"Think globally, act locally," a slogan promoted by environmental and community development activists, captures a perspective in which the need for overall global coordination is carefully balanced against the need for local and national autonomy.

9. "Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society... [a system of world governance] seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other." Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 41-42.

outlined above, international institutions should be given the authority to act only on issues of international concern where states cannot act on their own or to intervene for the preservation of the rights of peoples and member states. All other matters should be relegated to national and local institutions.¹⁰

Furthermore, in devising a specific framework for the future international order, leaders should survey a broad range of approaches to governance. Rather than being modeled after any single one of the recognized systems of government, the solution may embody, reconcile and assimilate within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them.

For example, one of the time-tested models of governance that may accommodate the world's diversity within a unified framework is the federal system. Federalism has proved effective in decentralizing authority and decision-making in large, complex, and heterogeneous states, while maintaining a degree of overall unity and stability. Another model worth examining is the commonwealth, which at the global level would place the interest of the whole ahead of the interest of any individual nation.

Extraordinary care must be taken in designing the architecture of the international order so that it does not over time degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery corrupting the life and machinery of the constituent political institutions.

In 1955, during the first decade review of the UN charter, the Bahá'í International Community offered a statement to the United

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10. Writing in the 1930s, Shoghi Effendi, who then led the worldwide Bahá'í community, sketched out some of the functions and responsibilities for a future world legislature. Among other things, he wrote: "a world legislature, whose members will, as trustees of the whole of mankind... enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples." *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203.

This view is shared by such scholars as Jan Tinbergen, winner of the 1969 Nobel prize for Economics, who stated, "Mankind's problems can no longer be solved by national governments. What is needed is a World Government. This can best be achieved by strengthening the United Nations system." United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Human Development Report 1994. *Global Governance for the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 88.

Nations, based on ideas articulated nearly a century before by Bahá'u'lláh. "The Bahá'í concept of world order is defined in these terms: A world Super-State in whose favor all the nations of the world will have ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for the purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. This State will have to include an International Executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the Commonwealth; a World Parliament whose members are elected by the peoples in their respective countries and whose election is confirmed by their respective governments; a Supreme Tribunal whose judgement has a binding effect even in cases where the parties concerned have not voluntarily agreed to submit their case to its consideration."¹¹

While we believe this formulation of a world government is at once the ultimate safeguard and the inevitable destiny of humankind, we do recognize that it represents a long-term picture of a global society. Given the pressing nature of the current state of affairs, the world requires bold, practical and actionable strategies that go beyond inspiring visions of the future. Nevertheless, by focusing on a compelling concept, a clear and consistent direction for evolutionary change emerges from the mire of contradictory views and doctrines.

III. Defining a Role for the UN Within the Emerging International Order

The United Nations was the centerpiece of the international system created by the victors of World War II and, during the long decades of ideological conflict between the East and the West, it served its original purpose as a forum for international dialogue. Over the years, its mandate has been expanded to include not only international standard-setting and promotion of social

11. Bahá'í International Community. Proposals to the United Nations for Charter Revision. 23 May 1955.

and economic development but also peacekeeping operations on several continents.

Over the same period, the political reality of our world has experienced a dramatic transformation. At the time of the UN's inception, there were some 50 independent states. That number has grown to exceed 185. At the close of World War II, governments were the main actors on the global scene. Today, the growing influence of organizations of civil society and of multinational corporations has created a much more intricate political landscape.

Despite the growing complexity in its mission, the United Nations system has retained more or less the same structure that was designed for a new international organization some 50 years ago. It is not surprising then that the occasion of its 50th anniversary has stimulated a new dialogue about its ability to meet the political realities of the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, in this dialogue, criticism has far outweighed praise.

Most criticisms of the operations of the United Nations are based on comparisons with the operations of the leading organizations in the private sector or on inflated initial expectations. Although some specific comparisons may be useful in improving the efficiency of the United Nations, more general exercises of this kind are essentially unfair. The United Nations lacks not only the clear authority, but also the requisite resources to act effectively in most instances. Accusations of the UN's failure are in fact indictments of the member states themselves.

Judged in isolation from the reality within which it operates, the United Nations will always seem inefficient and ineffective. However, if it is viewed as one element of a larger process of development in systems of international order, the bright light of analysis would shift from the UN's shortcomings and failures to shine on its victories and accomplishments. To those with an evolutionary mindset, the early experience of the United Nations offers us a rich source of learning about its future role within the international regime.

An evolutionary mindset implies the ability to envision an institution over a long time frame perceiving its inherent potential

for development, identifying the fundamental principles governing its growth, formulating high-impact strategies for short-term implementation, and even anticipating radical discontinuities along its path.

Studying the United Nations from this perspective unveils significant opportunities to strengthen the current system without the wholesale restructuring of its principal institutions or the intensive re-engineering of its core processes. In fact, we submit that no proposal for UN reform can produce high impact unless its recommendations are internally consistent and direct the UN along a projected evolutionary path toward a distinctive and relevant role within the future international order.

We believe the combination of recommendations described herein meets these conditions and that their adoption would represent a measured but significant step toward building a more just world order.¹²

A. Resuscitating the General Assembly

The foundation for any system of governance is the rule of law and the primary institution for promulgating law is the legislature. While the authority of local and national legislatures is generally respected, regional and international legislative bodies have been the subject of fear and suspicion.

In addition, the United Nations General Assembly has been a target of attack for its ineffectiveness. Although some of the accusations hurled against it are unfounded, there are at least two shortcomings that hamper the ability of the General Assembly to have impact.

12. Throughout His writings, Bahá'u'lláh consistently uses the terms "order," "world order," and "new world order" to describe the ongoing and momentous series of changes in the political, social and religious life of the world. In the 1870s, He wrote: "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed." *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, trans. Shoghi Effendi and a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 181.

First, the current arrangement gives undue weight to state sovereignty, resulting in a curious mix of anarchy and conservatism. In a reformed United Nations, the legislative branch and its voting structure will need to represent more accurately the people of the world as well as nation-states.¹³

Second, General Assembly resolutions are not binding unless they are separately ratified as a treaty by each member state. If the current system, which places state sovereignty above all other concerns, is to give way to a system which can address the interests of a single and interdependent humanity, the resolutions of the General Assembly—within a limited domain of issues—must gradually come to possess the force of law with provisions for both enforcement and sanctions.

These two shortcomings are closely linked inasmuch as the majority of the world's people, suspicious and fearful of world government, are unlikely to submit to an international institution unless it is itself more genuinely representative.¹⁴

Nevertheless, in the short term, five practical measures are possible to strengthen the General Assembly, enhance its reputation and align it with a longer term direction.

1. Raising Minimum Requirements for Membership

The minimum standards for conduct by a government towards its people have been well established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent international covenants, collectively referred to as the International Bill of Human Rights.

Without an unshakable commitment to regular and periodic elections with universal participation by secret ballot, to freedom of expression and to other such human rights, a member state stands in the way of the active and intelligent participation of the vast majority of its population in the affairs of its own communities.

We propose that there should be consequences for member

13. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 2d ed., trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957; reprint, 1970), p. 24.

14. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), *States of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalization* (London: KPC Group, 1995), pp. 106–09.

states that violate these standards. Similarly, nations seeking recognition should be denied membership until they openly espouse these standards or make recognizable efforts to move in that direction.

2. *Appointing a Commission to Study Borders and Frontiers*

Outstanding irredentist claims continue to be a major source of conflict and war, highlighting the critical need for general agreements on national boundaries. Such treaties can only be arrived at after consideration of the arbitrary manner in which many nation-states were originally defined and of all outstanding claims of nations and ethnic groups.

Rather than relegating such claims to the World Court, we believe it would be best to establish a special International Commission to research all claims affecting international boundaries and then, after careful consideration, to make recommendations for action.¹⁵ The results would serve as an early warning system

15. There are many ways that such a Commission, or even the World Legislature itself, might go about determining fair and just borders for all nations. But as daunting as the task may seem, it is an important part of the process of building a new order. Wrote 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns—the shining exemplars of devotion and determination—shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble undertaking—the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world—should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be

for growing tension among civil or ethnic groups and assessment of threats in situations benefiting from early preventive diplomacy.

In order to establish a genuine community of nations in the long run, it will be necessary to settle finally all disputes over borders. This research would serve that end.

3. *Searching for New Financial Arrangements*

Primarily triggered by the unwillingness of some member states to remit their general assessments on time, compounded by the absence of authority to collect any interest accrued because of that delay, and further aggravated by the bureaucratic inefficiencies in parts of its operations, the annual budget shortfall pressures the UN into a crisis management mentality.

Voluntary payments from member states will never be a reliable approach to finance an international institution. Vigorous approaches to revenue generation must be devised to enable the smooth functioning of the UN machinery. We propose the immediate appointment of an expert Task Force to begin a rigorous search for solutions.

In studying alternatives, the Task Force should be mindful of several fundamental principles. First, there should be no assessments without representation. Second, in the interest of fairness and justice, assessments should be graduated. Third, mechanisms for encouraging voluntary contributions by individuals and communities should not be overlooked.¹⁶

15. (cont.)

allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure." *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 64–65.

16. Charitable giving in the United States in 1994 rose by 3.6 percent to \$130 billion, according to Karen W. Arenson, "Charitable Giving Rose 3.6% in 1994, Philanthropy Trust Says," *The New York Times*, 25 May 1995, sec. A, p. 22.

4. *Making a Commitment to a Universal Auxiliary Language and a Common Script*

The United Nations, which currently uses six official languages, would derive substantial benefit from either choosing a single existing language or creating a new one to be used as an auxiliary language in all its fora. Such a step has long been advocated by many groups, from the Esperantists to the Bahá'í International Community itself.¹⁷ In addition to saving money and simplifying bureaucratic procedures, such a move would go far toward promoting a spirit of unity.

We propose the appointment of a high-level Commission, with members from various regions and drawn from relevant fields, including linguistics, economics, the social sciences, education and the media, to begin careful study on the matter of an international auxiliary language and the adoption of a common script.

We foresee that, eventually, the world cannot but adopt a single, universally agreed-upon auxiliary language and script to be taught in schools worldwide, as a supplement to the language or languages of each country. The objective would be to facilitate the transition to a global society through better communication

17. "Regarding the whole question of an International Language.... We, as Bahá'ís, are very anxious to see a universal auxiliary tongue adopted as soon as possible; we are not the protagonists of any one language to fill this post. If the governments of the world agree on an existing language, or a constructed, new tongue, to be used internationally, we would heartily support it because we desire to see this step in the unification of the human race take place as soon as possible." Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, comp. Gertrude Garrida (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973), p. 39.

In making this proposal, we wish to call attention to the term "auxiliary." The Bahá'í teachings value and promote cultural diversity, not uniformity. At this point in history, then, we do not envision imposing a single language worldwide. Rather, what we imagine is that peoples and nations would keep their own local and national languages—while at the same time be encouraged to learn a universal language. Certainly such a universal language should ultimately be taught, as a required subject, in all of the world's schools. But this should in no way detract from legitimate expressions of national and local linguistic and cultural diversity.

among nations, reduction of administrative costs for businesses, governments and others involved in global enterprise, and a general fostering of more cordial relations between all members of the human family.¹⁸

This proposal should be read narrowly. It does not in any way envision the decline of any living language or culture.

5. *Investigating the Possibility of a Single International Currency*

The need to promote the adoption of a global currency as a vital element in the integration of the global economy is self-evident. Among other benefits, economists believe that a single currency will curb unproductive speculation and unpredictable market swings, promote a leveling of incomes and prices worldwide, and thereby result in significant savings.¹⁹

The possibility of savings will not lead to action unless there is an overwhelming body of evidence addressing the relevant concerns and doubts of skeptics, accompanied by a credible implementation plan. We propose the appointment of a Commission consisting of the most accomplished government leaders, academics and professionals to begin immediate exploration into the economic benefits and the political costs of a single currency and to hypothesize about an effective implementation approach.

18. "The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script," wrote Bahá'u'lláh in the late 1800s. "When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own home." *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 250.

19. In a "special contribution" to the 1994 Human Development Report, James Tobin, winner of the 1981 Nobel Prize for Economics, observes that "a permanent single currency" would eliminate much if not all of the turbulence currently associated with the huge amount of currency speculation on world markets today. Observing that such a single world currency is probably a long way off, he proposes as an interim measure an "international uniform tax" on spot transactions in foreign exchange. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human Development Report 1994. A Tax on International Currency Transactions* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 70.

FROM THE
UNIVERSAL
HOUSE OF
JUSTICE

The Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í world community, was ordained by Bahá'u'lláh as that body charged "to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings."¹ Thus explicitly empowered through the writings of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice seeks continually to raise Bahá'í community members' vision about their contributions to shaping society, while giving full recognition to the obstacles and challenges inherent in current world events. Significant communications of the Universal House of Justice between Ridván 1995 and Ridván 1996, which largely focus on both the expansion of the community and various aspects of its development, are highlighted here.

1. *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1972), p. 4.

B. Developing A Meaningful Executive Function

At the international level, the single most important executive function is the enforcement of a collective security pact.²⁰

Collective security implies a binding covenant among nations to act in concert against threats to the collective. The effectiveness of the covenant depends on the degree to which members commit themselves to the collective good, even if motivated by a sense of enlightened self-interest.

Within the United Nations, the enforcement role is largely carried out by the Security Council, with other functions of the executive being shared with the Secretariat. Both are hampered in fulfilling their mandated roles. The Security Council suffers from an inability to take decisive action. The Secretariat is pressured by the complex demands of the member states.

In the short term, four practical measures are possible to strengthen the executive function within the United Nations.

1. Limiting the Exercise of the Veto Power

The original intention of the UN Charter in conferring veto power on the five Permanent Members was to prevent the Security Council from authorizing military actions against a Permanent Member or requiring the use of its forces against its will.²¹ In fact, beginning with the Cold War, the veto power has been exercised repeatedly for reasons that have to do with regional or national security.

In its 1955 submission on UN reform, the Bahá'í International Community argued for the gradual elimination of the concepts of "permanent membership" and "veto power" as confidence in the Security Council would build. Today, 40 years later, we reaffirm

20. The principle of collective security was put forth by Bahá'u'lláh over a century ago in letters to the kings and rulers of the world: "Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should anyone among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice." *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 254.

21. The Report of the Independent Working Group on the Future of the United Nations, *The United Nations in its Second Half-Century* (Yale University Press Service, 1995), p. 16.

that position. However, we also propose that, as a transitional step, measures be introduced to curb the exercise of the veto power to reflect the original intention of the Charter.

2. Institutionalizing Ad Hoc Military Arrangements

To support the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, and to add credibility to resolutions of the Security Council, an International Force should be created.²² Its loyalty to the UN and its independence from national considerations must be assured. The command and control of such a fully armed Force would reside with the Secretary-General under the authority of the Security Council. Its finances, however, would be determined by the General Assembly. In constructing such a force, the Secretary-General would seek to draw competent personnel from all regions of the world.

If properly implemented, this Force would also provide a sense of security that might encourage steps toward global disarmament, thereby making possible an outright ban on all weapons of mass destruction.²³ Furthermore, in line with the principle of

22. Glenview Foundation, *The Stassen Draft Charter for a New United Nations to Emerge from the Original, to Serve World Peace and Progress for the Next Forty Years* (Philadelphia: Glenview Foundation, 1985). Grenville Clark and Louis B. Sohn, *World Peace Through World Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966). Keith Hindell, "Reform of the United Nations?" in *The World Today: Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* (United Kingdom, Feb. 1992) Vol. 48, No. 2. pp. 30-33. John Logue, "New World Order Means Reformed U.N.," *World Federalist News*, July 1992. Benjamin B. Ferencz and Ken Keyes Jr., *Planethood: The Key to Your Future* (Coos Bay, Oregon: Love Line Books, 1991). Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Peace-making and Peace-Keeping*. Report of the Secretary General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council, January 31 (New York: United Nations, 1992).

23. This is not to say that steps to ban such weapons should await the full development and deployment of such a Force. We wholeheartedly support current steps to renew the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to firmly establish a comprehensive test ban, as well as any further efforts to eliminate nuclear, chemical and/or biological weapons. Likewise, stronger efforts must be made to restrict and control conventional weapons such as land mines, which kill indiscriminately.

collective security, it would become gradually understood that states need only maintain armaments sufficient for their own defense and the maintenance of internal order.

As an immediate step toward the establishment of this Force, the present system of ad hoc arrangements could be institutionalized to establish core regional forces for rapid deployment during a crisis.

3. *Applying the Notion of Collective Security to Other Problems of the Global Commons*

Although originally conceived within the context of a threat of military aggression, the principle of collective security, some argue, may now be applied in an expansive manner to all threats which, although apparently local in nature, are actually the result of the complex breakdown of the present-day global order. These threats include but are not limited to international drug trafficking, food security, and the emergence of new global pandemics.²⁴

We believe this issue would have to be included on the agenda of the proposed Global Summit. However, it is unlikely that expansive formulations of collective security would preclude the fundamental cause of military aggression.

4. *Retaining Successful UN Institutions with Independent Executive Function*

Some of the more independent organizations within the UN family, such as the UN International Children's Emergency Fund, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Universal Postal Union, the International Telegraph and Communications Union, the International Labour Organization, and the World Health Organization, have enjoyed conspicuous success with focused but important areas of international concern.

24. Mahbub ul Haq, 1994. Senior Advisor to UNDP Administrator. Team Leader of the Group that prepares the UNDP annual Human Development Reports which have brought, in recent years, fresh insights to development theory and practice, including a new concept on human security.

Generally, these organizations already have their own executive function. Their independence should be retained and reinforced as part of the international executive.²⁵

C. *A Strengthened World Court*

In any system of governance, a strong judicial function is necessary to moderate the powers of the other branches and to enunciate, promulgate, protect and deliver justice. The drive to create just societies has been among the fundamental forces in history²⁶—and without doubt no lasting world civilization can be founded unless it is firmly grounded in the principle of justice.

Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organization.

At the individual level, justice is that faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh avers, justice is "the best beloved of all things" since it permits each individual to see with his own eyes rather than the eyes of others, to know through his own knowledge rather than the knowledge of his neighbor or his group.

At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision-making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. To the extent that justice becomes a guiding concern of human

25. Erskine Childers, ed. *Challenges to the United Nations: Building a Safer World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994). pp. 21–25.

26. John Huddleston, *The Search for a Just Society* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989).

interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected. In such a climate the perennial tendencies toward manipulation and partisanship are far less likely to deflect the decision-making process.

Such a conception of justice will be gradually reinforced by the realization that, in an interdependent world, the interests of the individual and society are inextricably intertwined. In this context, justice is a thread that must be woven into the consideration of every interaction, whether in the family, the neighborhood, or at the global level.

We see in the current United Nations system the foundation for a strengthened World Court. Established in 1945 as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice is characterized by many positive elements. The current system for the selection of judges, for example, seeks to create a judicial panel which is representative of a wide range of peoples, regions, and judicial systems.²⁷

27. About 75 years ago 'Abdu'l-Bahá offered the following suggestions for a future world court: "the national assemblies of each country and nation—that is to say parliaments—should elect two or three persons who are the choicest of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws and the relations between governments and aware of the essential needs of the world of humanity in this day. The number of these representatives should be in proportion to the number of inhabitants of that country. The election of these souls who are chosen by the national assembly, that is, the parliament, must be confirmed by the upper house, the congress and the cabinet and also by the president or monarch so these persons may be the elected ones of all the nation and the government. The Supreme Tribunal will be composed of these people, and all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation. When the Supreme Tribunal gives a ruling on any international question, either unanimously or by majority rule, there will no longer be any pretext for the plaintiff or ground of objection for the defendant. In case any of the governments or nations, in the execution of the irrefutable decision of the Supreme Tribunal, be negligent or dilatory, the rest of the nations will rise up against it, because all the governments and nations of the world are the supporters of this Supreme Tribunal. Consider what a firm foundation this is! But by a limited and restricted League the purpose

The Court's primary shortcoming is that it lacks the authority to issue legally binding decisions, except in those cases where states have chosen in advance to be bound by its decisions. Without jurisdiction, the Court is powerless to administer justice.²⁸ In time, the decisions of the World Court may become binding and enforceable upon all states; however, in the short term, the World Court might be strengthened through two other measures.

1. Extending the Court's Jurisdiction

Currently, the Court's jurisdiction is limited to a few categories of cases, and only nations have standing to bring an action. We propose that in addition to member states, other organs of the United Nations should be given the right to bring cases before the Court.

2. Coordinating the Thematic Courts

The World Court should act as an umbrella for existing and new thematic courts, that arbitrate and adjudicate international cases within specific thematic domains.

Early components of a unified system can already be found in the specialized courts for arbitration of such matters as commerce and transportation, and in the proposals for such bodies as an International Criminal Court and a Chamber for Environmental Matters. Other issue areas that might need to be addressed under such a system would include courts for international terrorism and drug trafficking.

27. (cont.)

will not be realized as it ought and should." *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre and Marzieh Gail. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) pp. 306–07.

28. At the present time, for example, the Court's jurisdiction is limited to 1) cases which the parties refer to it jointly by special agreement, 2) matters concerning a treaty or convention in force which provides for reference to the Court, and 3) specified classes of legal disputes between States for which they have recognized the jurisdiction of the Court as compulsory. *Europa World Year Book 1994*. Vol. 1 (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1994), p. 22.

IV. Releasing the Power of the Individual: A Critical Challenge of the Emerging International Order

The primary objective of governing institutions at all levels is the advancement of human civilization. This objective is difficult to satisfy without the inspired and intelligent participation of the generality of humankind in the life and affairs of the community.

With a focus on building institutions and creating a community of nations, international bodies have historically remained distant from the minds and hearts of the world's people. Separated by several layers of government from the international arena and confused by the media's coverage of international news, the vast majority of people have not yet developed an affinity for institutions like the United Nations. Only those individuals who have had some access to the international arena through channels like organizations of civil society seem able to identify with these institutions.

Paradoxically, international institutions cannot develop into an effective and mature level of government and fulfill their primary objective to advance human civilization if they do not recognize and nurture their relationship of mutual dependency with the people of the world. Such recognition would set in motion a virtuous cycle of trust and support that would accelerate the transition to a new world order.

The tasks entailed in the development of a global society call for levels of capacity far beyond anything the human race has so far been able to muster. Reaching these levels will require an enormous expansion in access to knowledge on the part of every individual. International institutions will succeed in eliciting and directing the potentialities latent in the peoples of the world to the extent that their exercise of authority is moderated by their obligation to win the confidence, respect, and genuine support of those whose actions they seek to govern and to consult openly and to the fullest extent possible with all those whose interests are affected.

Individuals who become confident and respectful of these institutions will, in turn, demand that their national governments increase their support, both political and economic, for the

international order. In turn, the international institutions, with increased influence and power, will be better positioned to undertake further actions to establish a legitimate and effective world order.

Along with the measures for strengthening its structure, the United Nations needs to adopt initiatives that release the latent power in all people to participate in this galvanizing process. To this end, certain themes that accelerate the advancement of the individual and society warrant special consideration. Among them, promoting economic development, protecting human rights, advancing the status of women, and emphasizing moral development are four priorities so closely tied to the advancement of civilization that they must be emphasized as part of the United Nations agenda.

A. Promoting Economic Development

Economic development strategies employed by the United Nations, the World Bank and a number of governments during the last 50 years, however sincerely conceived and executed, have fallen far short of aspirations. In much of the world, the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" has widened and is accelerating with the persistent disparity in income levels. Social problems have not subsided. In fact, crime and disease are not just on the rise; they are also becoming endemic and more difficult to combat.

These failures can be traced to a number of factors. They include a misplaced focus on large-scale projects and bureaucratic over-centralization, unjust terms of international trade, a pervasive corruption that has been allowed to flourish throughout the system, the exclusion of women from the decision-making processes at all levels, a general inability to ensure that resources reach the poor, and the diversion of development resources into military hardware.

A dispassionate examination of these factors betrays a common systematic and fundamental flaw in the current paradigm for economic development: material needs are often addressed without taking into account the spiritual factors and their motivating power.

Development should not become confused with the creation of an unsustainable consumer society. True prosperity encompasses spiritual as well as material well-being. Food, drink, shelter and a degree of material comfort are essential, but human beings cannot and never will find fulfillment in these necessities. Nor is contentment to be found in the somewhat more intangible material attainments such as social recognition or political power. Ultimately, not even intellectual achievement satisfies our deepest needs.

It is in the hunger for something more, something beyond ourselves, that the reality of the human spirit can be properly understood. Although the spiritual side of our nature is obscured by the day-to-day struggle for material attainment, our need for the transcendent cannot long be disregarded. Thus a sustainable development paradigm must address both the spiritual aspirations of human beings and their material needs and desires.

Education is the best investment in economic development. "Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess," writes Bahá'u'lláh. "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom."²⁹ Education implies more than a process of mastering a narrow body of

29. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 260.

"The primary most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 109)

"This same difference is noticeable among animals; some have been domesticated, educated, others left wild. The proof is clear that the world of nature is imperfect, the world of education perfect. That is to say, man is rescued from the exigencies of nature by training and culture; consequently, education is necessary, obligatory. But education is of various kinds. There is a training and development of the physical body which ensures strength and growth. There is intellectual education or mental

knowledge or learning a set of life skills. In truth, education, which should be a fundamental imperative of development, must also teach the process for knowledge acquisition, cultivate the powers of intellect and reasoning, and infuse the student with indispensable moral qualities.

It is this comprehensive approach to education that allows people to contribute to the creation of wealth and encourage its just distribution.³⁰

Genuine wealth is created when work is undertaken not simply as a means of earning a livelihood but also as a way to contribute to society. We hold that meaningful work is a basic need of the human soul, as important to the proper development of the individual as nutritious food, clean water and fresh air are to the physical body.

Because of the spiritually damaging nature of dependency, schemes which focus solely on redistributing material wealth are doomed to failure in the long run. Distribution of wealth must be

29. (cont.)

training for which schools and colleges are founded. The third kind of education is that of the spirit. Through the breaths of the Holy Spirit man is uplifted into the world of moralities and illumined by the lights of divine bestowals. The moral world is only attained through the effulgence of the Sun of Reality and the quickening life of the divine spirit." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, comp. Howard MacNutt, 2d. ed., (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 329–30.

30. Governments and their partners must bear in mind that material equality is neither achievable nor desirable. Absolute equality is a chimera. At various points along the way, there will nevertheless be the necessity for the redistribution of some of the world's wealth. For, indeed, it is becoming increasingly obvious that unbridled capitalism does not provide the answer either. Some regulation and redistribution is necessary to promote material justice. In this regard, a tax on income is, in principle, one of the fairest and most equitable means. There must also be a role for the voluntary sharing of wealth—both at an individual and an institutional level. Equal opportunities for economic advancement and progress, however, must be woven into the very fabric of the new order. Ultimately, the most important regulation on any economic system is the moral regulation that begins in the hearts and minds of people.

approached in an efficient and equitable manner. In fact, it must be intimately integrated with the process of wealth creation.

We propose the following recommendation to the United Nations system for promoting more effective development.

1. Launching a Determined Campaign to Implement Agenda 21

The plan of action formulated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development incorporated a wide range of views from civil society and a set of principles not unlike those articulated in this statement. Unfortunately, however, little has been done by member states to implement the measures described in the plan.

If the objectives of Agenda 21 are to be addressed and satisfied, an expanded effort, different in nature but comparable in scale and commitment to the Marshall Plan for the re-development of post-war Europe, might be necessary. In this case, the Bretton Woods institutions would be called upon to mount a pronounced campaign to expedite national implementation efforts. A mandate of this nature can result only from a conference, similar to the first Bretton Woods meetings 50 years ago, dedicated to a wholesale reexamination of these institutions. The purpose of this reexamination would be to make available to the people of the world sufficient resources so that they could implement local initiatives. Moreover, the conference could also expand its agenda to address deeper issues of global economic security through the redefinition of existing institutions or the creation of new structures.³¹

If successful, this new machinery could also be extended to coordinate implementation of the measures identified at the recent Social Summit.

B. Protecting Fundamental Human Rights

Over the five decades since the United Nations was founded, an

31. The establishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a commendable first step in the right direction and may be useful in the long run, as one of the tools that could be the basis for funding Agenda 21, if its operational scale is enlarged and its mandate redefined.

understanding has emerged that human rights must be recognized and protected internationally if peace, social progress and economic prosperity are to be established.

The foundation for international agreement on the nature of human rights is the all-important Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and elaborated in two international covenants—the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. In addition, some 75 other conventions and declarations identify and promote the rights of women and children, the right to freedom of worship, and the right to development, to name but a few.

The current United Nations human rights regime has two major shortcomings: limited means for enforcement and follow-up, and too little emphasis on the responsibilities that accompany all rights.

Human rights enforcement at the international level needs to be handled in a manner similar to the treatment of military aggression under a collective security regime. The violation of human rights in one state must be considered the concern of all, and enforcement mechanisms must provide for a unified response on the part of the entire international community. The question of when and how to intervene to protect human rights is more difficult to answer. Vigorous enforcement will require a high degree of global consensus on what constitutes a flagrant and willful violation.

Important steps toward global consensus were taken during the process leading up to the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, which affirmed unequivocally that human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent, and ended the long-standing debate about the relative importance of civil and political rights as compared to social, economic and cultural rights.³² Conference resolutions also confirmed that human rights must be applied irrespective of differences of racial background, ethnic origin, religious belief or national identity. They encompass the equality

32. World Conference on Human Rights. Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. 14–25 June 1993. Vienna, Austria.

of women and men; they include for all individuals worldwide the same rights to freedom of investigation, information and religious practice; and they embody the right of everyone to basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare.³³ Beyond the need to build consensus and strengthen enforcement of human

33. A further elaboration of this concept can be found in *The Prosperity of Humankind*, a statement of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, published in February 1995: "The activity most intimately linked to the consciousness that distinguishes human nature is the individual's exploration of reality for himself or herself. The freedom to investigate the purpose of existence and to develop the endowments of human nature that make it achievable requires protection. Human beings must be free to know. That such freedom is often abused and such abuse grossly encouraged by features of contemporary society does not detract in any degree from the validity of the impulse itself.

"It is this distinguishing impulse of human consciousness that provides the moral imperative for the enunciation of many of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration and the related Covenants. Universal education, freedom of movement, access to information, and the opportunity to participate in political life are all aspects of its operation that require explicit guarantee by the international community. The same is true of freedom of thought and belief, including religious liberty, along with the right to hold opinions and express these opinions appropriately.

"Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the race is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This trusteeship constitutes the moral foundation of most of the other rights—principally economic and social—which the instruments of the United Nations are attempting similarly to define. The security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to privacy are all implied in such a trusteeship. The obligations on the part of the community extend to the provision of employment, mental and physical health care, social security, fair wages, rest and recreation, and a host of other reasonable expectations on the part of the individual members of society.

"The principle of collective trusteeship creates also the right of every person to expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the protection of national and international law. Much like the role played by the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and economic development of a human race experiencing its collective coming-of-age. It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global civilization. On the one hand, cultural expressions need to be protected from suffocation by the

rights, it is important to establish a greater understanding that to each right is attached a corresponding responsibility.

The right to be recognized as a person before the law, for example, implies the responsibility to obey the law—and to make both the laws and the legal system more just. Likewise, in the socio-economic realm, the right to marry carries with it the responsibility to support the family unit, to educate one's children and to treat all family members with respect.³⁴ The right to work cannot be divorced from the responsibility to perform one's duties to the best of one's ability. In the broadest sense, the notion of "universal" human rights implies a responsibility to humanity as a whole.

Ultimately, while it is up to the individual to fulfill the responsibility in each such area, it is up to international institutions to protect the related human right. We propose three measures for immediate action.

1. Strengthening the Machinery of the UN for Monitoring, Implementation and Follow-Up

The United Nations machinery for the monitoring, implementation and follow-up of government compliance with international

33. (cont.)

materialistic influences currently holding sway. On the other, cultures must be enabled to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilization, free of manipulation for partisan political ends."

34. Ultimately, respect for human rights must begin in the family: "Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families. Therefore, as strife and dissension destroy a family and prevent its progress, so nations are destroyed and advancement hindered." *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 157.

covenants is inadequate. The Center for Human Rights consists of a very small professional staff struggling to support efforts to monitor the compliance by countries of all treaties they have ratified.

We believe the resources assigned to this Center must be dramatically increased if it is to discharge its duties properly.

2. *Encouraging Universal Ratification of International Conventions on Human Rights*

Since ratifying the international conventions on human rights creates an obligation for member states, albeit not a practically enforceable one, the Secretary-General and all bodies of the UN might consider every opportunity to encourage member states to act on this issue. In fact, a demanding timeline for universal ratification may be an inspiring goal to be set by the General Assembly.

3. *Assuring Respect for the Monitoring Organs of the UN Involved in Human Rights*

Since the mandate of the human rights monitoring agencies is of a very serious nature, the UN needs to be particularly mindful of perceptions created by the structure and processes of these agencies and equally deliberate in acting to resolve compromising situations.

We believe it would be prudent to explore during the nomination process the qualifications of member states in visible positions and to exclude from election to membership on the Commission on Human Rights and other monitoring agencies, any member states that have not yet ratified the international conventions. While these member states would still be able to fully participate in deliberations, it would protect the United Nations from a potentially embarrassing and compromising situation.

We also believe that a single exception is warranted to the above rule. Member states, not under the scrutiny of the UN, that have sufficient protection for fundamental human rights within their constitutions, but which have not been able to complete the ratification process because of internal political reasons, should

not be barred from election to visible positions.

Finally, it also seems prudent for member states that have ratified the international conventions but are under scrutiny for gross human rights violations to be disqualified from election to the offices of conferences and other meetings of the Commission on Human Rights. This will prevent a widespread perception of the proceedings as a mockery.

C. *Advancing The Status Of Women*

The creation of a peaceful and sustainable world civilization will be impossible without the full participation of women in every arena of human activity.³⁵ While this proposition is increasingly supported, there is a marked difference between intellectual acceptance and its implementation.

It is time for the institutions of the world, composed mainly of men, to use their influence to promote the systematic inclusion of women, not out of condescension or presumed self-sacrifice but as an act motivated by the belief that the contributions of women are required for society to progress.³⁶ Only as the contributions of women are valued will they be sought out and woven into the fabric

35. "When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind." *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 174-75.

36. "Let it be known once more that until woman and man recognize and realize equality, social and political progress here or anywhere will not be possible. For the world of humanity consists of two parts or members: one is woman; the other is man. Until these two members are equal in strength, the oneness of humanity cannot be established, and the happiness and felicity of mankind will not be a reality. God willing, this is to be so." *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 77.

of society. The result will be a more peaceful, balanced, just and prosperous civilization.³⁷

The obvious biological differences between the sexes need not be a cause for inequality or disunity. Rather, they are an aspect of complementarity. If the role of women as mothers is properly valued, their work in nurturing and educating children will be respected and properly rewarded. It should also be acknowledged that the child-bearing role does not diminish one's aptitude for leadership, or undermine one's intellectual, scientific or creative capacity. Indeed, it may be an enhancement.

We believe progress on a few critical fronts would have the greatest impact on the advancement of women. We share the following perspectives which are foundational to the recommendations which follow.

First and foremost, violence against women and girls, one of the most blatant and widespread abuses of human rights, must be eradicated. Violence has been a fact of life for many women throughout the world, regardless of race, class, or educational background. In many societies, traditional beliefs that women are inferior or a burden make them easy targets of anger and frustration. Even strong legal remedies and enforcement mechanisms will have little effect until they are supported by a transformation in the attitudes of men. Women will not be safe until a new social conscience takes hold, one which will make the mere expression of condescending attitudes towards women, let alone any form of physical violence, a cause of deep shame.

37. "The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting—force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals—or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in John E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 4th rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Books, published by Pyramid Publications for Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 156.

Second, the family remains the basic building block of society and behaviors observed and learned there will be projected onto interactions at all other levels of society. Therefore, the members of the institution of the family must be transformed so that the principle of equality of women and men is internalized. Further, if the bonds of love and unity cement family relationships, the impact will reach beyond its borders and affect society as a whole.

Third, while the overall goal of any society must be to educate all its members, at this stage in human history the greatest need is to educate women and girls.³⁸ For over 20 years, studies have consistently documented that, of all possible investments, educating women and girls pays the highest overall dividends in terms of social development, the eradication of poverty and the advancement of community.³⁹

Fourth, the global dialogue on the role of men and women must promote recognition of the intrinsic complementarity of the two sexes. For the differences between them are a natural assertion of the necessity of women and men to work together to bring

38. This principle, that women and girls should receive priority over men and boys in access to education, has been a long-standing principle in the Bahá'í teachings. Speaking in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: "In proclaiming the oneness of mankind [Bahá'u'lláh] taught that men and women are equal in the sight of God and that there is no distinction to be made between them. The only difference between them now is due to lack of education and training. If woman is given equal opportunity of education, distinction and estimate of inferiority will disappear.... Furthermore, the education of women is of greater importance than the education of men, for they are the mothers of the race, and mothers rear the children. The first teachers of children are the mothers. Therefore, they must be capably trained in order to educate both sons and daughters. There are many provisions in the words of Bahá'u'lláh in regard to this.

"He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes." *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 174-75.

39. Lawrence H. Summers, Vice President & Chief Economist for the World Bank, *Investing in All the People*. 1992. Also, USAID. 1989. *Technical Reports in Gender and Development. Making the Case for the Gender Variable: Women and the Wealth and Well-being of Nations*. Office of Women in Development.

to fruition their potentialities for advancing civilization, no less than for perpetuating the human race. Such differences are inherent in the interactive character of their common humanity. This dialogue needs to consider the historical forces which have led to the oppression of women and examine the new social, political and spiritual realities which are today transforming our civilization.

As a starting point for this dialogue we offer this analogy from the Bahá'í Writings: "The world of humanity has two wings—one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible."⁴⁰ In addition, we support the following three specific measures.

1. Increasing the Participation of Women in Member State Delegations

We recommend that member states be encouraged to appoint an increased number of women to ambassadorial or similar diplomatic positions.

2. Encouraging Universal Ratification of International Conventions that Protect Women's Rights and Improve their Status

As with the international conventions on human rights, the Secretary-General and all bodies of the UN should consider every opportunity to encourage member states to proceed with ratification of conventions and protocols that protect women's rights and seek their advancement.

3. Planning Ahead for Implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action

The Forward-Looking Strategies declaration adopted at the Nairobi conference was highly bold and imaginative, yet its implementation was rather ineffective.⁴¹ We believe that a lesson

40. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 302.

41. The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. As adopted by the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, Kenya, 15–26 July 1985.

should be learned from this unfortunate experience and deliberate plans be put into place to ensure that the Platform of Action emerging from the Beijing conference does not meet a similar fate.

We propose that a monitoring system be established to prepare status reports on the implementation of adopted measures and to make presentations to the General Assembly annually, highlighting the top 20 and bottom 20 member states in terms of compliance.

D. Emphasizing Moral Development

The process of integrating human beings into larger and larger groups, although influenced by culture and geography, has been driven largely by religion, the most powerful agent for changing human attitudes and behavior. By religion, however, we mean the essential foundation or reality of religion, not the dogmas and blind imitations which have gradually encrusted it and which are the cause of its decline and effacement.

In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit.... Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless."⁴²

The concept of promoting specific morals or values may be controversial, especially in this age of humanistic relativism. Nevertheless, we firmly believe there exists a common set of values that have been obscured from recognition by those who exaggerate minor differences in religious or cultural practice for political purposes.⁴³ These foundation virtues, taught by all spiritual communities, constitute a basic framework for moral development.

42. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 303.

43. The interfaith declaration entitled "Towards a Global Ethic," which was produced by an assembly of religious and spiritual leaders from virtually every major world religion and spiritual movement at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, suggests that it is indeed possible for the world's religions to find much common ground in this regard. The declaration states: "We affirm that a common set of core values is found in

Riḍván Message (152 B.E.)

Each year between 21 April and 2 May, during the twelve-day commemoration of Bahá'u'lláh's public declaration of His mission in the Garden of Riḍván in Baghdad, the Universal House of Justice addresses a letter to the Bahá'ís of the world, outlining the achievements of the past year and looking ahead to the activities of the coming year. The 1995 Riḍván message (152 B.E.) focuses largely on the growing recognition of the Bahá'í Faith, its role in assisting the progress of humanity, and various aspects of its community's affairs.

The letter begins by noting “the despair besetting leaders of nations and peoples in their search for solutions to pressing social problems” and by seeing in their “desperation” “a world-wide cry for the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.” In the face of the “melancholy outlook evident at the World Summit for Social Development” in Copenhagen in March 1995, for example, the Bahá'í International Community's considerable presence there and its many follow-up activities undertaken after the gathering evidenced “the further advance of our world community in influencing the processes towards the Lesser Peace.”²

Indeed, while the international conferences called by the United Nations may not appear to have accomplished much, Bahá'ís see in them “a gradual movement towards the ultimate fulfillment of the will of Bahá'u'lláh that the rulers of nations meet to consult and decide on the outstanding issues in an increasingly global society.” In fact, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, described how the parallel processes leading to the political union of nations and to the uniting of people in one common faith would eventually draw closer together towards the end of this century, and the Universal House of Justice sees in current events evidence of the approaching fulfillment of this vision. Bahá'ís, then, have offered strong support to the recent series of United Nations conferences and summits.

Another indication of the wider recognition of the Bahá'í Faith noted by the Universal House of Justice is the increasing number

of visits to the Bahá'í World Centre by dignitaries, high-ranking government officials, and media representatives, underscoring “a trend towards a greater familiarity of the governments of the nations with the evolving center of a World Faith.” Such recognition also highlights the necessity for the speedy completion of the current construction projects on Mount Carmel. Bahá'ís understand the act of erecting these buildings as synchronizing, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, with “two no less significant developments—the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions.”

Against the backdrop of despair in the wider society, developments in the Bahá'í community are, in contrast, “encouraging.” Aside from “heartening” advances in external affairs activities and an increase in the community's efforts to share the message of Bahá'u'lláh, a number of stimulating factors concerning the internal functioning of Bahá'í communities around the world are highlighted. These include evolution in the work of the International and Continental Counsellors, appointed high-ranking officers of the Faith, and their auxiliaries around the globe; the emphasis on the education of children in the Bahá'í community; the “vigor of the youth”; and the “gathering strength” of Spiritual Assemblies at both the national and local levels. These institutions, says the Universal House of Justice, “foster a climate of unified action” in the Bahá'í community by engaging in complementary collaborative activities with individuals. By establishing such a climate, they will be able to work together “to combat the ravages of a rampant moral decadence” evident in society.

The vitality of the Bahá'í community is also reflected in the formation, at Riḍván 1995, of five new National Spiritual Assemblies: Armenia, Georgia, Belarus, Sicily, and Eritrea. At the same time, four previously existing Assemblies, in Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, South Africa, and Transkei, merged into one under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of South Africa, reflecting the recent political reunion of the region. At Riḍván 1995, then, the total number of National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world stood at 174.

Towards the close of the letter, again drawing the Bahá'í community's attention to “humanity's current plight,” the Universal

2. For further details concerning Bahá'í participation in the World Summit for Social Development, see *The Bahá'í World 1994–95*, pp. 37–46.

Reflection on the commonalities inherent in the great religious and moral systems of the world reveals that each one espouses unity, cooperation and harmony among people, establishes guidelines for responsible behavior and supports the development of virtues which are the foundation for trust-based and principled interactions.⁴⁴

1. Promoting the Development of Curricula for Moral Education in Schools

We advocate a universal campaign to promote moral development. Simply put, this campaign should encourage and assist local initiatives all over the world to incorporate a moral dimension into the education of children. It may necessitate the holding of

43. (cont.)

the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic... There already exist ancient guidelines for human behavior which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the condition for a sustainable world order.”

44. The Golden Rule, the teaching that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, is an ethic variously repeated in all the great religions:

Buddhism: “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” *Udana-Varqa*, 5:18.

Zoroastrianism: “That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.” *Dadistan-i Dinik*, 94:5.

Judaism: “What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men. That is the entire Law, all the rest is commentary.” *The Talmud, Shabbat*, 31a.

Hinduism: “This is the sum of all true righteousness: deal with others as thou wouldst thyself be dealt by. Do nothing to thy neighbor which thou wouldst not have him do to thee after.” *The Mahabharata*.

Christianity: “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” *Luke* 6:31.

Islam: “No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.” *Sunnah*.

Taoism: The good man “ought to pity the malignant tendencies of others; to regard their gains as if they were his own, and their losses in the same way.” *The Thai-Shang*.

Confucianism: “Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you.” *Analects*, XV, 23

Bahá’í Faith: “He should not wish for others that which he doth not wish for himself, nor promise that which he doth not fulfill.” *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*.

conferences, the publication of relevant materials and many other supportive activities, all of which represent a solid investment in a future generation.

This campaign for moral development may begin with a few simple precepts. For example, rectitude of conduct, trustworthiness, and honesty are the foundation for stability and progress; altruism should guide all human endeavor, such that sincerity and respect for the rights of others become an integral part of every individual’s actions; service to humanity is the true source of happiness, honor and meaning in life.

We also believe the campaign will be successful only to the extent that the force of religion is relied upon in the effort. The doctrine of the separation of church and state should not be used as a shield to block this salutary influence. Specifically, religious communities will have to be drawn in as collaborative partners in this important initiative.

As it proceeds, this campaign will accelerate a process of individual empowerment that will transform the way in which people, regardless of economic class, social standing, or ethnic, racial or religious background, interact with their society.

V. A Turning Point for All Nations: A Call to World Leaders

We have reached a turning point in the progress of nations.

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.⁴⁵

45. *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 202.

Over a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh taught that there is but one God, that there is only one human race, and that all the world's religions represent stages in the revelation of God's will and purpose for humanity. Bahá'u'lláh announced the arrival of the time, foretold in all of the world's scriptures, when humanity would at last witness the uniting of all peoples into a peaceful and integrated society.

He said that human destiny lies not merely in the creation of a materially prosperous society, but also in the construction of a global civilization where individuals are encouraged to act as moral beings who understand their true nature and are able to progress toward a greater fulfillment that no degree of material bounty alone can provide.

Bahá'u'lláh was also among the first to invoke the phrase "new world order" to describe the momentous changes in the political, social and religious life of the world. "The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing Order appeareth to be lamentably defective," He wrote. "Soon will the present-day order be rolled up and a new one spread out in its stead."⁴⁶

To this end, He laid a charge on the leaders and members of society alike. "It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens."⁴⁷

Above all else, leaders for the next generation must be motivated by a sincere desire to serve the entire community and must understand that leadership is a responsibility; not a path to privilege. For too long, leadership has been understood, by both leaders and followers, as the assertion of control over others. Indeed, this

46. Bahá'u'lláh. *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh to the Kings and Leaders of the World* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1967), p. 113.

47. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh with the assistance of a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 167.

age demands a new definition of leadership and a new type of leader.⁴⁸

This is especially true in the international arena. In order to establish a sense of trust, win the confidence, and inculcate a fond affinity in the hearts of the world's people for institutions of the international order, these leaders will have to reflect on their own actions.

Through an unblemished record of personal integrity, they must help restore confidence and trust in government. They must embody the characteristics of honesty, humility and sincerity of purpose in seeking the truth of a situation. They must be committed to and guided by principles, thereby acting in the best long-term interests of humanity as a whole.

"Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own selves," Bahá'u'lláh wrote. "Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men."⁴⁹

48. The Commission on Global Governance writes: "As the world faces the need for enlightened responses to the challenges that arise on the eve of the new century, we are concerned at the lack of leadership over a wide spectrum of human affairs. At national, regional, and international levels, within communities and in international organizations, in governments and in non-governmental bodies, the world needs credible and sustained leadership.

"It needs leadership that is proactive, not simply reactive, that is inspired, not simply functional, that looks to the longer term and future generations for whom the present is held in trust. It needs leaders made strong by vision, sustained by ethics, and revealed by political courage that looks beyond the next election.

"This cannot be leadership confined within domestic walls. It must reach beyond country, race, religion, culture, language, life-style. It must embrace a wider human constituency, be infused with a sense of caring for others, a sense of responsibility to the global neighborhood." *Our Global Neighborhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 353.

49. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 7.

*This statement by the Bahá'í
International Community was
prepared for the United Nations
Fourth World Conference on
Women, held in Beijing,
September 1995.*

The Role of Religion in Promoting
THE ADVANCEMENT
of WOMEN

A bold and courageous plan for the advancement of both men and women, the *Platform for Action* of the Fourth World Conference on Women stands on solid ground. It sets out an Agenda for Equality which stresses women's rights as human rights, emphasizes shared responsibility and partnership between women and men, and calls for immediate action to create a peaceful, developed and just world, based on the principle of equality and built on the strength of women's knowledge, energy, creativity and skills. Thus the *Platform for Action* addresses the advancement of women from the standpoint of moral principle, as distinct from pure pragmatism.

The Bahá'í International Community is encouraged by and applauds this principled approach, but we feel it must go much farther. If the *Platform for Action* is to win the worldwide support it requires for successful implementation, the principle on which it is founded, the equality of men and women, needs to be understood as an essential aspect of an even broader principle: the oneness of humanity. Properly understood in the context of

the oneness of humanity, equality of the sexes must be embraced not only as a requirement of justice but as a prerequisite for peace and prosperity. Nothing short of a compelling vision of peace, and commitment to the values on which it must be based, will have the power to motivate the revolutionary changes in individual behavior, organizational structures, and interpersonal dynamics called for by the *Platform for Action*.

Traditionally, religion has been one of the most powerful sources of both vision and values. Every religion, particularly in its early stages, has evoked a new vision for society, articulated values consonant with that vision, and inspired both personal and institutional transformation. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that religion has also been a source of division and social fragmentation. Indeed, the record of religions in promoting the advancement of women has been uneven. While, typically, in the early years of their existence, religions have tended to encourage the participation of women, historical evidence suggests a gradual tendency among religious institutions over time to establish practices and support attitudes that impede the development of women's potential.

Because religion is such a potentially powerful force for progress, religious leaders and people of faith everywhere are urged to step forward as lovers of humanity to promote those eternal, unifying principles—or spiritual values—that can inspire in both individuals and governments the will to implement the Agenda for Equality.

Foremost is the principle of the oneness of humankind. It lies at the heart of the exhortation that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, an ethical standard upheld in some form by every religion. To establish justice, peace and order in an interdependent world, this principle must guide all interactions, including those between men and women. If the treatment of women were scrutinized in the light of this ethical standard, we would doubtless move beyond many traditional, religious and cultural practices.

The personal transformation required for true equality will undoubtedly be difficult for men and women alike. Both must relinquish all attachment to guilt and blame and courageously

assume responsibility for their own part in transforming the societies in which they live. Men must use their influence, particularly in the civil, political and religious institutions they control, to promote the systematic inclusion of women, not out of condescension or presumed self-sacrifice but out of the belief that the contributions of women are required for society to progress. Women, for their part, must become educated and step forward into all arenas of human activity, contributing their particular qualities, skills and experience to the social, economic and political equation. Women and men together will ensure the establishment of world peace and sustainable development of the planet.

Religious leaders and people of faith everywhere have a special responsibility to reaffirm those eternal spiritual principles that unite and bind together the hearts and release the capacities of every soul. Galvanized by the spirit and vision of the oneness of the human family, women and men together can, in the spirit of the Agenda for Equality, create a peaceful, just and prosperous world in which to nurture the generations to come.

*Written statement for the 47th
Session of the Sub-Commission on
Prevention of Discrimination and
Protection of Minorities,
Geneva, 31 July to 25 August
1995.*

The Realization of ECONOMIC, SOCIAL & CULTURAL RIGHTS

As the twentieth century draws to a close, it is no longer possible to maintain the belief that the approach to social and economic development to which the materialistic conception of life has given rise is capable of meeting humanity's needs. Optimistic forecasts about the changes it would generate have vanished into the ever widening abyss that separates the living standards of a small and relatively diminishing minority of the world's inhabitants from the poverty experienced by the vast majority of the globe's population.¹

The Bahá'í International Community believes that it is unrealistic to imagine that the vision of the next stage in the advancement of civilization can be formulated without a searching reexamination of the attitudes and assumptions that currently underlie approaches to social and economic development. At the most obvious level, such rethinking will have to address practical matters of policy, resource

1. Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, Introduction, para. 7. (See *The Bahá'í World 1994-95*, pp. 273-96 for the full text of this statement.)

utilization, planning procedures, implementation methodologies, and organization. As it proceeds, however, fundamental issues will quickly emerge, related to the long-term goals to be pursued, the social structures required, the implications for development of principles of social justice, and the nature and role of knowledge in effecting enduring change. Indeed, such a reexamination will be driven to seek a broad consensus of understanding about human nature itself.² We are being shown that, unless the development of society finds a purpose beyond the mere amelioration of material conditions, it will fail of attaining even these goals. That purpose must be sought in spiritual dimensions of life and motivation that transcend a constantly changing economic landscape and an artificially imposed division of human societies into “developed” and “developing.”³

The bedrock of a strategy that can engage the world’s population in assuming responsibility for its collective destiny must be the consciousness of the oneness of humankind.⁴ The human species is an organic whole, the leading edge of the evolutionary process. That human consciousness necessarily operates through an infinite diversity of individual minds and motivations detracts in no way from its essential unity. Indeed, it is precisely an inhering diversity that distinguishes unity from homogeneity or uniformity. What the peoples of the world are today experiencing, Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, said, is their collective coming-of-age, and it is through this emerging maturity of the race that the principle of unity in diversity will find full expression.⁵ Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity’s oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected.⁶

At the group level, a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision making, because it is the only

2. Introduction, para. 4.

3. Introduction, para. 8, ll. 5–10.

4. Chapter I, para. 1, ll. 1–3.

5. Chapter I, para. 3, ll. 2–9.

6. Chapter II, para. 1, ll. 1–3.

means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. To the extent that justice becomes a guiding concern of human interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected. In such a climate the perennial tendencies toward manipulation and partisanship are far less likely to deflect the decision-making process.⁷

The implications for social and economic development are profound. Concern for justice protects the task of defining progress from the temptation to sacrifice the well-being of the generality of humankind—and even of the planet itself—to the advantages which technological breakthroughs can make available to privileged minorities. In design and planning, it ensures that limited resources are not diverted to the pursuit of projects extraneous to a community’s essential social or economic priorities. Above all, only development programs that are perceived as meeting their needs and as being just and equitable in objective can hope to engage the commitment of the masses of humanity, upon whom implementation depends.⁸

What Bahá’u’lláh is calling for is a consultative process in which the individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of a body with its own interests and goals. In such an atmosphere, characterized by both candor and courtesy, ideas belong not to the individual to whom they occur during the discussion but to the group as a whole, to take up, discard, or revise as seems to best serve the goal pursued. Consultation succeeds to the extent that all participants support the decisions arrived at, regardless of the individual opinions with which they entered the discussion.⁹ Viewed in such a light, consultation is the operating expression of justice in

7. Chapter II, para. 3.

8. Chapter II, para. 4, ll. 1–10.

9. Chapter III, para. 5, ll. 1–9.

human affairs. So vital is it to the success of collective endeavor that it must constitute a basic feature of a viable strategy of social and economic development.¹⁰

Universal education will be an indispensable contributor to the process of capacity building, but the effort will succeed only as human affairs are so reorganized as to enable both individuals and groups in every sector of society to acquire knowledge and apply it to the shaping of human affairs.¹¹

Throughout recorded history, human consciousness has depended upon two basic knowledge systems through which its potentialities have progressively been expressed: science and religion. Through these two agencies, the race's experience has been organized, its environment interpreted, its latent powers explored, and its moral and intellectual life disciplined.¹² It is, therefore, in the context of raising the level of human capacity through the expansion of knowledge at all levels that the economic issues facing humankind need to be addressed.¹³ Instruments of social and economic change so powerful must cease to be the patrimony of advantaged segments of society, and must be so organized as to permit people everywhere to participate in such activity on the basis of capacity.¹⁴

Moreover, as the experience of recent decades has demonstrated, material benefits and endeavors cannot be regarded as ends in themselves. Their value consists not only in providing for humanity's basic needs in housing, food, health care, and the like, but in extending the reach of human abilities. The most important role that economic efforts must play in development lies, therefore, in equipping people and institutions with the means through which they can achieve the real purpose of development: that is, laying foundations for a new social order that can cultivate the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness.¹⁵

10. Chapter III, para. 6, ll. 1-4.

11. Chapter IV, para. 1, ll. 5-8.

12. Chapter IV, para. 2, ll. 1-5.

13. Chapter V, para. 1, ll. 1-3.

14. Chapter IV, para. 4, ll. 2-5.

15. Chapter V, para. 1, ll. 3-11.

Only in this way can economics and the related sciences free themselves from the undertow of the materialistic preoccupations that now distract them, and fulfill their potential as tools vital to achieving human well-being in the full sense of the term. Nowhere is the need for a rigorous dialogue between the work of science and the insights of religion more apparent.¹⁶

The problem of poverty is a case in point. Proposals aimed at addressing it are predicated on the conviction that material resources exist, or can be created by scientific and technological endeavor, which will alleviate and eventually entirely eradicate this age-old condition as a feature of human life. A major reason why such relief is not achieved is that the necessary scientific and technological advances respond to a set of priorities only tangentially related to the real interests of the generality of humankind. A radical reordering of these priorities will be required if the burden of poverty is finally to be lifted from the world. Such an achievement demands a determined quest for appropriate values, a quest that will test profoundly both the spiritual and scientific resources of humankind. Religion will be severely hampered in contributing to this joint undertaking so long as it is held prisoner by sectarian doctrines which cannot distinguish between contentment and mere passivity and which teach that poverty is an inherent feature of earthly life, escape from which lies only in the world beyond. To participate effectively in the struggle to bring material well-being to humanity, the religious spirit must find—in the Source of inspiration from which it flows—new spiritual concepts and principles relevant to an age that seeks to establish unity and justice in human affairs.¹⁷

A challenge of similar nature faces economic thinking as a result of the environmental crisis. The fallacies in theories based on the belief that there is no limit to nature's capacity to fulfill any demand made on it by human beings have now been coldly exposed. A culture which attaches absolute value to expansion, to acquisition, and to the satisfaction of people's wants is being compelled to recognize that such goals are not, by themselves, realistic guides to policy. Inadequate, too, are approaches to

16. Chapter V, para. 2, ll. 3-8.

17. Chapter V, para. 3.

economic issues whose decision-making tools cannot deal with the fact that most of the major challenges are global rather than particular in scope.¹⁸

The effect of the persistent denial to women of full equality with men sharpens still further the challenge to science and religion in the economic life of humankind. To any objective observer the principle of the equality of the sexes is fundamental to all realistic thinking about the future well-being of the earth and its people. It represents a truth about human nature that has waited largely unrecognized throughout the long ages of the race's childhood and adolescence.¹⁹ A commitment to the establishment of full equality between men and women, in all departments of life and at every level of society, will be central to the success of efforts to conceive and implement a strategy of global development.²⁰

The task of creating a global development strategy that will accelerate humanity's coming-of-age constitutes a challenge to reshape fundamentally all the institutions of society. The protagonists to whom the challenge addresses itself are all of the inhabitants of the planet: the generality of humankind, members of governing institutions at all levels, persons serving in agencies of international coordination, scientists and social thinkers, all those endowed with artistic talents or with access to the media of communication, and leaders of nongovernmental organizations.²¹ The enterprise requires a radical rethinking of most of the concepts and assumptions currently governing social and economic life. It must be wedded, as well, to a conviction that, however long the process and whatever setbacks may be encountered, the governance of human affairs can be conducted along lines that serve humanity's real needs.²²

18. Chapter V, para. 6.

19. Chapter V, para. 9, ll. 1-7.

20. Chapter V, para. 9, ll. 11-15.

21. Chapter VII, para. 1, ll. 1-8.

22. Chapter VII, para. 1, ll. 13-18.

*The Bahá'í International
Community submitted this
statement on the United Nations
Decade for Human Rights
Education to the UN Commission
on Human Rights in March 1996.*

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

The Bahá'í International Community wholeheartedly welcomes the proclamation of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (hereafter, "the Decade"). We believe that education is indispensable to the realization of human rights. Education which instills in hearts and minds an awareness of and a sensitivity to the human rights of all persons constitutes, in our opinion, an essential tool for the promotion and implementation of international human rights standards.

In particular, we welcome the emphasis of the Commission on Human Rights on the importance of a holistic educational approach. In Resolution 1995/47, for example, the Commission expressed its conviction that "human rights education, both formal and non-formal, should involve more than the provision of information and should constitute a comprehensive life-long process by which people at all levels of development and in all strata of society learn respect for the dignity of others and the means and methods of ensuring that respect in all societies." Moreover, the Commission echoed the inspirational words of Article 26 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms.”¹

The *Plan of Action* prepared by the High Commissioner for Human Rights reflects this integrated conception of education by defining human rights education as “training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the molding of attitudes which are directed to:

- (a) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (b) The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;
- (c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups;
- (d) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society; and
- (e) The furtherance of the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.²

The Bahá’í International Community fully embraces these goals and objectives. Human rights education, if it is to succeed, must seek to transform individual attitudes and behavior and thereby establish, within every local and national community, a new “culture” of respect for human rights. Only such a change in the fundamental social outlook of every individual—whether a government official or an ordinary citizen—can bring about the universal observance of human rights principles in the daily lives of people. In the final analysis, the human rights of an individual are respected and protected—or violated—by other individuals, even if they are acting in an official capacity. Accordingly, it is essential to touch the hearts, and elevate the behavior, of all

1. Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1995/47 (3 March 1995).
2. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995–2004*, para. 2 (1995) (hereafter *Plan of Action*).

human beings, if, in the words of the *Plan of Action*, human rights are to be transformed “from the expression of abstract norms” to the “reality” of the “social, economic, cultural and political conditions” experienced by people in their daily lives.³

The Bahá’í teachings have long advocated both moral and intellectual education as essential to enabling human beings to realize their full potential as contributing members of socially and spiritually advancing communities. Bahá’u’lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, proclaimed that “Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess.” Bahá’u’lláh furthermore counseled: “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”⁴

In the Bahá’í view, the education required to enrich the human mind and spirit must seek to develop those essentially moral attributes—including truthfulness, courtesy, generosity, compassion, justice, love, and trustworthiness—whose reflection in the everyday lives of human beings can create harmonious, productive families and communities and make the enjoyment of fundamental rights a reality for all their members. Such education, moreover, must help to instill in every individual a keen, emotionally grounded awareness of the fundamental unity of humankind. As people begin to see each other as members of one human family, they will become willing to discard negative learned stereotypes and begin to see people of other ethnic groups, nationalities, classes and religious beliefs as potential friends rather than as threats or enemies.

Educational programs undertaken as part of the Decade must also cultivate a greater understanding that to each right is attached a corresponding responsibility. The right to be recognized as a person before the law, for example, implies the responsibility to obey the law—and to make both the laws and the legal system more just. Likewise, in the socioeconomic realm, the right to

3. *Plan of Action*, para. 6.
4. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 269–70.

marry carries with it the responsibility to support the family unit, to educate one's children and to treat all family members with respect. The right to work cannot be divorced from the responsibility to perform one's duties to the best of one's ability. In the broadest sense, the notion of "universal" human rights implies a responsibility to humanity as a whole. This interplay between rights and responsibilities has, for nearly fifty years, been acknowledged in Article 29 of the *Universal Declaration*, and is reaffirmed in the *Plan of Action* itself.⁵ Human rights education should accordingly focus on developing an awareness of the connection between rights and responsibilities and of the personal responsibility we each have to safeguard the rights of our fellow human beings.

In *Turning Point for All Nations*, a statement issued on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the Bahá'í International Community called for a universal campaign to promote moral education.⁶ Because Bahá'ís believe that moral education is needed to bring about the "universal culture of human rights" envisioned by the *Plan of Action*, and because an individual's fundamental moral framework is formed at a very young age, we strongly endorse the *Plan of Action's* call for beginning human rights-inspired education in early childhood.⁷ We encourage governments and nongovernmental organizations, including religious organizations, to consider ways of instilling an awareness of human rights, human unity, and responsibilities towards others in educational programs for the youngest children. Indeed, because girls will become the mothers and primary educators of the next generation, we also recommend that if educational resources are limited, the girl child be accorded priority.

5. See *Plan of Action*, para. 21, which recommends that the general public "be the subject of far-reaching human rights information efforts designed to inform them of their rights and responsibilities under the international human rights instruments."

6. Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point for All Nations: A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations* (1995), p. 21. See pp. 40-41 of this volume.

7. *Plan of Action*, para. 25.

Finally, the Bahá'í writings affirm that religion is the chief instrument "for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples."⁸ We, therefore, believe that religious organizations have an especially important role to play in providing the type of values-centered education we have described here, and we welcome their explicit inclusion in the *Plan of Action*.

Bahá'í communities in 173 countries are already both promoting and providing education, based on the principle of the oneness of humanity, which seeks to cultivate respect for the rights of others, a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the human family, and the moral attributes that contribute to a just, harmonious and peaceful world civilization. As a fundamental tenet of their religion, Bahá'ís are committed to the eradication of all forms of prejudice, including those based on race, ethnic origin, religion, sex or nationality—prejudices that fuel hatred and cause otherwise good people to deprive their fellow citizens of their rights. Bahá'ís are thereby working to build, in the communities in which they reside, that new culture conducive to the universal enjoyment of human rights that is a primary goal of the Decade. As the United Nations and national focal points in member states develop curricula for the Decade, the Bahá'í International Community would be pleased to offer whatever insights might be useful, based on its century and a half of experience promoting respect for the rights of all people.

8. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1978), pp. 63-64.

House of Justice reiterates the importance of the efforts of individual Bahá'ís, reinforced by their institutions, to bring the healing message of Bahá'u'lláh to the peoples of the world. Indeed, the House of Justice states that "at this extraordinary moment in the history of the planet, nothing whatever is of more critical importance than inviting people of every sort and every gift to the banquet table of the Lord of Hosts," and cites 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to the current century as a time that will leave "traces which shall last forever."

Judgement by the Supreme Court of India

The theme of widening recognition of the Bahá'í Faith can be seen again in a letter of 5 May 1995, in which the Universal House of Justice informs National Spiritual Assemblies around the world of a judgement by the Supreme Court of India that refers to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith as a means for solving religious disputes. The case ruled on by the Court involved strife between Hindus and Muslims occasioned by the razing of a mosque in Ayodhya, the site where Hindus believe the god Rama was born thousands of years ago. The mosque's destruction ignited widespread violence and attacks on property.

The Universal House of Justice cites this reference to the Bahá'í Faith as evidence of its emergence from obscurity and further notes that "Reports have been received that receptive members of governments are now using the...Teachings and principles of the Faith in directing the affairs of their countries." The House of Justice also pays tribute to the "sacrifices of the Bahá'ís in Iran and the solidarity of the Bahá'í world in rallying around its institutions" in support of the Iranian Bahá'ís. These factors, it says, have led Bahá'ís in many parts of the world to contact their governments on behalf of their fellow believers, resulting in a greatly increased awareness of the Faith and its teachings which, in turn, leads to references to the Faith such as that made by India's Supreme Court.

Increase in the Number of Continental Counsellors

A letter to the Bahá'ís of the world written 29 October 1995 marks a significant advance in one aspect of community development, with the Universal House of Justice's announcement of the com-

mencement of a new five-year term of service for members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith and the indication that the number of appointees will be raised from 72 to 81. After giving the names of the new Counsellors and thanking the 15 individuals retiring from their duties, the Universal House of Justice states that an important focus for the Counsellors during "the crucial period ahead" will be "fostering the evolution of local and national Bahá'í institutions and...helping the rank and file of the believers to increase their devotion to Bahá'u'lláh, their ardor in teaching, and their ability to draw on the tremendous power latent in the unified action of Bahá'í communities."

Messages at the Time of the Continental Boards of Counsellors' Conference

The holding of a conference for members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors from around the world in Haifa in December 1995 occasioned several weighty messages from the Universal House of Justice. The letter of greeting to the conference, dated 26 December 1995, refers to the role of the institution of the Counsellors over the past 25 years and announces the launch of a Four Year Plan, at Ridván 1996, for the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í world community. It also challenges the Counsellors to call forth "the wholehearted endeavors of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh," to raise "the level of their spiritual awareness," and to promote "the evolution of national and local Bahá'í communities."

In its letter specifically about the Four Year Plan, also dated 26 December 1996, the Universal House of Justice outlines its central focus as a single major accomplishment: a significant advance in the process of steady large-scale enrollments. To effect this, it writes, will require "marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community." Discussing the responsibilities of the individual in teaching the Faith to others and of local institutions in coordinating such efforts, the House of Justice stresses that "those who enter the Faith must be integrated into vibrant local communities, characterized by tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose and collective will, environments in which the

PROFILE:
ASSOCIATION
for the COHERENT
DEVELOPMENT
of the AMAZON

In 1994, eight young people from different rural communities in the Amazon concluded their high school studies at the Djalal Eghrari Polytechnical Institute in Iranduba, Brazil. During the ceremony, many of the parents were seen crying as they watched their children graduate—an unbelievable dream in the Amazon where these youth were the only ones in their communities to have finished their secondary studies.

The Djalal Eghrari Polytechnical Institute is one of the components of the Association for the Coherent Development of the Amazon (ADCAM). ADCAM, a non-profit organization based on Bahá'í principles and dedicated to the education and development of the population of the rural regions of the Amazonas state, was initiated following the call of the Universal House of Justice in 1983 for greater involvement of Bahá'í communities in social and economic development. In January 1984, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brazil sent a research team, whose members had a collective experience of more than 30 years in the region and who were professionals in the fields of



The Djalal Eghrari Polytechnical Institute in Iranduba, Brazil, places emphasis on agriculture and rural development.

health, education, agriculture, and rural development, to survey the possibilities of greater participation in the socioeconomic development of the Amazon. Three distinct aspects identified by this team as crucial to the progress of the region—education, health care, and the development of the rural economy—therefore became the focus of this organization.

Specifically, ADCAM seeks to furnish the means by which rural populations may gain competence in the fields of education, health, and rural production; to research jointly with local populations options for self-sustained development; to offer educational and social services to the community; to build capacities for the formation and administration of grassroots organizations; to use consultation as a method of group decision making for the solution of social and economic problems; to promote consciousness of the interdependence of all the members of society, and of people and nature; and to establish a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and material aspects of life.

The first major initiative of ADCAM was the establishment of the Eghrari Institute in 1984 to fulfill two distinct purposes: to assist with Bahá'í activities and to provide practical and academic education for the local youth. The institute began its operations in 1988 with a 19-day rotational cycle: for 19 days about 20 male and 20 female students study in Iranduba and then return to their villages for the same period of time to apply the principles they have learned. The practical work performed by the students

during the 19-day period in their communities involves simple individual or group projects in which students carry out assignments, often consisting of an elementary survey of their own communities under the categories of agriculture, health, water, and social conditions.

In order to expand its capacity to serve the needs of the region, the school is presently shifting from a four-year state-sponsored curriculum to address the following five lines of action: (1) formal education, through modifying the existing school to follow the System of Tutorial Apprenticeship (SAT), an integrated rural education program pioneered by FUNDAEC in Colombia¹; (2) community development, focusing on the creation of community structures based on the Bahá'í teachings to maintain basic health, education, production and organization; (3) preparation of sufficient educational materials for the execution of short training courses and for the application of SAT; (4) training of human resources, which includes creating opportunities for the staff of the institute, as members of a nongovernmental organization, to develop their administrative abilities in rural education and development and in the SAT program; and (5) the establishment of an efficient administrative model for the institute, enabling it to execute its diverse programs.

On 3 January 1995, the Canadian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Environment visited the Djalal Eghrari Institute, which is partly funded by the Canadian embassy. Her scheduled 30-minute inspection of the project expanded to about two hours because of her enthusiasm and interest. She later stated that this was the best part of her tour of the Amazon.

1. FUNDAEC (*Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias*) is a non-profit organization seeking to counter the effects of industrialization in rural Colombia. Founded in 1974 and based in Cali, FUNDAEC uses Bahá'í principles in its approach to development and sponsors a number of rural development programs, including a microenterprise project, an agro-industrial training center, and the SAT program for rural education. For further information on FUNDAEC and its projects, see *One Country*, the quarterly newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community, vol. 7, no. 4 (January–March 1996) and vol. 8, no. 1 (April–June 1996).

The second major program of ADCAM, the Nucleus or Center for Social Welfare, located in Manaus, Amazonas, emerged from the Lar Linda Tanure orphanage. In 1985, the Bahá'ís were asked by a group of businessmen and the government to establish and administer a home for abandoned children. Its approach clearly reflects the Bahá'í view of human nature. In the words of Ferial Farzin, the center's director, "we search for the jewel that we believe exists inside each person."

By 1991, Lar Linda had expanded its sphere of operations to include educational programs for children and pre-adolescents, including moral education in addition to regular academic subjects. Courses for women from the surrounding low-income neighborhood included health, hygiene, nutrition and disease prevention.



Students outside the Lar Linda Tanure school, a component of the Association for the Coherent Development of the Amazon (ADCAM).

One outreach initiative saw the organization of a mothers' group in the neighborhood immediately adjacent to the school—an example of how the students' parents can become a force for social change and action. Members of the group walk around together in the evenings, visiting families with problems and providing mutual support. As one member of the group said, "The Bahá'í community gives us a new vision. Many, many people promise us things. But they do little accomplishment. But the Bahá'ís are always willing to serve, and they show us that example."

The Center's success is reflected in the fact that by 1992 more than 250 abandoned children had been served by the orphanage;

of this number approximately 60 percent had been adopted, while another 40 percent had returned to their parents. A total of more than 140 students had taken part in an outreach program.

By 1993, Lar Linda had fully evolved from an orphanage into a school, and it signed an agreement with the Bahá'í-owned Masrou Association to establish the Masrou Vocational School on the property. The main purpose of the vocational school is to provide the students with some skills while making them conscious of their social responsibilities. Students can take courses in hairdressing, child and adolescent psychology, human relations, moral education, and first aid.

Christina Ihhamus de Paula, a teacher at Masrou, said that if the school had not been established to serve children in the area, "most of them would be abandoned and like many other children they would live in the streets." She continued, "many of the students are from the poorest class of society and they lack care and tenderness. I feel myself that they need my love, because they often don't have it at home. Not all of them get enough to eat, so the need for the school is very important."

Presently, there are more than 350 children and youth attending the Lar Linda School, and about 200 people participating in the Masrou Vocational Program.

Having sustained and expanded its initiatives for more than a decade, ADCAM is achieving its goal to provide a regional system whereby the spiritual needs of the long-suffering rural population of the region can be met in conjunction with their material progress. The Association is motivating the rural population to seek alternative solutions to their present problems rather than thinking they have left them behind by seeking the overly crowded urban centers.

INFORMATION
AND
RESOURCES

OBITUARIES

Rodney Lynn Belcher

This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. A physician ministering to the sick, gently, tenderly, free from prejudice and believing in the solidarity of the human race, he is giving praise.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Rodney Lynn Belcher, a member of the Ugandan Bahá'í community, was shot and killed on 11 March 1996 by vehicle hijackers in the parking lot of Mulago Hospital in Kampala. He was 64 years old.

Born in the United States on 2 November 1931, Rodney Belcher married Dawn Dayton in 1953

and became a Bahá'í in 1957. Together the Belchers raised two sons.

At the time of his passing, Dr. Belcher was employed by Health Volunteers Overseas, an organization which is based in Washington, D.C. and implements an orthopedics project in Uganda funded by USAID. He had spent many years in East Africa both teaching and practicing orthopedic surgery, focusing initially on victims of war and later also treating the effects of polio and other diseases.

Dr. Belcher first went to Uganda in the early 1980s as a Fulbright lecturer in Makerere. He trained

many of Uganda's physicians in orthopedics, and he established the master of medicine program in orthopedic surgery at Mulago Hospital. He collaborated with the British Red Cross to set up an orthopedic workshop at Mulago Hospital which makes artificial limbs, wheelchairs, and braces for amputees, victims of polio, and others. He also established the orthopedics program operating at Muhimbili Hospital in Tanzania. He served as a Fulbright lecturer and a professor at the University of Nairobi's medical school, and taught orthopedics at the medical school at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. for many years.

The Belcher family contributed significantly to the Ugandan Bahá'í community. One Bahá'í noted, "With tremendous grace and self-effacement, they made their resources of time, money, and the invaluable vehicle, with Dawn as driver, available for the work of the Faith. Their home was open to the many visitors who relied on the Belchers for international telephone calls, faxes, hot water, and food...."

The funeral took place on 12 March 1996, beginning with a memorial program at the Bahá'í Temple in Kampala. The service then moved to the burial site, where the Bahá'í prayer for the dead was recited. The mourners, numbering over 2,000, filed past the casket; many of them were in wheelchairs, on crutches, or

using canes or simple walking sticks Dr. Belcher had assisted them to obtain. Virtually the entire staff of the U.S. Embassy and of USAID were there, as well as many colleagues from Mulago Hospital and Mulago University.

The news media picked up the story of Dr. Belcher's murder and a number of accounts were published in various newspapers, including the *New Vision* in Uganda and the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Times* in the United States.

During the days following Dr. Belcher's passing, the Belcher family, and in particular Dr. Belcher's widow, Dawn, was deluged by letters and messages of condolence from people of eminence in Africa, friends, individuals Dr. Belcher had assisted, and health service organizations with which he had collaborated. Many of these messages bore eloquent witness to Dr. Belcher's numerous acts of kindness and sacrifice as he strove to serve the people of Uganda. The King of Buganda, His Majesty, Ssabasajja Kabaka Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II stated, "It is with a sense of great personal loss that I mourn the sudden departure of a man who has been so dear and useful to our nation."

United States Senator Patrick Leahy praised Dr. Belcher in the Senate, declaring, as published in the *Congressional Record*, "It

would be hard to conceive of a more senseless, horrible crime. Rod Belcher was a wonderfully generous human being who devoted his professional life to improving the lives of others.... At his funeral, Dr. Belcher was honored by the Ugandan Vice President, the Minister of Health, the director of the hospital, the dean of the medical school, the American Ambassador, the British High Commissioner, and many others. The orthopedic clinic that he worked so hard to establish was formally named after him. The streets were lined with people who knew him personally or had heard of the American doctor who had done so much for the Ugandan people." The comments of Ugandan Vice President, Dr. Specioza Wandira Kazibwe, who had studied surgery under Dr. Belcher when she was a medical student, included her warm memories of how he had encouraged her in her wish to specialize in surgery, even though in that time and place it was a medical speciality not as welcoming to women as others.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the United States wrote to Mrs. Belcher, "His universal kindness to all levels of society and rectitude of conduct exemplified his adherence to the principles of our Faith and made him widely respected as a 'true physician.'" Upon receiving the news of Dr. Belcher's passing, the Universal House of Justice sent the following message to the

National Spiritual Assembly of Uganda:

DEEPLY GRIEVED BRUTAL MURDER DEDICATED OUTSTANDING PIONEER RODNEY BELCHER WHOSE INDEFATIGABLE SERVICES WILL ALWAYS BE LOVINGLY REMEMBERED. SELFLESSLY, ENERGETICALLY AND COURAGEOUSLY, TOGETHER WITH HIS DISTINGUISHED WIFE, HE LABORED AMONG HIS COMPATRIOTS IN THE UNITED STATES AND WITH EVEN GREATER DISTINCTION SINCE 1970 IN TANZANIA, KENYA AND UGANDA, SERVING THE POPULATION THROUGH HIS MEDICAL PROFESSION AND PROMOTING INTERESTS BELOVED FAITH IN THESE COUNTRIES.

PRAYING HOLY SHRINES FOR PROGRESS HIS LUMINOUS SOUL ETERNAL KINGDOM, AND FOR COMFORT AND SOLACE HIS DEAR WIFE AND MEMBERS FAMILY.

ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL MEETING HIS HONOR IN HOUSE OF WORSHIP. ASK TANZANIAN KENYAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES HOLD SIMILAR GATHERINGS IN HIS NAME.

Suhayl Ala'i

On 14 August 1995 in Western Samoa. Born 5 January 1927 into a Bahá'í family in Teheran, Iran, Suhayl Ala'i immigrated to New

Zealand in 1950 and graduated with a degree in agriculture from Massey University. He married Lilian Wyss in 1954, joined her in Western Samoa, and two of their children were born there. In 1959, Mr. and Mrs. Ala'i moved to American Samoa, where their youngest child was born. Mr. Ala'i was appointed to the first Continental Board of Counselors in Australasia in 1968 and served on that institution until 1990. He also served as a member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the South Pacific and of the National Assembly of Samoa. His consulting business, Pacific Services, developed over time into Pacific Products and Pacific Marketing.

Samiheh Banání

On 8 May 1995 in Canada. Born on 8 December 1907 in Teheran, Iran, in 1925 she married Músá Banání, who was later appointed a Hand of the Cause, and bore six children. In Iran, Mrs. Banání was one of the early members of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women. At the instruction of Shoghi Effendi, the Banání family transferred its residence to Dezashoub, Iran, from 1943 to 1945, in order to teach the Bahá'í Faith. They pioneered to Uganda in 1951, where Hand of the Cause of God Banání passed away in 1971. From 1974 to 1976, Mrs. Banání pioneered in the Canary Islands. She then moved to Canada, serving as a member of the Local Assembly of Toronto. She continued to

serve in that country until her death.

Gail Avery Davis

On 7 November 1995 in Alaska. Born on 29 September 1903 in the United States, Gail Avery learned about the Bahá'í Faith in her forties and returned to school for nurse's training so that she could better serve the Cause she had embraced. In 1953 she left her home in Montana to pioneer to Baranof Island in Alaska, for which she was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. She lived on Baranof, in Sitka, for some 40 years. She was adopted as a Tlingit and married Albert Davis, the head of the Coho Clan of Tlingits for Sitka.

Sabri Elias

On 22 October 1995 in Egypt. Mr. Elias embraced the Bahá'í Faith at the age of 14 in Egypt after learning about it from his brother and uncle. In the 1930s, he became the first Bahá'í to pioneer to Ethiopia, where he helped form the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Addis Ababa and arrange for the translation of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* into Amharic. After returning to Egypt, he settled again in Ethiopia with his wife Fahíma and two children, and in 1954 they pioneered to French Somaliland (now Djibouti); for this service Mr. and Mrs. Elias were named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. In the mid-1960s he pioneered again, to Libya. He eventually settled in Egypt, traveling to countries of

the Middle East in order to visit and encourage fellow Bahá'ís.

Ruth Eyford

On 10 January 1996 in Canada. Ruth Monk was born in Nova Scotia, Canada, on 12 June 1930, and studied nursing and psychiatric nursing. She became a Bahá'í in Montreal in 1956 and married Glen Eyford in 1957; together they raised two children. The Eyfords served the Bahá'í communities in Iceland, India, and various locations in Canada and settled finally in St. Albert, Alberta, in 1970. Mrs. Eyford traveled extensively throughout Canada, teaching others about the Bahá'í Faith and working to assist and strengthen various Bahá'í communities. She served as an Auxiliary Board member and as chairman of the National Assembly of Canada. She was also a member at different times of a number of Local Assemblies and national and local committees. Mrs. Eyford's service to the community at large, including her work as a nurse counselor with the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, was recognized by the mayor of St. Albert and a member of the Legislative Assembly in November 1995.

William R. Foster

On 18 May 1995 in Hawaii. William Foster, born in the United States on 6 June 1912, became a Bahá'í in the early 1930s. He was the first African-American Bahá'í to respond to the call for

pioneers to Africa, moving first to Liberia in 1951, to Morocco in 1954, and then back to Liberia in 1962. In 1953 he spent 45 days at the World Centre, assisting the Guardian with the development of Bahá'í properties. He later served on a number of national committees and Local Spiritual Assemblies in the United States, and for nearly twelve years he was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Hawaiian Islands.

Eileen Dewar Hill

On 23 October 1995 in Guyana. Born in 1914, she married James Hill in 1939, learned about the Bahá'í Faith from her sister and became a Bahá'í in 1956. She was a regular participant in the activities of the Guyanese Bahá'í community and served on the first Regional Assembly of the Guianas, which formed in 1970, and on the National Assembly of Guyana when it came into being in 1976. She took pains to share the Bahá'í Faith with others in her native country, and in 1983 she became Guyana's first international pioneer by settling in Grenada for 11 years, where she was elected to the first National Assembly in 1984, serving as its treasurer. Mrs. Hill was elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Georgetown, Guyana, every year for some 25 years, and she also served on that of Springs/Woodlands, Grenada for about nine years. In Grenada she was on various national committees, and she was also the librarian for

many of the years she spent in that country. Mrs. Hill served the Society for the Blind from 1958 until 1980. She had one son.

Marion Hofman

On 5 December 1995 in the United Kingdom. Born on 17 May 1910 in Visalia, California, in the United States, Marion Holley joined the Bahá'í community in the early 1930s. She attended both Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley, and worked as a budget analyst for the city of San Francisco in the 1940s. She was appointed to the National Teaching Committee of the United States during the first Seven Year Plan, and after marrying David Hofman in 1945 she served on the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles (1945–1963), its National Teaching Committee (1945–50), and the first Auxiliary Board of Europe, appointed in 1954. From 1963 to 1988 she served at the Bahá'í World Centre, where her husband was a member of the Universal House of Justice. She continued to work from the Holy Land for some twelve years as manager of George Ronald Publisher in the United Kingdom. The Hofmans had two children.

Mary McCulloch

On 7 January 1996 in Canada. Mary Zabolotny was born on 9 November 1918 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, to Ukrainian immigrants. She studied at both the University of Manitoba and the Winnipeg School of Art and

worked as a commercial artist. After she embraced the Bahá'í Faith in 1951, she pioneered in Canada itself, first to Saskatoon, in Saskatchewan, and then to several other communities, to help form Local Spiritual Assemblies. She was designated a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh by Shoghi Effendi for her service in fulfilling the extremely difficult pioneering goal of Anticosti Island, in 1956. Mary married Ken McCulloch in 1958, and together they moved to Baker Lake, in the Northwest Territories; there they shared the Bahá'í Faith with the first Inuit Bahá'í in Canada. They also established the Baker Lake Bahá'í House and arranged for Bahá'í literature to be translated into Inuktitut. In her later years, Mrs. McCulloch was involved with translating Bahá'í literature into Ukrainian. The McCullochs had one daughter.

James Moncho

On 5 September 1995 in Botswana. James Moncho was born on 30 July 1907 in Ganyesa, South Africa; in 1938 he married Stella Motshedi. He became a Bahá'í in 1955 and in 1957 he was elected to the first Local Assembly of Mafeking, in South Africa. That same year the Monchos moved to Botswana and thus became the first Bahá'ís of that country. Mr. Moncho is remembered for his translations of the Bahá'í sacred writings into Setswana; in 1982 he was among the first Bahá'ís to travel to Tsabong, in the Kalahari Desert, to share with others

the message of Bahá'u'lláh. He worked as a school inspector and founded many schools in the Tsabong region. He also began feeding programs in schools in places where hunger kept children from attending and in poor and remote areas. Mr. and Mrs. Moncho had four children.

Juana Ortuño López

On 1 August 1995 in Spain. One of the founding members of the Iberian Bahá'í community, she accepted the Faith in 1947. She was elected the chairperson of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Madrid, and then left Spain, where she had been born in 1905 in Cieza, Murcia, to pioneer in Cuba. There she served on a number of Local Assemblies at different times and was elected a member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Greater Antilles and then later of the first National Spiritual Assembly of Cuba. During the years after her return to Spain in 1963 she was elected to various Local Spiritual Assemblies over the years. Her contributions to the Faith also include a translation of the Seven Valleys from French into Spanish in 1953.

Nurreddin Soraya

On 15 October 1995 in Indonesia. Born on 6 March 1920 in Isfahan, Iran, Nurreddin Soraya became a Bahá'í in 1945. He obtained his degree as a medical doctor from the University of Teheran in 1949 and moved to Baluchistan, in 1950, in order to

serve the Bahá'í Faith, and then again to Neyshabur in 1952. In 1953 he married Bahereh Sharifi. They pioneered to Indonesia in 1954, where he served for the remaining 41 years of his life, offering his medical skills to the Indonesian people through his position as an Indonesian civil servant within the Department of Health—forgoing an expatriate work contract to take a position with very little financial remuneration. He worked in public hospitals in all the towns and villages in which they resided, operating a private practice in the evenings in order to support his wife and their six children. In recognition of these medical services, Dr. Soraya received a commendation from the government of Indonesia. His various professional postings took him and his family to five different localities within the first three years of their life in Indonesia; in 1957 they settled in Bojonegoro, East Java, where he lived until his death. Dr. Soraya served on the Local Assembly of Jakarta, and his service for a period as a member of the Auxiliary Board took him to numerous Bahá'í communities within Indonesia, as well as a great many countries elsewhere in Asia. Dr. Soraya assisted with the translation of Bahá'í writings into Indonesian from Arabic and Persian.

Habib Taherzadeh

On 18 August 1995 in Brazil. Born to a Bahá'í family of Yazd, Iran, on 4 January 1908, Habib

Taherzadeh attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the early age of five, upon his family's visit to the Holy Land in 1913. He married Farrokhlegha Missaghieh in 1941, and they had two children. From 1950 to 1955, Mr. Taherzadeh served as a member of the translation committee of the National Assembly of Iran. From 1953 to 1954, he and his family pioneered to Turkey, and then in 1955 they were the first Iranian Bahá'is to move to Brazil. From 1955 to 1957, Mr. Taherzadeh served as a member of the Local Assembly of Rio de Janeiro, and in 1957 he was elected to the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Curitiba, to which he was re-elected for many years. In 1961, he became a member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil. Mr. Taherzadeh was a noted translator, a scholar, and an Esperantist. He worked in the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice from 1970 to 1977, during which time he translated the Tablets which comprise *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* and *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. He also authored at the request of the Universal House of Justice a glossary and a description of a translation methodology based on the translations of Shoghi Effendi. He was a frequent traveler, visiting various places throughout the world to inspire and enrich the understanding of Bahá'is and to share Bahá'u'lláh's teachings with others.

Ama Dahan Talon

On 24 May 1995 in the Philippines. In 1971, Ama Dahan Talon accepted the Bahá'í Faith, and he became a pillar of the Bahá'í community within his native Mangyan tribe. Although he had no formal education, he consistently taught the Bahá'í Faith in the Mangyan areas, served as a member of a Local Spiritual Assembly and an assistant to an Auxiliary Board member, and constantly brought inspiration to his fellow Filipino Bahá'is. Mr. Talon and his wife, Hunhon, had five children.

Leala Tasi

On 4 August 1995 in Samoa. One of the highest chiefs of his village, Leala Tasi became a member of the Bahá'í community in 1968 and served it the rest of his life. He served on the National Spiritual Assembly of Samoa, as well as the Local Spiritual Assembly of Puleia. He was a marriage officer for the island of Savaii and offered his land for construction of its first Bahá'í center. He and his wife, Ta'amilo Leala, together raised eight children.

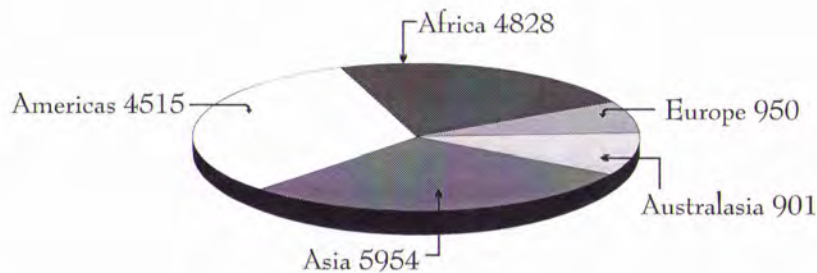
STATISTICS

General Statistics

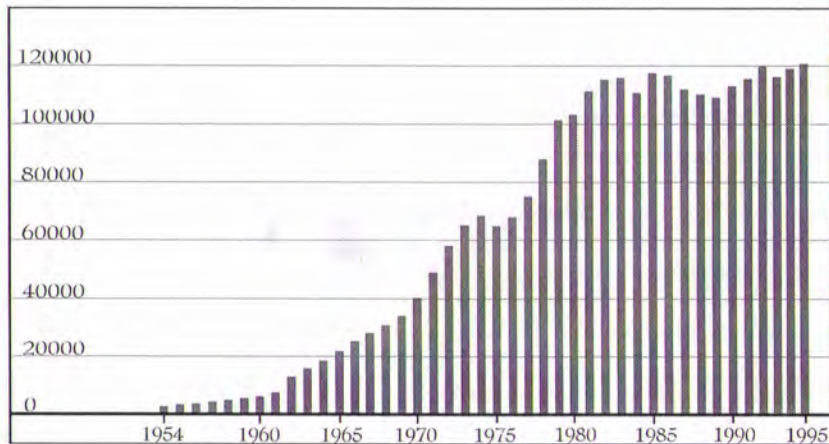
Worldwide Bahá'í population	More than 5 million
Countries/dependent territories where the Bahá'í Faith is established	190 countries/ 45 territories
Continental Counsellors	81
Auxiliary Board members serving throughout the world	990
National/Regional Spiritual Assemblies	174
Local Spiritual Assemblies	17,148
Localities where Bahá'is reside	121,058
Tribes, races and ethnic groups represented in the Bahá'í community	2,112
Languages into which Bahá'u'lláh's writings have been translated	802
Bahá'í Publishing Trusts	30

All statistics as of May 1995

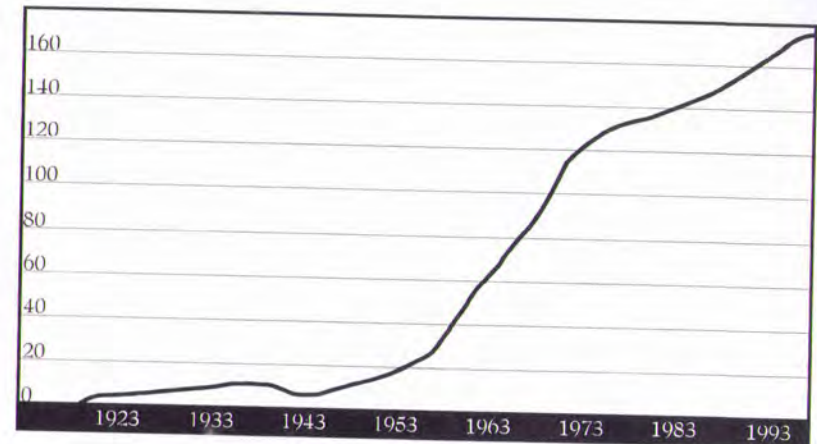
Geographic distribution of Local Spiritual Assemblies by continent



Growth in the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside



Growth in the number of National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies



Social and Economic Development

Bahá'í development activities are initiated either by Bahá'í administrative institutions or by individuals or groups of believers. Together, these activities contribute to a global process of learning about a Bahá'í approach to social and economic development. They presently fall into three general categories.

Grassroots Activity

Most Bahá'í social and economic development efforts are attempts by Bahá'ís in villages and towns around the world to address the problems and challenges faced by their localities through the application of spiritual principles enshrined in the Bahá'í Teachings. They may begin in the Bahá'í community or as support of Bahá'ís for the development initiatives of other organizations, but all extend their benefits to the well-being of the society as a whole. It is estimated that in 1995-96 there were some 1,350 such activities of varying duration and levels of complexity which addressed a wide range of issues including education, the environment, agriculture, health, the advancement of women, and the elimination of prejudice.

capacities of all components—men, women, youth and children—are developed and their powers multiplied in unified action.”

The letter deals with a number of different aspects of the Four Year Plan, including the planning process itself, as each national community formulates its own plan within the global guidelines set by the House of Justice; the focus of the work of the Continental Counsellors in assisting national communities to formulate their plans and pursue their goals; and necessary elements for effective plans. The House of Justice spends some time on the development of “institutes,” which it defines as “organizational structures dedicated to systematic training,” the purpose of which is “to endow ever-growing contingents of believers with the spiritual insights, the knowledge, and the skills needed to carry out the many tasks of accelerated expansion and consolidation” of the community. “Institutes should be regarded as centers of learning,” it notes, which are designed to assist in the large-scale development of human resources in the Bahá'í community. The House of Justice concludes, “It is our hope that significant progress in this direction will constitute one of the distinguishing features of the Four Year Plan.”

Another section of this letter is devoted to development at the local level, about which the House of Justice says, “The community must become imbued with a sense of mission and the Assembly grow in awareness of its role as a channel of God’s grace not only for the Bahá'ís but for the entire village, town or city in which it serves.” To this end, in local communities where the participation of women is lagging, “determined steps” must be taken to rectify this situation; proper annual elections of Local Spiritual Assemblies and enhancement of their functioning must be achieved (later in the message the House of Justice announces that as of Ridván 1996 all Spiritual Assemblies around the world must be elected on the First Day of Ridván); priority should be given to the regular holding of Bahá'í children’s classes; youth should be given attention. All of these factors combine to define a first stage in the process of community development, beyond which the community can further progress.

The functioning of members of the Auxiliary Boards of the Continental Boards of Counsellors receives considerable attention

in the 26 December letter, focusing on their work locally to assist the growth and development of communities and on their role in the evolution of institutes.

At the conclusion of the Continental Counsellors’ Conference, the Universal House of Justice released a letter to the Bahá'ís of the world, informing them of the launch of the Four Year Plan at Ridván 1996, referring to the deliberations of the Counsellors at their conference, and reiterating the Four Year Plan’s one key goal: a significant advance in the process of large-scale enrollments of new believers. The House of Justice also summarizes the requisites necessary for progress “in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community”:

The first calls for a vitality of the faith of each believer that is expressed through personal initiative and constancy in teaching the Cause to others, and through conscientious, individual effort to provide energy and resources to upbuild the community, to uphold the authority of its institutions, and to support local and regional plans and teaching projects. The second requires that local and national Bahá'í institutions evolve more rapidly into a proper exercise of their responsibilities as channels of guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. The third, the flourishing of the community especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly is manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth.

The House of Justice then elaborates the “new dimensions” of the work of the Continental Counsellors, including developments in their mode of functioning, the planning process, human resource development, Local Spiritual Assembly functioning, and further development of local Bahá'í communities.

In concluding this message, the House of Justice states that “An auspicious beginning for the new Plan will largely depend on the results of the current one, which will end in just a few months” and continues, “There are divine deadlines to be met. Our work is

Sustained Independent Projects

A second level of Bahá'í social and economic development activities is represented by the work of about 270 ongoing projects. The vast majority are schools, including preprimary, primary, secondary, and post secondary educational institutions. They also include small hospitals, dispensaries and clinics, vocational training centers, and radio stations. Some address such specific concerns as race unity, equality between women and men, microenterprise, immunization and primary health care, literacy, and tree-planting.

Organizations with Integrated Action

Some Bahá'í development efforts have achieved the stature of development organizations with relatively complex programmatic structures and significant spheres of influence. These organizations, 34 in number and located in all continents of the globe, systematically train human resources and manage a number of lines of action to address problems of local communities and regions in a coordinated, interdisciplinary manner.

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Selected **NEW** PUBLICATIONS

'Abdu'l-Bahá in America: Agnes Parsons' Diary

Edited by Richard Hollinger with a foreword by Sandra Hutchinson. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996. 167 pp.

An intimate day-by-day account kept by Bahá'í Agnes Parsons of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's stay in Washington, D.C., and in Dublin, New Hampshire, during His journey to America in 1912.

Arising to Serve

The Ruhi Institute. Riviera Beach, Florida: Palabra Publications, 1995. 80 pp.

The second in a series of books written by the Ruhi Institute in Colombia to assist Bahá'is to gain a progressively greater understanding of the Bahá'í writings and to prepare them for sharing their Faith with others.

Bahá'u'lláh: The Great Announcement of the Qur'an

Muhammad Mustafa. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995. 115 pp.

A revised and expanded version of a book originally written in 1959 to assist English-speaking readers to understand issues frequently raised by Muslims with regard to the Bahá'í Faith.

Created Rich: How Spiritual Attitudes and Material Means Work Together to Achieve Prosperity

Patrick Barker. Happy Camp, California: Naturegraph Publishers, 1995. 207 pp.

A guide to the spiritual and practical principles of wealth acquisition written primarily for Bahá'is but suitable for anyone seeking to become financially independent.

* Address communications to Bahá'í World Centre, P.O. Box 155, 31 001 Haifa, Israel.

Developing Genius: Getting the Most Out of Group Decision-Making

John Kolstoe, with illustrations by Trevor R.J. Finch. Oxford: George Ronald, 1995. 260 pp.

The Bahá'í writings and the author's years of experience in education and business serve as the basis for this guide to the principles of effective consultation.

Ethel Jenner Rosenberg: The Life and Times of England's Outstanding Pioneer Worker

Robert Weinberg. Oxford: George Ronald, 1995. 336 pp.

Using Ethel Rosenberg's diaries and letters, minutes and notes from the meetings of the first Bahá'í institutions in Britain and other original documents, the author explores the life of the first Englishwoman in her native country to accept Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God.

Fire and Gold: Benefitting From Life's Tests

Compiled by Brian Kurzius. Oxford: George Ronald, 1995. 368 pp.

This volume, which includes passages long out of print, is a compilation of quotations from the Bahá'í writings on the purpose and source of the tests faced by individuals and society and how to find comfort, inner peace and spiritual upliftment in the face of them.

Foundations for a Spiritual Education

National Bahá'í Education Task Force. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995. 208 pp.

This work provides a selection of extracts from the Bahá'í writings on the nature, purpose, content, and process of spiritual education and offers an initial framework for carrying these principles into practice.

The God of Buddha

Jamshed Fozdar. Rome: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 1996. 184 pp.

Using the Buddha's own words concerning the recurring manifestation of the Supreme in the material world, the author discusses the place of Buddhism in the panorama of ever-recurring religious revelation.

The Greatness Which Might Be Theirs: Reflections on the Agenda and Platform for Action for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Equality, Development and Peace

Bahá'í International Community Office for the Advancement of Women, 1995. 87 pp.

A collection of essays on topics such as education, health, violence, human rights and the girl child prepared on the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Jesus Christ in Sacred Bahá'í Literature: A Compilation with Introductory Observations by Michael Sours

Compiled by Michael Sours. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1995. 120 pp.

A compilation of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the station of Christ and the transforming power of His teachings.

The Law of Love Enshrined: Selected Essays

John Hatcher and William Hatcher. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996. 296 pp.

In a selection of nine essays based on themes found in Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, a professor of English literature and a mathematician offer arguments for the existence, unity and uniqueness of God and for God's role in the evolution of the human species.

Meditation

Wendi Momen. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996. 144 pp.

This volume briefly describes a number of techniques and practices that one might employ to develop the faculty of meditation and provides verses from the Bahá'í writings upon which to focus.

Moments with Bahá'u'lláh: Memoirs of the Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandari

Translated by Mehdi Samandari and Marzieh Gail. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995. 76 pp.

Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandari, who undertook his first pilgrimage during Bahá'u'lláh's lifetime and was present at the time of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, recounts his many experiences in the presence of this precious Being.

The Odyssey of the Soul

Artemus Lamb. Oxford: George Ronald, 1995. 96 pp.

Drawing on the literature of the Bahá'í Faith, the author charts the progress of the soul from its birth, through its journey in the physical world, to the world of the spirit after death, looking particularly at the nature of the soul, the value of prayer and meditation, the purpose of hardships, and immortality.

Portraits of Some Bahá'í Women

O.Z. Whitehead. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996. 184 pp.

Portraits of seven Bahá'í women—Emogene Hoagg, Claudia Coles, Anna Kunz, Amelia Collins, Kate Dwyer, Ella Bailey, and Ella Quant—whose services to the Bahá'í Faith have spanned the twentieth century.

The Pupil of the Eye: African Americans in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

Bonnie J. Taylor. Riviera Beach, Florida: Palabra Publications, 1995. 200 pp.

Excerpts from the Bahá'í scriptures relating to the important role played by people of African descent in the progress of the Bahá'í Faith, the need for racial unity and the dangers of racism, the contributions of African Americans to the Bahá'í Faith and the destiny of African peoples.

Sacred Moments: Daily Meditations on the Virtues

Linda Kavelin Popov. Fountain Hills, Arizona, and Chicago: Virtues Communications, 1996. 440 pp.

A simple tool for daily reflection and meditation which weaves together the wisdom found in the world's religions, personal anecdotes, and quotations from celebrities, philosophers, and average people.

Sexual Morality and the World Religions

Geoffrey Parrinder. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996. 290 pp.

This revised and updated edition includes a chapter exploring the Bahá'í views on chastity, contraception and abortion, marriage and divorce, and the status of women.

A Short History of the Bahá'í Faith

Peter Smith. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996. 168 pp.

An introduction to the history and global development of the Bahá'í Faith up to the present time.

So Great An Honor: Becoming a Bahá'í

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995. 81 pp.

Designed primarily as a welcoming guide for new members of the Bahá'í community, this book familiarizes readers with the essential truths of the Bahá'í Faith, gives a glimpse of Bahá'í history, discusses the Covenants of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and outlines the features of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

The Style of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Aspects of the Sublime

Suheil Bushrui. Bethesda, Maryland: University Press of Maryland, 1995. 74 pp.

Professor Suheil Bushrui, who holds the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland, assists the non-Arabic speaking reader to understand the distinguishing characteristics of this most sacred of Bahá'í texts as it appeared in its original Arabic form.

Symbol and Secret: Qur'án Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Íqán. Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, Volume Seven

Christopher Buck. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995. 326 pp.

The author offers the results of his research into the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Íqán and the early history of its publication, addresses criticism of the Book, and analyzes the rhetorical techniques used by Bahá'u'lláh.

Ultimate Visions: Reflections on the Religions We Choose

Edited by Martin Forward. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1995. 288 pp.

A collection of essays by leading theologians and scholars of many different faiths, including the Bahá'í Faith, on which religion they choose to live by, and why.

A Basic BAHÁ'Í READING List

The following list has been prepared to provide a sampling of works conveying the spiritual truths, social principles, and history of the Bahá'í Faith. It is by no means exhaustive. For a more complete record of Bahá'í literature, see Bibliography of English-language Works on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, 1844–1985, compiled by William P. Collins (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990).

SELECTED WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

The Most Holy Book, Bahá'u'lláh's charter for a new world civilization. Written in Arabic in 1873, the volume's first authorized English translation was released in 1993.

The Kitáb-i-Íqán

The Book of Certitude was written prior to Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His mission as an explanation of progressive revelation and a proof of the station of the Báb.

The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh

Written in the form of a compilation of moral aphorisms, these brief verses distill the spiritual guidance of all the Divine Revelations of the past.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

A compilation of tablets revealed between 1873 and 1892 which enunciate important principles of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, reaffirm truths He previously proclaimed, elaborate on some of His laws, reveal further prophecies, and establish subsidiary ordinances to supplement the provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

A selection of Bahá'u'lláh's sacred writings translated and compiled by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to convey the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's life and teachings.

WRITINGS OF THE BÁB

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

The first compilation of the Báb's writings to be translated into English.

SELECTED WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912

Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a wide variety of audiences in Paris in 1911–1912, explaining the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

A message addressed to the rulers and people of Persia in 1875 illuminating the causes of the fall and rise of civilization and elucidating the spiritual character of true civilization.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

A compilation of selected letters from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's extensive correspondence on a wide variety of topics, including the purpose of life, the nature of love, and the development of character.

Some Answered Questions

A translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's answers to a series of questions posed to Him during interviews with Laura Clifford Barney between 1904 and 1906. The topics covered include the influence of the Prophets in the evolution of humanity, the Bahá'í perspective on Christian doctrine, and the powers and conditions of the Manifestations of God.

SELECTED WRITINGS OF SHOGHI EFFENDI

God Passes By

A detailed history of the first one hundred years of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Promised Day Is Come

A commentary on Bahá'u'lláh's letters to the kings and rulers of the world.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters

An exposition on the relation between the Bahá'í community and the entire process of social evolution under the dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, in the form of a series of letters from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the West between 1929 and 1936.

INTRODUCTORY WORKS

Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, 1991.

A brief statement detailing Bahá'u'lláh's life and work issued on the occasion of the centenary of His passing.

Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era

John Esslemont. 5th rev. paper ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990.

The first comprehensive account of the Bahá'í Faith, written in 1923 and updated for subsequent editions.

The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion

William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985.

Textbook providing an overview of Bahá'í history, teachings, administrative structures, and community life.

All Things Made New

John Ferraby. 2d rev. ed. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987.

A comprehensive outline of the Bahá'í Faith.

Most of the books listed above have been published by various Bahá'í Publishing Trusts and are available in bookshops, libraries, or from the Trusts. Please see the Directory for addresses.

GLOSSARY

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: (1844–1921) Son of Bahá’u’lláh, designated His successor and authorized interpreter of His writings. Named ‘Abbás after His grandfather, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was known to the general public as ‘Abbás Effendi. Bahá’u’lláh gave Him such titles as “the Most Great Branch,” “the Mystery of God,” and “the Master.” After Bahá’u’lláh’s passing, He chose the name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, meaning “Servant of Bahá’u’lláh.”

Administrative Order: The system of administration as conceived by Bahá’u’lláh, formally established by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and realized during the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi. It consists, on the one hand, of a series of elected councils, universal, national and local, in which are invested legislative, executive, and judicial powers over the Bahá’í community, and, on the other hand, of eminent and devoted Bahá’ís appointed for the specific purpose of propagation and protection of the Faith under the guidance of the Head of that Faith, the Universal House of Justice.

Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm: Mary Sutherland Maxwell, an eminent North American Bahá’í who became the wife of Shoghi

Effendi Rabbání, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, in 1937, after which she became known as Rúhíyyih Khánum Rabbání. (Amatu'l-Bahá is a title meaning "Handmaiden of Bahá'u'lláh.") She served as the Guardian's secretary during his lifetime and was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God in 1952. She is the most prominent dignitary of the Bahá'í community.

Arc: An arc cut into Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel; along this pathway the international administrative buildings of the Bahá'í Faith are being built.

Auxiliary Boards: An institution created by Shoghi Effendi in 1954 to assist the Hands of the Cause of God. When the institution of the Continental Boards of Counsellors was established in 1968 by the Universal House of Justice, the Auxiliary Boards were placed under its direction.

Báb, the: The title, meaning "Gate," assumed by Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad, the Prophet-Founder of the Bábí Faith and the Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh. Born 20 October 1819, the Báb proclaimed Himself to be the Promised One of Islam and announced that His mission was to alert the people to the imminent advent of "Him Whom God shall make manifest," namely, Bahá'u'lláh. Because of these claims, the Báb was executed by order of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh on 9 July 1850.

Bahá'í Era: The period of the Bahá'í calendar beginning with the Declaration of the Báb on 23 May 1844, and expected to last until the next appearance of a Manifestation (Prophet) of God after the expiration of at least one thousand years.

Bahá'í International Community: A name used generally in reference to the worldwide Bahá'í community and officially in that community's external relations. In the latter context, the Bahá'í International Community is an association of the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world and functions as an international nongovernmental organization. Its offices include its Secretariat at the Bahá'í World Centre, a United Nations Office in New York with a branch in Geneva, an Office of Public Information, an Office of the Environment, and an Office for the Advancement of Women.

Bahá'í World Centre: The spiritual and administrative center of the Bahá'í Faith, located in the twin cities of Acre and Haifa, in Israel.

Bahá'u'lláh: Title assumed by Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Born on 12 November 1817, He declared His mission as the Promised One of all Ages in April 1863 and passed away in Acre, Palestine, on 29 May 1892 after 40 years of imprisonment, banishment, and house arrest. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are considered by Bahá'ís to be direct revelation from God.

Consultation: A form of discussion between individuals and within groups which requires the subjugation of egotism so that all ideas can be shared and evaluated with frankness, courtesy, and openness of mind, and decisions arrived at can be wholeheartedly supported. Its guiding principles were elaborated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Continental Boards of Counsellors: An institution created in 1968 by the Universal House of Justice to extend into the future the work of the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, particularly its appointed functions of protection and propagation. With the passing of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, there was no way for additional Hands of the Cause to be appointed. The duties of the Counsellors include directing the Auxiliary Boards in their respective areas, advising and collaborating with National Spiritual Assemblies, and keeping the Universal House of Justice informed concerning the conditions of the Faith in their areas. Counsellors are appointed for terms of five years.

Convention: A gathering called at a regional, national, or international level for consultation on matters affecting the welfare of the Bahá'í community and for the purpose, respectively, of electing delegates to a National Convention, electing the members of a National Spiritual Assembly, or electing the members of the Universal House of Justice.

German Templar Colony: Group of houses with red-tiled roofs at the foot of Mount Carmel that once housed members of the Society of the Temple, founded in Germany in the mid-1800s. Templers foregathered in Haifa in 1863 to await the second coming of Christ.

Hands of the Cause of God: Individuals appointed first by Bahá'u'lláh, and others named later by Shoghi Effendi, who were charged with the specific duties of protecting and propagating the Faith. With the passing of Shoghi Effendi there is no further possibility for appointing Hands of the Cause; hence, in order to extend into the future the important functions of propagation and protection, the Universal House of Justice in 1968 created Continental Boards of Counsellors and in 1973 established the International Teaching Centre which coordinates their work.

Holy Days: Eleven days commemorating significant Bahá'í anniversaries, on nine of which work is suspended.

Ḥuqúqu'lláh: Arabic for "the Right of God." As instituted in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, payment to "the Authority in the Cause to whom all must turn" (at present, the Universal House of Justice) of 19 percent of what remains to one's personal income after one's essential expenses have been covered. Funds generated by the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh are used for the promotion of the Faith and for the welfare of society.

International Teaching Centre: An institution established in 1973 by the Universal House of Justice to bring to fruition the work of the Hands of the Cause of God in the Holy Land and to provide for its extension into the future. The duties of the International Teaching Centre include coordinating, stimulating, and directing the activities of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and acting as liaison between them and the Universal House of Justice. The membership of the Teaching Centre comprises all the surviving Hands of the Cause and also nine Counsellors appointed by the Universal House of Justice. The seat of the International Teaching Centre is located at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

Knight of Bahá'u'lláh: Title initially given by Shoghi Effendi to those Bahá'ís who arose to open new territories to the Faith during the first year of the Ten Year Crusade (1953–1963) and subsequently applied to those who first reached those remaining unopened territories at a later date.

Lesser Peace: A political peace to be established by the nations of the

world in order to bring about an end to war. Its establishment will prepare the way for the Most Great Peace, a condition of permanent peace and world unity to be founded on the spiritual principles and institutions of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and signaling humanity's coming of age.

Local Spiritual Assembly: The local administrative body in the Bahá'í Faith, ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The nine members are directly elected by secret ballot each year at Riḍván from among the adult believers in a community.

Monument Gardens: Beautifully landscaped gardens at the heart of the Arc on Mount Carmel where befitting monuments have been erected over the graves of the daughter, wife, and youngest son of Bahá'u'lláh, and also the wife of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Mount Carmel: The mountain spoken of by Isaiah as the "mountain of the Lord." Site of the Bahá'í World Centre including several Bahá'í holy places, the most important of which are the Shrine of the Báb and the Monument Gardens.

National Spiritual Assembly: The national administrative body in the Bahá'í Faith, ordained in the Bahá'í sacred writings, with authority over all activities and affairs of the Bahá'í Faith throughout its area. Among its duties are to stimulate, unify, and coordinate the manifold activities of Local Spiritual Assemblies and of individual Bahá'ís within its jurisdiction. The members of National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world constitute the electoral college for the Universal House of Justice. At Riḍván 1995, there were 174 National or Regional Spiritual Assemblies. See also Regional Spiritual Assembly.

Nineteen Day Feast: The principal gathering in each local Bahá'í community, every Bahá'í month, for the threefold purpose of worship, consultation, and fellowship.

Pioneer: Any Bahá'í who arises and leaves his or her home to journey to another country for the purpose of teaching the Bahá'í Faith. "Homefront pioneer" is used to describe those who move to areas within their own country that have yet to be exposed to the Bahá'í Faith or where the Bahá'í community needs strengthening.

intended not only to increase the size and consolidate the foundations of our community, but more particularly to exert a positive influence on the affairs of the entire human race. At so crucial a moment in world affairs, we must not fail in our duty to take timely action on the goals set before us in the Three Year Plan.”

Persian Edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

On 28 December 1995, the Universal House of Justice announced to all National Spiritual Assemblies the publication of a Persian edition of Bahá'u'lláh's Book of Laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas or Most Holy Book, in January 1996. The text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself remains in the original Arabic and other sacred writings in the volume are in their original language, either Persian or Arabic. The introduction, notes, and other supplementary material from the English edition are published here in Persian.

New National Spiritual Assemblies, Ridván 1996

A letter written on 15 February 1996 to all National Spiritual Assemblies announced the formation of two new National Spiritual Assemblies at Ridván 1996: São Tomé and Príncipe, and Moldova. Further to this, “the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Ukraine and Moldova with its seat in Kiev will become the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Ukraine.” In conclusion, the Universal House of Justice states, “We are delighted by these further evidences of the extension of the institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order as the conclusion of the Three Year Plan approaches.”

Conclusion

The letters written by the Universal House of Justice between Ridván 1995 and Ridván 1996 indicate both the increasing international recognition accorded to the Bahá'í community for its teachings and activities and the importance of strengthening the Bahá'í community for the growth it must sustain as it extends its interaction with wider society. Such complementary concerns reflect the gathering strength of an emerging global religion.

EVENTS
1995-96

Regional Spiritual Assembly: An institution identical in function to the National Spiritual Assembly but including a number of countries or regions in its jurisdiction, often established as a precursor to the formation of a National Spiritual Assembly in each of the countries it encompasses.

Riḍván: Arabic for “Paradise.” The twelve-day festival (from 21 April through 2 May) commemorating Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration of His mission to His companions in 1863 in the Garden of Riḍván in Baghdad.

Shoghi Effendi Rabbání: (1897–1957) The Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921, designated in His Will and Testament as His successor in interpreting the Bahá’í writings and as Head of the Faith.

Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh: The resting place of Bahá’u’lláh’s mortal remains, located near the city of Acre, Israel. The Shrine is the holiest spot on earth to Bahá’ís and a place of pilgrimage.

Shrine of the Báb: The resting place of the Báb’s mortal remains, located on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, a sacred site to Bahá’ís, and a place of pilgrimage.

Tablet: Divinely revealed scripture. In Bahá’í scripture, the term is used to denote writings revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Universal House of Justice: Head of the Bahá’í Faith after the passing of Shoghi Effendi, supreme administrative body ordained by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, His Book of Laws. The Universal House of Justice is elected every five years by the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies who gather at an International Convention. The House of Justice was elected for the first time in 1963 and occupied its permanent Seat on Mount Carmel in 1983.

Adapted from *A Basic Bahá’í Dictionary*, Wendi Momen, ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989).

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This article reports on the appointment of the Continental Boards of Counsellors for their new five-year term and on the Counsellors' Conference held 26–31 December 1995.

Conference of BAHÁ'Í COUNSELLORS

On 26 December 1995, a conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors was convened at the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, in the presence of the three remaining Hands of the Cause—Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, and 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá—the members of the Universal House of Justice, and the Counsellor members of the International Teaching Centre.

Although a Counsellors' Conference had been held at the Bahá'í World Centre immediately following the Seventh International Bahá'í Convention in 1993,¹ this year's conference was significantly different in that it was called at the beginning of the Counsellors' five-year term of service and was intended to be an opportunity for these high-ranking officers of the Faith to prepare themselves for the challenges of their duties by deliberating on the tasks and opportunities of the years immediately

1. See *The Bahá'í World 1993–94*, pp. 59–66.

ahead. A Counsellors' Conference of this type had not been held since that of 27 December 1985 through 2 January 1986.²

In its 29 October 1995 letter to the Bahá'ís of the world announcing the Counsellors' appointments, the Universal House of Justice indicated that the Counsellors were being called upon to direct their attention and energies throughout their five-year term to two tasks: fostering the evolution of local and national Bahá'í institutions and helping the rank and file of the believers to increase their devotion to Bahá'u'lláh, their ardor in teaching others about the Bahá'í Faith, and their ability to draw on the tremendous power latent in the unified action of Bahá'í communities.

The gathering itself was marked by an atmosphere of consecration and humility on the part of the participants, and it was characterized by joy and reverence, singing, and the sharing of their diversity of experience.

As with the Bahá'í community itself, a microcosm of the human race could be seen in the diversity of the group. The newly appointed members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors represent more than ever the variety of humanity. With these appointments, the House of Justice increased the number of Continental Counsellors from 72 to 81 and enriched their numbers through the inclusion of additional Bahá'ís who are natives of the countries they are serving—countries such as Papua New Guinea, Finland, Niger, Colombia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Germany, Cameroon, Mexico, Ethiopia and Romania. It is also significant that 36 percent of the Continental Counsellors are women.

The various capacities and experiences of the individual members of that group were collectively directed towards the achievement of one common aim: to consider issues of implementation of the Four Year Plan, to commence at Ridván 1996. The essential features of the new plan were presented to the Counsellors by the Universal House of Justice in its message to the gathering, dated 26 December 1995 (see article pp. 31–33). With this document in hand, all contributed to the consideration



Members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors from around the world gather on the steps of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice with the Hands of the Cause of God, members of the Universal House of Justice, and Counsellor members of the International Teaching Centre during the Counsellors' Conference in Haifa, December 1995.

of the challenges and opportunities confronting the worldwide Bahá'í community during the coming years. It was of particular note that such a focused and purposeful meeting of people from all parts of the globe should be gathered, dedicated solely to the betterment of humankind, and consulting in a spirit of unity and service, at a time of unprecedented chaos and confusion in the world.

Another distinguishing feature of the consultative sessions was the strong emphasis on and encouragement of activity and initiative at the grass roots. According to the Bahá'í writings, it is the individual who possesses the moral, intellectual, and spiritual powers central to the advancement of civilization. The release of these creative potentialities is as much a challenge in the governance of human affairs as is the promotion of a democratic process of decision-making. The administrative order established by Bahá'u'lláh requires the elected institutions to stimulate the development and exercise of these powers, but it augments the

2. See *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 19, 1983–1986, p. 505.

generation free of prejudice"; their efforts attract the hearts of many people with a parade, music, performances of dance workshops, and seminars on the elimination of racism. After two weeks of training in basic health care, a woman in Zambia returns to her village and shares what she has learned with her neighbors. A group of youth travels from Alberta to the Northwest Territories in Canada and offers performances depicting positive social values in various community centers. These people, though they have in all probability never met one another, share a united view of the world and its future, as well as their own role in shaping that future. They are members of the Bahá'í international community.

The Bahá'í international community, comprising members of the Bahá'í Faith from all over the globe, now numbers some five million souls. They represent 2,112 ethnic and tribal groups and live in over 121,000 localities in 190 independent countries and 45 dependent territories or overseas departments. What was once regarded by some as an obscure, tiny sect is now reported by the *Encyclopedia Britannica* to be the second-most widely spread independent religion in the world, after Christianity. Its membership cuts across all boundaries of class and race, governing itself through the establishment of local and national elected bodies known as Spiritual Assemblies. Its international center and the seat of its world-governing council, known as the Universal House of Justice, are located in the Holy Land, in Haifa, Israel.

From what source do the members of the Bahá'í Faith draw their spiritual strength and their organizational structure? What are the tenets of faith that can so attract and unify such a diverse group of people? How do they see the future? This brief introduction to the Bahá'í community, its history, its spiritual teachings, its aims, and its objectives, provides information in response to these questions.

Origins

In 1844 in Persia, a young siyyid (descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad) named Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad declared Himself to be the Promised Qá'im awaited by Shí'ih Muslims. He adopted

the title "the Báb," which means "the Gate," and His teachings quickly attracted a large following. Alarmed by the growing numbers of "Bábís," as His followers were known, the Muslim clergy allied themselves with ministers of the Shah in an effort to destroy the infant Faith. Several thousand Bábís were persecuted, tortured, and killed over the next number of years, but the growth of this new religion continued, even after the Báb Himself was imprisoned and subsequently publicly executed by a firing squad in July 1850. The horrific treatment of the Bábís at the hands of the secular and religious authorities was recorded by a number of Western diplomats, scholars, and travelers, who expressed their admiration for the character and fortitude of the victims of the persecution.

The Bábí Faith sprang from Islám in the same manner that Christianity sprang from Judaism or Buddhism from Hinduism. It was apparent from early in the Báb's ministry that the religion established by Him represented not merely a sect or a movement within Islám but possessed the character of an independent Faith. Furthermore, one of the main tenets of Bábí belief was the Báb's statement that He had been sent by God to prepare the way for One greater than Himself, who would inaugurate an era of peace and righteousness throughout the world, representing the culmination of all the religious dispensations of the past.

Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, known to history as Bahá'u'lláh, was one of the leading adherents of the Bábí Faith who was arrested and imprisoned during the tumultuous years of the Báb's brief ministry. He was spared from execution but was banished from Persia to Baghdad, thence to Constantinople, Adrianople, and finally to the penal colony of Acre in Palestine. Thus, the Persian government, which had secured the support of the rulers of the rival Ottoman empire in suppressing the new movement, expected that His sphere of influence would be severely limited. During His imprisonment Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí had received the first divine intimations that He was the Promised One of whom the Báb had spoken. He adopted the title Bahá'u'lláh, which means "the Glory of God," and publicly declared His mission on the eve of His exile from Baghdad, in April 1863.

provisions for this requirement through complementary institutions, one level of which is that of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. Charged with counseling, encouraging, and assisting both the individual members of the Bahá'í community and its elected bodies, their role is to assist in unlocking the capacity for action of individuals, communities and other institutions. Their deliberations focused on ways and means of doing so. Furthermore, the consultation, rather than following a format of numerous presentations by a few members of senior institutions, was very much an exchange between the Continental Counsellors themselves, who live and work in the communities they serve, face the same social challenges as the rest of the people in their region, and move in the same social milieu.

An emphasis was placed on collaborating with and benefiting from the experiences of others: the conference included opportunities for smaller meetings, so that those with mutual interests could consult on various topics. During four of the six conference days, separate afternoon meetings were held for each of the Continental Boards so that the Counsellors could consider in more detail the application in their continent of the principles discussed in the morning plenary sessions. Additionally, as the



Participants in the Counsellors' Conference visit the completed terraces below the Shrine of the Báb, December 1995.

26 December message encouraged the Counsellors to collaborate across Continental Boards, one evening session was devoted to consultation in special intercontinental interest groups—for example, those with responsibilities in the circumpolar areas, those from francophone countries, and those working in the Russian Federation.

The 26 December 1995 message of the House of Justice formed the basis of all the consultations. Its major foci include developments in the mode of the functioning of the Continental Boards of Counsellors; the process for the elaboration of the Four Year Plan through the formulation of derivative plans and strategies at the national, regional, and local levels, involving consultation between members of institutions at all levels; the development of human resources to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding community through formally conducted programs of training; effective approaches to the raising up and consolidation of Local Spiritual Assemblies; and further means for the development of local Bahá'í communities.

Through its message the Universal House of Justice placed in the hands of the Continental Counsellors a major responsibility in the creation and implementation of the next stage of the development of the worldwide Bahá'í community; following the conference, the Counsellors began the process of consulting with National Spiritual Assemblies about how to apply the guidance contained in the message to the special conditions and circumstances of each region.

The final session of the conference was an especially moving occasion. The members of the Universal House of Justice entered the meeting in file, which roused the participants to their feet. A tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was read,³ followed by the message dated 31 December 1995 to the Bahá'ís of the world prepared by the House of Justice, which was being electronically transmitted to National Spiritual Assemblies around the world at that same time. Those gathered were profoundly affected by the spirit of the occasion, some of them spontaneously breaking into a

³ *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), #204.

devotional song. The meeting ended with the reading of the same tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in the original Persian. Then all of those in attendance traveled to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, where they prayed together for the success of the Four Year Plan and of their efforts in what was described in the closing session as perhaps the most important four years of their lives.

The closing evening was distinguished by a banquet for all attendees, held in their honor by Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum at the House of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where she resides.

After the conference concluded, each of the five Boards of Counsellors took the opportunity to hold a meeting while their members were together in the Holy Land, further deliberating on the application of the guidance imparted in the 26 and 31 December messages to conditions in their regions.

In the ensuing weeks, the energizing effect the conference had on the Counsellors became clear as report after report was made of their meetings with the Auxiliary Board members in their areas. Participants in such meetings learned about the conference, studied the 26 and 31 December messages from the House of Justice, consulted on assisting communities to achieve the remaining goals of the Three Year Plan, attained greater clarity of vision regarding their role in the years ahead, and became more resolved to arise to carry out the tasks demanded by this critical period of history. Meetings of this nature were held in places as diverse as Réunion, Kenya, Zimbabwe, the United States, Canada, the Philippines, India, the Mariana Islands, Hong Kong, Turkey, France, and Italy.

*This article describes the formation
in April 1995 of five new National
Spiritual Assemblies.*

FIVE NEW NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES

Just 75 years after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's references in His Will and Testament to the establishment of "secondary Houses of Justice" (currently called National Spiritual Assemblies), these institutions have been formed in nearly three-quarters of the countries and territories of the world.¹ At Ridván 1995, three republics of the former Soviet Union whose Bahá'í communities had been administered by Regional Spiritual Assemblies formed their own National Spiritual Assemblies: Armenia, with its seat in Yerevan; Georgia with its seat in Tbilisi; and Belarus, with its seat in Minsk. At the same time, the independent political status gained by Eritrea called for a National Spiritual Assembly there, with its seat in Asmara, and the development of the Bahá'í Faith in Sicily led to the decision to form a National Assembly there

1. For an explanation of the nature and purpose of the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly and a brief history of its development, see *The Bahá'í World 1994-95*, pp. 26-28.

with its seat in Palermo. This brought the number of these national Bahá'í institutions worldwide to 174.²

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Georgia

The National Spiritual Assembly of Georgia was formed at Ridván 1995, but the history of the Georgian Bahá'í community reaches back to the time of Bahá'u'lláh. There were enough Bahá'ís in Georgia and neighboring regions during the period of His ministry (1853–1892) to warrant formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Caucasus in 1925.

In 1928, the Bahá'ís in the Caucasus began facing serious difficulties practicing their Faith. Meetings were disrupted by communist authorities; attendees were arrested and held for questioning; documents and books were confiscated; mail censored. A long and careful examination by the authorities revealed that the Bahá'ís were not guilty of any subversive, anti-Soviet, or political activity, but Bahá'í meetings were nevertheless allowed only with special police permission.

Ultimately, after the election of Bahá'í local councils in the Caucasus republics in April 1928, the government abrogated their constitutions and—after protracted negotiations—imposed a constitution which dissolved all Bahá'í committees, decreed that Russian translations of minutes from all Bahá'í meetings must be submitted to the authorities, and required that Bahá'í children under 18 years of age not be instructed in their religion. Another government order decreed that all synagogues, churches, and other places of worship were state property.

In accordance with the laws of their Faith, the Bahá'ís did not engage in any political activity or agitation; rather, they appealed to the legally constituted local and national authorities for

restitution of their rights. By 1938, however, the Bahá'í community of the Caucasus was reduced to remnants and remained in that condition for some 50 years.

The sweeping reforms launched in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s opened up opportunities for Bahá'í communities in that part of the world to be revived and developed. The Universal House of Justice appointed the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany to coordinate efforts to foster the growth of the Bahá'í community in Georgia and to provide guidance and encouragement as the community developed. A Two Year Teaching Plan, focusing on the entire region of the former Soviet Union, was launched by the Universal House of Justice at Ridván 1990. At Ridván 1991 the Bahá'í community in the Republic of Georgia came under the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the USSR, which was later renamed the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Baltic States and Georgia when the USSR was officially dissolved and the states adopted new names. By Ridván 1992 the Faith had grown to the point that four new National/Regional Assemblies were established for the territory of the former USSR and the existing Assembly was renamed the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Russia, Georgia and Armenia.

At Ridván 1992, the Bahá'í community in Georgia was still small: one group and several isolated individuals. Bahá'í literature in Georgian included *Love of God*, *The Promise of World Peace*, and some introductory material. Traveling teachers began to visit Georgia in the summer of 1992, and despite the challenges of an unstable political situation, a still suspicious KGB, and shortages of electricity, gas, food, and water, they sought out the Bahá'ís and offered support and encouragement.

A joyous event occurred when the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia, was reestablished at Ridván 1993. With the assistance of Bahá'ís from other parts of the world, a house was purchased to serve as a local Bahá'í center. By October 1993, there were also Bahá'ís in the city of Gouri, not far from Tbilisi, and a Bahá'í center had been rented there. Traveling teachers began to regularly visit Georgia from

2. At Ridván 1994, there were 172 National Spiritual Assemblies, so although five new Assemblies were formed, the increase appears to be only two. This is accounted for by the fact that at Ridván 1995, the Bahá'í communities of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, South Africa, and Transkei were merged into one community under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South Africa, to reflect the political reunion of that region.

Riḍván 1994 and shared Bahá'í teachings with people from all strata of society. Among the prominent figures with whom official contacts were made were the prime minister and mayors and deputy mayors of a number of cities.

By June 1994 there were 45 new believers in Georgia, a number of whom traveled to Panchgani, India, to participate in an extensive Bahá'í study course. The number of Local Spiritual Assemblies had increased to seven, six of which were formed in one week. Members of these Assemblies came from Muslim, Armenian, and Georgian backgrounds, and many of them were highly educated. Five short-term pioneers from the region, particularly Tadjikistan, joined pioneers from England, the Philippines, and Canada to settle in different parts of Georgia. Two national conferences were held in Tbilisi that summer. As of January 1995 there were 12 Local Spiritual Assemblies in Georgia, and the Universal House of Justice announced that the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Georgia would form at Riḍván 1995.

Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánúm represented the Universal House of Justice at the first National Convention of the Bahá'ís of Georgia, held 23–24 April in Tbilisi. Almost 300 Bahá'ís, of whom 200 were from 14 different Georgian localities, came together in a beautiful valley surrounded by the snow-capped mountains of the Caucasus to celebrate the birth of this new institution. An Auxiliary Board member participating in the Convention reported that “all the

The first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Georgia.



Bahá'ís, whether rich or poor, from any metropolis in the world or a tiny village in Georgia were together in a spirit of unity.” During her visit, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánúm was able to meet with the Vice Prime Minister, the Minister for Human Rights, the Minister for Environment, other government officials, and His Holiness Ilia II, Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church. After the Convention, Moscow Television contacted the Bahá'ís, interviewed the chairman of the new National Assembly, and broadcast the piece in Russia and in Georgia three times.

During the year following the Convention, the Bahá'í community of Georgia organized its first Youth Camp, helped put together the first Bahá'í Youth Convention of Georgia and Armenia, and held three Trans-Caucasian Bahá'í Academy courses on topics such as prayer and meditation, Bahá'í history, consultation, and administration. The Georgian community had grown sufficiently to establish 35 Local Spiritual Assemblies.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Armenia

The history of the development of the Bahá'í Faith in Armenia closely parallels that of Georgia, with believers residing there during Bahá'u'lláh's lifetime and both regions being under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Caucasus from 1925 to 1938. Bahá'ís in Armenia suffered the same persecution and prohibitions under the communist regime as did the Bahá'ís in Georgia. When political and social change swept the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Armenia, like Georgia, came under the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the



The first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Armenia, with Counsellor Abbas Katirai and a representative of the former Regional Spiritual Assembly of Russia, Georgia and Armenia.

USSR, later renamed the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Baltic States and Georgia. At Riḍván 1992 a Regional Spiritual Assembly was established for Russia, Georgia and Armenia.

By November 1992 two pioneers, an 80-year-old woman from Brazil and an 18-year-old Russian girl, had settled in Armenia, joining 20 Armenian Bahá'ís, and a Bahá'í center had been acquired in Yerevan. Despite the difficult conditions of war in Armenia, including lack of heat, electricity, food, and water, Local Spiritual Assemblies were elected in Aparvan, Yerevan, Abavyan, and Dilizhan by March 1994.

The first National Teaching Conference of Armenia was held in May 1994, during which 140 adults and twenty youth gathered in Yerevan to become better acquainted, consult about their future, and enjoy their first experience working together on this scale. In November, the Bahá'í community of Yerevan was legally registered, and a Bahá'í center was purchased in Oktemberyan.

By January 1995, there were approximately 200 Bahá'ís in Armenia and ten Local Spiritual Assemblies. Despite continuing conflict in the region, the first National Convention was held in April 1995, attended by Abbas Katirai of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Asia who represented the Universal House of Justice.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Belarus

In 1978, Helmut Winkelbach, a Bahá'í from Germany, saw an ad for an electrician's job in Russia, undertook training for three months, and took a train to what was then called the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. He was the first Bahá'í to settle in this territory and fulfill a goal of the Ten Year Plan,³ and thus he was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

3. In 1953 the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, launched a ten-year teaching plan to bring the Bahá'í Faith to the main unopened territories of the world and to consolidate communities in territories where there were already Bahá'ís, among other goals. During this period the number of National Spiritual Assemblies increased from 12 to 47. Those who arose at that time or later to open territories named as goals of the Ten Year Plan were named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.

Mr. Winkelbach remained in what is now called Belarus for two years and then returned in 1986 with his wife, Olga, a native Belarussian. Their teaching efforts and the arrival of one more pioneer produced a group of eight believers by Riḍván 1991. By September that year a Local Assembly had been formed in Minsk. Other enrollments occurred after a group of 20 enthusiastic traveling teachers came through from the United Kingdom and several groups of Bahá'ís from the United States visited. By the end of the Two Year Plan jurisdiction over the area was transferred from the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany to the new Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Ukraine, Bielarus⁴ and Moldova.

The members of this fledgling community were greatly inspired when 164 Bahá'ís from 16 countries attended an International Youth Conference they organized in Brest in August 1993. Another international event they put together was a women's conference in Brest in April 1994, which was attended by 250 people from Belarus, Russia, other countries in Europe, Canada, Panama, and the United States, 200 of whom were not Bahá'ís. Sessions were held on psychology and pedagogy; economics and law; culture, literature, and art; and ecology and health. Papers were delivered on issues such as the role of women in protecting the environment and on spiritual and moral development, and the women from North America came prepared to share technical information on health care, cooperative marketing and food distribution. The event was supported by the United Nations Office in Belarus and the Soros Foundation.

The Bahá'ís of Belarus organized a particularly successful teaching project, called "Neman 94," along the banks of the Neman River during the summer of 1994. In September an exhibition on the history of the Bahá'í Faith was displayed in Bobruysk. The following month, a children's education institute was held with participants from Moscow, Kiev, and Belarus. By the end of 1994, there were approximately 130 Bahá'ís in 11 cities of Belarus.

4. At that time, this was the spelling of what is now Belarus.

The first election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Belarus took place at Ridván 1995. On this historic occasion, Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre Hartmut Grossmann represented the Universal House of Justice. In a message to the Bahá'í World Centre, the Convention participants wrote: "We feel blessed to be one of the five new pillars of the Universal House of Justice which were elected this Ridván." Just two months later, representatives from all the Local Assemblies, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Europe, and the Auxiliary Board member for the area met for a "Unity of Vision" conference to form goals and plans of action for the community of Belarus.



The first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Belarus, with Hartmut Grossmann, a Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre, and Counsellor Larissa Tsutskova.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Eritrea

Eritrea, a country which proclaimed its sovereignty on 24 May 1993, was for centuries part of ancient Ethiopia. After being colonized by the Italians at the close of the nineteenth century, it became a protectorate of the United Kingdom when British forces conquered the area in 1941. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Sabri Elias, who had introduced the Faith to Ethiopia in 1934, returned to share Bahá'u'lláh's teachings with a new generation of Ethiopians (see obituary, pp. 312–13). They helped to spread the Bahá'í Faith to Eritrea, where the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Asmara (the capital) was established in the early 1950s.

By the late 1950s, Asmara had one of the strongest Bahá'í communities in the world; in 1958 the Local Spiritual Assembly

was officially recognized as a religious body through registration with the Federal High Court and the Supreme Court of Eritrea; by the early 1960s large numbers of people in the Kunama region of Eritrea began embracing the Faith. However, the civil war which began in 1963 and raged for 30 years disrupted this process. Still, the Bahá'í community survived, operating under the jurisdiction of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of North East Africa from 1956 to 1975 and thereafter under the National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia. In October 1992, the Bahá'í Teaching and Administrative Committee in Eritrea was formed, and during its first year it arranged three teaching trips and appointed task forces to begin promoting the equality of men and women and addressing the need for Bahá'í material in the local language of Tigrigna.



The first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Eritrea.

In Asmara at Ridván 1995, in the presence of Counsellor Hushang Ahdieh, representing the Universal House of Justice, and 60 observers from around the nation, including several of the original pioneers, the delegates to the first National Convention of Eritrea elected the country's National Spiritual Assembly. Dr. Ahdieh reported that "this historic and joyous occasion was celebrated amidst expressions of profound gratitude and exhilaration, and was characterized by a spirit of love and unity, of high resolve and determination to expedite the long-awaited day when the Cause of God would cover this long-suffering, receptive nation."

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sicily

In the series of letters 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to the North American Bahá'ís during the First World War (known as Tablets of the Divine Plan), He named Sicily as one of the regions which should receive the Bahá'í teachings after the war. However, it was not until 1953 that six Americans were able to settle in Sicily and introduce the Bahá'í Faith there. For this achievement, Carol, Florence, Gerrold, Stanley and Susan Bagley and Emma Rice were named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.

Four years of work by the pioneers, Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Ugo Giachery, the newly declared Sicilian believers, and the Italo-Swiss National Spiritual Assembly (which had been given the development of the Sicilian community as a goal) resulted in the formation of the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Palermo at Ridván 1958. This city was later chosen by the Universal House of Justice to be the site of the first Oceanic Bahá'í Conference, held in August 1968 to consult about the development of the Faith in the Mediterranean region. More than 2,300 Bahá'ís took part.

By the end of February 1995, the Bahá'í community of Sicily had grown to comprise 31 localities, and eight Local Spiritual Assemblies had been formed. The stage was set for the first Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sicily to be formed.⁵

On 22–25 April 1995, 350 “strongly united” followers of Bahá'u'lláh, including supporters from nine countries, gathered together in the presence of the Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-



The first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sicily, with Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muhammad Varqá.

Muhammad Varqá, who represented the Universal House of Justice, Counsellor Sohrab Youssefian, members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, and the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh who first brought the Faith to their land. Dr. Varqá reported: “In an atmosphere of joy, emotion, enthusiasm and delight, dominated by profound love for Bahá'u'lláh, the Sicilian Convention was held in Terrasini in the vicinity of Palermo.”

By September of that year, the new Assembly was able to report a range of activities in Sicily, including teaching projects, television interviews, presentation of Bahá'í literature to civil authorities and schools, a regional youth conference, a women's conference, and vibrant Naw-Rúz celebrations attended by nearly the entire community.

The Process Continues

As the Bahá'í communities of Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, Eritrea, and Sicily prepared for their first National Conventions, the Universal House of Justice announced that at Ridván 1996 new National Spiritual Assemblies would be formed in São Tomé and Príncipe and in Moldova. Bahá'ís around the world rejoiced at this further evidence that people of every background are finding truth in Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and are successfully building the administrative order He envisioned.

5. Generally the jurisdiction of Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies is defined by political borders; however, there are exceptions, dictated by compelling circumstances. In some instances geographical or cultural characteristics necessitate the formation of a National Assembly in an outlying region or territory of a given country, the better to promote the well-being and efficient functioning of the Bahá'í community. For example, Alaska and Hawaii have their own National Spiritual Assemblies and are not under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, which directs and coordinates Bahá'í activities in the 48 continental states, but the three National Assemblies collaborate in a manner that preserves the unity of their relations in dealing with the federal authorities.



*View of the Shrine of the Báb and the terrace immediately below,
October 1995.*

MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS: Progress 1995–96

The momentous building projects on Mount Carmel continued to gather momentum between Riḍván 1995 and Riḍván 1996. One of the most significant achievements of this period was the fulfillment of a major goal of the Three Year Plan—initiation of all seven phases of construction of the buildings on the Arc and the terraces above and below the Shrine of the Báb. At the conclusion of this fruitful time, the Universal House of Justice wrote to the Bahá'ís of the world that “The magnificent progress of the projects on Mount Carmel is pre-eminent among the measurable achievements of this period. Indeed, despite numerous difficulties, the stage of accomplishment anticipated in our message announcing the Three Year Plan is entirely evident.”

There was intense activity throughout the year on the building of the Centre for the Study of the Texts. The concreting operation on this building reached a record pour of 1,000 cubic meters in a single month, enabling the structure to rise speedily. Its entrance portico was cast and bases prepared for eight Ionic marble columns to stand in a semi-circle in the facade of the building. With the major part of the structure complete, a contract was



The almost completed structure of the Centre for the Study of the Texts is defined by its semi-circular entrance portico.

Installation of drywall partitions and air conditioning ducts inside the Centre for the Study of the Texts in February 1996 signalled the beginning of interior finishing work.



signed with a Canadian company for the erection of gypsum drywall partitions, precast gypsum moulded ceilings and suspended tiled ceilings. Soon defined spaces within the building took shape as drywall partitions went up. Installation of the mechanical services also commenced. In late November 1995 a special meeting was arranged in Italy for the inspection and approval of the marble columns, during which all the contractors involved met with the project manager to chalk out various strategies for the installation of the marble before the entire consignment of marble columns arrived on site in April 1996. In the meantime, masonry work inside the north patio of the Centre for the Study of the Texts began with the arrival of Turkish masons and the delivery of 800 square meters of local stone.

Work commenced on the installation of the roof on the four-story underground extension to the existing International Bahá'í Archives building. By the end of the year it was waterproofed, and concrete screed and polystyrene panels were applied to protect the waterproofing and drainage gravel, preparing the roof for the addition of topsoil. The most important component of the

Archives extension is a strong room which will house the sacred texts and relics of the Bahá'í Faith. The walls of this structure within a structure were waterproofed externally as well as internally for double reinforcement. A massive vault door has been put in place to provide security.

A sixty-meter-long, ten-meter-wide, five-meter-high tunnel was constructed to provide access from Crusader Road to the parking building, an ancillary structure between the Centre for the Study of the Texts and the Archives extension. Because of its dimensions, the roof of this tunnel was cast in fifteen sections, each four meters apart. A special steel form was prepared in the shape of the roof to assist in the concreting operations.

Steady progress was made on the construction of the International Teaching Centre, a large and complex building situated in close proximity to the Seat of the Universal House of Justice. While construction work progressed on two levels of the building, a ramp which had earlier been constructed to provide access for construction materials to the site was removed. The ramp had occupied almost 25 percent of the building areas and its removal



By March 1996 the structure of the International Teaching Centre had reached its second level.

Project manager Fariborz Sahba inspects columns in the marble factory in Italy, November 1995. Also pictured are Mr. Hedayat of the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy and Mr. Hoffmann, General Manager of Henraux s.p.a.



enabled the extension of the foundations of the Teaching Centre right up to the retaining wall. About 10,000 cubic meters of earth were excavated and relocated, which also allowed the installation of the remaining three rows of rock anchors in the micropile retaining wall to provide complete support. Thirty-nine micropiles, varying in length from five to seven meters, were poured, bringing the loads of the sloping foundations of the building to a greater depth, and thereby enhancing the stability of these foundations.

More than 45 years ago Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote to the Bahá'ís in the East sharing 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision of a monumental pathway leading from the foot of Mount Carmel to the Shrine of the Báb and reaching beyond to the crest of the mountain. The preliminary outline of nine terraces



Aerial photograph showing dramatic progress on the Arc and Terraces Projects, March 1996.

as an approach to the Shrine from the central avenue of the former German Templar Colony was completed by the Guardian himself in pursuance of this vision. As he wrote, "This beautiful and majestic path which extends from the Shrine of the Báb to the City of Haifa in line with the greatest avenue of that blessed city, which is adorned with trees and verdant plants and illumined with bright lights, which is the object of admiration of the people of this region and a source of joy and pride to the authorities of this land, will subsequently be

converted, as foreshadowed by the Center of the Covenant, into the Highway of the Kings and Rulers of the World."¹ The completion of seven terraces below the Shrine of the Báb and the decision of the Universal House of Justice to open five of them to pilgrims and Bahá'í visitors from Ridván of 153 B.E. (April 1996) has been a major step towards the realization of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's and Shoghi Effendi's vision of these terraces.

As part of the adornment of the ceremonial approach to the Shrine of the Báb, ornamental statuary, diverse colorful plants within brick edgings and planter urns, and paths covered with crushed ocher-colored roof tiles were prepared. Bronze railings and light fittings were also placed by the sides of the *Duranta repens* hedges planted on both sides of the central stairway. The informal areas to the east and west of terraces nine to five were developed with beautiful rockery plantings, cacti, succulents and other drought-tolerant plants.

In an interview with an architectural magazine, architect Fariborz Sahba explained: "The goal of the design of these terraces is to create the most appropriate setting for the Shrine of the Báb, one of the holiest places of pilgrimage for Bahá'ís. They are meant to prepare the Bahá'í pilgrims, as they walk through these terraces towards the Shrine for pilgrimage, for the spiritual encounter ahead of them. The terraces are primarily being built, then, to heighten the spiritual experience of the Bahá'í pilgrim to the Shrine of the Báb. For this reason they must not only be beautiful gardens and landscape, but must create an atmosphere of reverence and peace, conducive to meditation." One element in the creation of such an atmosphere is the use of water as a main concept of the landscape: It flows from the top of the mountain to the bottom in a continuous cascade along the sides of the central stairway. Several beautiful fountains, carefully designed to provide crystal clear water, with a gentle sound to mask the noise of the city, will assist pilgrims to concentrate on their meditation. The irrigation system on the lower terraces became operational, enabling visitors to enjoy the visual beauty

1. From a letter dated Naw-Rúz 108 (March 1952) addressed to the Bahá'ís in the East by Shoghi Effendi, translated from the Persian.

Bahá'u'lláh was still nominally a prisoner when He passed away some forty years later in Acre, in November 1892, although the authorities had gradually loosened their restrictions as they became acquainted with Him and the nature of His teachings. During the long years of His exile and imprisonment, Bahá'u'lláh revealed the equivalent of over 100 volumes of writings, consisting of the laws and ordinances of His dispensation, letters to the kings and rulers of the East and the West, mystical teachings, and other divinely inspired writings.

In His will and testament, Bahá'u'lláh appointed His eldest son, 'Abbás Effendi, who adopted the title 'Abdu'l-Bahá (the Servant of Bahá), as His successor and sole authoritative interpreter of His teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had shared the long years of exile and imprisonment of His Father, being freed only after a new regime was installed by the "Young Turk" movement in 1908. Shortly thereafter, at an advanced age, He embarked on an arduous journey to Europe and America where, from 1911 to 1913, He proclaimed Bahá'u'lláh's message of universal brotherhood and peace to large audiences, consolidated fledgling Bahá'í communities, and warned of the potential catastrophe looming on Europe's darkening horizon. By the time World War I erupted in 1914, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had returned to His home in Haifa, just across the bay from Acre in Palestine, and devoted Himself to caring for the people of that city, fending off famine by feeding them from stores of grain He had safeguarded for just such an eventuality. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's humanitarian services and promotion of intercultural harmony were recognized by the British government, which, at the end of the war, conferred upon Him a knighthood, a title He acknowledged, although He declined to use it. He passed away in 1921 and is buried on Mount Carmel in a vault near where the remains of the Báb were interred by Him some years before.

Among the significant legacies bequeathed to history by 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a series of letters, called the Tablets of the Divine Plan, addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America during the years of World War I. These fourteen letters directed the recipients to scatter to countries on all continents and share with

their populations the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh—a mandate that led to the global expansion of the Bahá'í community.

Another legacy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was His Will and Testament, which Bahá'ís regard as the charter of the administrative order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh. In this document, 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, to succeed Him after His passing as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and authorized interpreter of its teachings.

During the period of his Guardianship, from 1921 to 1957, Shoghi Effendi concentrated his attention on four main areas: the development of the Bahá'í World Centre in the environs of Haifa, Israel; the translation and interpretation of the Bahá'í sacred writings; the rise and consolidation of the institutions of the administrative order of the Bahá'í Faith; and the implementation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's plan for the propagation of the Bahá'í Faith around the world.

At the Bahá'í World Centre, Shoghi Effendi effected the construction of a superstructure for the mausoleum containing the remains of the Báb, which had been brought from Persia to the Holy Land and been interred by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a tomb on Mount Carmel in a spot designated by Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi beautified and expanded the simple native stone structure, which is today a site of pilgrimage for Bahá'ís from all over the world. He enhanced the Bahá'í properties, particularly the site of Bahá'u'lláh's grave at Bahjí, with gardens of striking beauty, and he also initiated the construction of the International Bahá'í Archives building to house and preserve artifacts from the early days of the Bahá'í Faith. The International Archives building was the first structure built on the arc-shaped path on the site designated as the world administrative center of the Bahá'í community. It was completed in 1957.

In concert with the actions he took to develop the Bahá'í World Centre and lay the foundations, literally and figuratively, for the further course of that development, Shoghi Effendi was also instrumental in interpreting the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and translating them from the original Persian and Arabic into English. The Guardian had served as secretary for a

of the fountains bubbling with water and running down the stone runnels along the sides of the stairs.

Work on the steep slopes of the terraces above the Shrine of the Báb was also pursued at a brisk pace. The structure of four of these terraces—numbers fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen—was completed, and mechanical, electrical, plumbing and irrigation services were put in place. Soon after, spreading of topsoil and planting on their central slopes began.

Concomitantly, the construction of the uppermost terrace, the nineteenth, commenced. This terrace, at the crest of Mount Carmel, is designed with two levels of balconies. 'Abdu'l-Bahá envisioned that "A person standing on the summit of Mount Carmel...will look upon the most sublime and majestic spectacle



Bird's eye view of the bridge over 'Abbás Street, which provides continuity between terraces four and five below the Shrine of the Báb.

of the whole world..."² These balconies will provide a visitor with a spectacular view of the Shrine of the Báb, and beyond it down to the harbor and across Haifa Bay towards the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. A tunnel under the terrace's first level will connect it to the Louis Promenade on Panorama Street, built by the Municipality of Haifa. This will enable visitors strolling on the promenade to enter the terrace with ease without crossing the road, which sees plenty of vehicular traffic. During the year the structure of the balconies of terrace nineteen was completed; work on the pedestrian tunnel was also finished and a 300-meter-long promenade on the side of terrace nineteen was built.

2. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, Volume XXIV, p. 302.



Terrace nineteen at the crest of Mount Carmel provides access from Panorama Street and the Louis Promenade to the upper terraces and has over 700 square meters of floor space. This photo was taken in March 1996.

One of the most challenging and critical stages of the Terraces Project was initiated in February of 1996 when a contract was formalized with a well-known Haifa contractor for the lowering of Hatzionut Avenue and the construction of a pedestrian tunnel and retaining walls for the bridge that will span the street, linking the terrace of the Shrine of the Báb to the footpath on the Arc and the upper terraces. A joint announcement by the Bahá'í World Centre and the Haifa Municipality was carried in three major newspapers informing the general public of the nature of work to be undertaken and changes in the traffic arrangement in the entire section adjoining the Bahá'í properties on this street. Of the three principal stages of work on the roadway, one was accomplished by Riqdán 1996. During the first stage, work was undertaken on the north side close to the terrace of the Shrine. A temporary sewage line was constructed; the north pedestrian sidewalk was reduced to 1.5 meters; and street lamp posts, traffic lights and bus stops were relocated. When this was completed, the traffic was restored to the north side and work began on the excavation of the south side.

As the projects on Mount Carmel have advanced, the interest they have generated among the citizens of Haifa has also become more intense. This resulted in an invitation from Haifa's Chamber of Commerce and Industry to the Bahá'í World Centre to participate in "Haifa 2000," an exhibition designed to display unique projects in the city, depicting its development and changing business climate. The organizers offered the Bahá'í World Centre, free of cost, the best and most central location to display models of its projects. Held 19–27 June 1995, the exhibition attracted an estimated 250,000 visitors, including those attending two international conferences occurring in the city at the same time. Visiting dignitaries included Israel's then Foreign Minister Shimon Perez and dignitaries from the United Kingdom, who came with a large delegation of businessmen. Other visitors included well-known Israeli businessmen, economists, investors, and residents of Haifa. The event garnered wide media coverage. Afterwards, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry expressed its appreciation to the Bahá'ís, saying that the success of the exhibition "would not have been possible without your participation and the presentation of your impressive projects..."

An exciting development related to the Mount Carmel Projects but initiated by the government of Israel was the commencement of the first stage of work on the restoration of the German Templar Colony. Nestling at the foot of Mount Carmel, the Templar houses flank Ben Gurion Avenue from Haifa harbor to the junction of Hagefen Street, where the entrance plaza to terrace number one is located. In the section immediately conjoining the entrance plaza, work began on the implementation of the German Colony's main axis, the design of which had been previously selected from an array of competitors.

The media maintained their interest in the projects and continued to report about them throughout the year. In its July 1995 issue, a prestigious Israeli architectural magazine, *Architecture of Israel*, published a fourteen-page article on the Mount Carmel Projects in Hebrew and English, with beautiful color photographs. Dedicated to the work of architect Fariborz Sahba and focusing on his design of the Bahá'í House of Worship in



Members of the Universal House of Justice visit the Mount Carmel Projects in December 1995.

India as well as the terraces of the Shrine of the Báb, the article also provided information about the history of the Bahá'í Faith. While the beauty of the terraces of the Shrine of the Báb—called "the hanging gardens" by the Israeli media—has often been extolled, this article highlighted the contribution of the Terraces Project to the environment of Haifa, saying: "The eternal shine of the dome of the Bahá'í Shrine is one of the best known features of Haifa. In the past few years the construction of the 'Hanging Gardens' has begun—a garden strip of 400-meter width, its foot in the German Colony in lower down-town, and its head at the Panorama Towers on Carmel. With the completion of this project in about four years, these gardens will not only be one of Haifa's significant urban projects but also the most protected 'green lung' in the country."

To the worldwide Bahá'í community the projects on Mount Carmel are much more than "significant urban projects." Their realization constitutes "part of a process clearly perceived by Shoghi Effendi as synchronizing with two no less significant developments: the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions."³ It is this understanding which impels the pursuance "with deliberate speed [of] the gigantic building projects on God's Holy Mountain."⁴ But the speedy pursuit of these "gigantic building projects" would

3. The Universal House of Justice, *Ridván 150 B.E.* (April 1993).

4. *Ibid.*

not have been possible without the tremendous material sacrifices of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in every land. In response to the summons to sacrifice issued by the Universal House of Justice, the Bahá'ís of the world "stepped forward and made sacrificial offerings for the furtherance of this vast undertaking so highly extolled by the beloved Guardian,"⁵ and the goal of raising 74 million dollars during the Three Year Plan was achieved.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The Three Year Plan

Riḍván 1996 saw the conclusion of the worldwide Bahá'í community's Three Year Plan for the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith around the globe and the inauguration of a Four Year Plan, which will conclude at Riḍván 2000. The process of expansion and consolidation has been pursued through a series of international plans, which took their original impetus from the Faith's sacred writings, particularly 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan, and from the directives of Shoghi Effendi. Since its establishment in 1963, the Universal House of Justice has launched a series of such initiatives, through the course of which national Bahá'í communities have assumed increasing responsibility for formulating and monitoring plans of their own. Systematic advances in numerical strength and the increasing maturity of its worldwide institutions have been two great benefits of this approach.

The Three Year Plan, which ran from April 1993 to April 1996, brought many notable achievements which are highlighted

5. The Universal House of Justice, in a letter dated 20 June 1995, transmitted electronically to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

throughout *The Bahá'í World* volumes covering this period. The “qualitatively enriched community” which emerged from this period could take pride, for example, in the progress made on the Mount Carmel Projects at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa—not only in the visible progress in construction and beautification of the site but in the unity of purpose attained by Bahá'ís all over the world, who contributed generously to ensure the Projects' steady progress.

In the realm of expansion, twelve new National Spiritual Assemblies were formed over the three years; thousands of international traveling teachers and pioneers arose; systematic approaches were made to collective teaching endeavors, and long-term teaching projects were set in motion in a number of countries. The International Teaching Centre encouraged the development of human resources around the globe and increased access to the Bahá'í sacred writings of Bahá'ís in many localities through its promotion of the core literature program, which has made large quantities of a few essential titles available inexpensively in a wide range of languages.

Indigenous Bahá'ís assumed more responsibility for teaching and consolidating their peoples; even in troubled areas of the globe, such as Angola, Cambodia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, Bahá'í activities carried on; newly established Bahá'í communities in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc distinguished themselves by their aptitude in administering the affairs of the Faith; and Bahá'í communities on islands around the world were very active. Contributions of Bahá'í youth, both to the Faith itself and to the general development of society, were another feature of this plan.

Over the three years of the plan, Bahá'í communities became more deeply involved with social and economic development, particularly education, as, in one case, Bahá'ís took on the management of seven schools in an area; in Africa, Bahá'í communities in exile because of political unrest continued to work on projects that would make them self-sufficient. Other particular areas of focus included the advancement of women and pilot literacy projects.

The public face of the Bahá'í community became better known, too, as external affairs activities multiplied around the world. Increasing numbers of public officials invited the Bahá'ís to participate in activities and discussions related to the concerns of the day, and initiatives were taken by Bahá'í communities to influence government action. Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum participated in events such as the Summit on the Alliance between Religions and Conservation, sponsored by the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and the Fourth International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society at the University of Maryland in the US. The establishment of academic programs, the use of the arts, and the Bahá'í International Community's participation in United Nations conferences in Copenhagen and Beijing and its contributions to the UN 50 celebrations were other high points of external affairs activities during the three years.

With regard to the enrichment of the spiritual lives of Bahá'ís around the world, the Three Year Plan saw, notably, the release of the first Persian-language edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book of Bahá'u'lláh, which contains Arabic text with supplementary material translated into Persian from the English edition. The English edition, published in 1992 and accompanied by an extensive body of annotations based on the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, serves as the basis for translations into other languages. As much of the original translation of the text into English, as well as the supplementary material, was rendered by Shoghi Effendi, the appointed interpreter of the Bahá'í writings, it provides a unique guide for other translations.

In addition, the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh gained growing support around the world, as Bahá'ís everywhere recognized this significant law for the benefit of humankind. Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, Trustee of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, took up residence in the Holy land, joining the only other two living Hands of the Cause of God, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum and Mr. 'Alí-Akbar Furútan.

With the stage set for further advances during the Four Year Plan which will carry it to the end of the century and millennium,

the Bahá'í community stands poised to greatly expand its membership and address the needs of this turbulent age of transition for humankind.

The Year in Review

The year beginning at Ridván 1995 and ending at Ridván 1996 was characterized by the intense efforts of Bahá'ís around the world to fulfill the goals they had set for themselves for the Three Year Plan. Through systematic, energetic, creative activity, the Bahá'í community grew to a new level of capacity and unity of purpose. An increase in the assumption of responsibility by indigenous Bahá'ís for the functioning of their own communities, outstanding contributions on the part of the youth, the initiating by Bahá'ís at the grass roots of much-needed development projects, greater involvement in the efforts of society at large to address various issues, and the steady development of Bahá'í communities and administrative institutions—these were some of the hallmarks of this past year.

The survey of Bahá'í activity which follows does not attempt to be comprehensive. It is intended rather to provide a general sense of the myriad efforts of Bahá'ís from hundreds of national communities and thousands of localities to contribute to the advancement of the Faith's aims. Bahá'í participation in some specific events has been reported in detail in separate articles: observances of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the various activities of the Bahá'í International Community, and the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.

Material is arranged in the survey within the following categories: Hands of the Cause, prominent people, children, youth, women, cultural events and indigenous Bahá'ís, race unity, peace, interfaith activities, environment, social and economic development, involvement in the life of society, recognition, landmark occasions, sharing the message of Bahá'u'lláh, institutes, scholarship, and the arts.

Hands of the Cause

Each of the surviving three Hands of the Cause of God plays a critical role in Bahá'í community life, encouraging and inspiring

Bahá'ís through their visits and the books they have written. While in residence in Haifa, they meet with the stream of Bahá'í pilgrims to the holy places of the Bahá'í Faith. Among their important duties is advising the Universal House of Justice and serving as members of the International Teaching Centre. Highlights of activities in which they engaged this year are detailed below.

The Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum led the four official representatives of the Bahá'í Faith at the Summit on the Alliance between Religions and Conservation held in the United Kingdom from 29 April to 4 May 1995. The Summit was convened in Windsor Castle, under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and attracted many prominent representatives of nine religions (see pp. 132–33 for further details).

From 29 June to 2 July, Rúhíyyih Khánum was present, as the honored guest, at the Regional Bahá'í Teaching Conference held in Tirana, Albania. About three hundred Bahá'ís attended the event from 18 different countries, many of them leaving directly from the conference to travel and share Bahá'u'lláh's message with people in the region. While Rúhíyyih Khánum was in Albania, she received a courtesy call from the President's daughter and granted a number of interviews to radio, television, and newspaper reporters.

From 14 to 17 October, she was featured as the keynote speaker at the Fourth International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society, held at the University of Maryland at College Park (see pp. 102–03).

Additional activities included her address on 22 May to a committee meeting of the House of Lords in the United Kingdom, called by Lord Clinton-Davis; her participation in a Bahá'í conference held in Fiuggi, Italy, in July, at which time she also addressed the opening session of a summer school for youth that followed the conference; and a 31 October interview broadcast on the Persian Service of Voice of America.

In Azerbaijan, the National Spiritual Assembly reached an agreement with the Education Ministry for use of the book *Mothers, Fathers and Children*, written by Hand of the Cause

'Alí-Akbar Furútan, as a textbook for moral education in schools and colleges. The book has now been published in eight languages and is widely available as an assistance in the raising of children. This year, as ever, Bahá'ís who visited the Bahá'í holy places in Israel came away with special memories of Mr. Furútan, whose unflagging resolve to join their evening gatherings and shower upon them his love and vast experience has won the hearts of thousands over the course of many years.

Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá served as the representative of the Universal House of Justice at the first National Convention of the Bahá'ís of Sicily, held in Palermo from 21 to 25 April 1995 (see pp. 52–53). He also attended the National Convention of Italy, offering encouragement and support to that community. Dr. Varqá, who is the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, took up residence in the Holy Land this year, joining Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánúm and Mr. Furútan in bringing inspiration to pilgrims and visitors and to those serving at the Bahá'í World Centre.

Prominent People

This year the Bahá'í World Centre saw a steady succession of visits from various ambassadors, embassy officials, and other notable people. On 5 January 1996, Lord Clinton-Davis, a cross-bencher in the House of Lords in the United Kingdom, came, accompanied by Lady Clinton-Davis and Eric Mark, Head of the Parliamentary Commission. Visiting ambassadors included Sven Erik Svedman of Norway, on 11 May 1995; Paulino Romero of Panama, on 2 June; Martin Indyk of the United States, on 11 July; Wojciech Adamiecki of the Republic of Poland, on 13 February 1996; and Arto Tanner of Finland, on 8 April. Officials were received from the Israeli embassy in New Delhi, India; and from the embassies in Israel of China, Poland, and the Republic of Korea. Other visitors included Andrew Joseph, Representative to the United Nations of the Director-General of the World Health Organization, on 17 May 1995; Professor Yehuda Haiut, president of Haifa University in Israel, along with about nineteen other professors and administrators from the university, the Mayor of Haifa, and other municipal staff members, on 29

November; the Mayor of Haifa again on 26 January 1996, with 40 trustees of the Haifa Foundation; and on 12 April, Nichiko Niwano, president of Rissho Kosei-Kai in Japan and president of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, along with Mrs. Yoshie Niwano and a delegation from Rissho Kosei-Kai.

Several Bahá'í communities had the honor of hosting government officials this year. President Amata Kabua of the Marshall Islands visited the Bahá'í House of Worship in Apia, Western Samoa, on 3 December 1995. President Kabua met with several members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Samoa, attended the Sunday service, and gave a speech in which he described his association with the Bahá'í Faith and its members. President Teburoro Tito of Kiribati attended a reception held in his honor by the Bahá'ís of the Mariana Islands during his visit to Guam on 14 January 1996. The reception included a luncheon and an address to the gathering by President Tito. Also in the Marianas, the First Lady of Saipan, the Honorable Grace Tenorio, was one of about 150 people to attend the Naw-Rúz party held on that island.

Bahá'ís have also continued their efforts to make contact with governmental leaders and heads of state, in order to offer to them the unique solutions to world problems contained in the teachings of their Faith. A representative of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom participated in the Commonwealth Day Observance at Westminster Abbey in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, held on 11 March 1996. The words of Bahá'u'lláh were included in



Visit of Senator Nick Bolkus, Australian Federal Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, to the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney, 26 November 1995.

the service for the first time and were broadcast around the world by the BBC World Service. As in previous years, the National Assembly's representative was introduced to the Queen and His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

On 21 April 1995, a Bahá'í group, including a number of youth, met with the President of Romania, the Minister of Youth and Recreation, the Representative of Religions in the Parliament, the Representative of Minority Rights in Romania, the officials of the Students' Union Against Racial Prejudice, and other prominent government officials. Bahá'í teachings on the unity of humankind were offered to the President.

A meeting was held with President Nelson Mandela of South Africa this year in order to present him with a statement on overcoming racial prejudice. A Bahá'í delegation also visited President Bakili Muluzi of Malawi, on 3 August 1995. The Bahá'ís briefly informed the President about the history and principles of their Faith, and presented him with a copy of *The Promise of World Peace* and other Bahá'í books. The President responded by expressing his happiness that the Bahá'ís are helping the government's program for alleviating poverty in rural areas, and he encouraged them to work on literacy and primary health care programs.

On the evening of 2 May 1995, members of the Bahá'í School Management Team of the Marshall Islands, together with members of the Schools Project Board and others, paid a courtesy visit to President Amata Kabua and the First Lady at their residence. The purpose of the visit was for the team members, who were all non-Marshallese, to greet the Head of State of the country, to express their appreciation for his continued support and guidance, and to update him on the progress of the Schools Project (see *The Bahá'í World 1994-95*, p. 128).

On 31 January 1996, the nine members of the Spiritual Assembly of Puerto Rico met with Governor Pedro Rosello in his office. Members of the Assembly offered the services of the Assembly and of the community to the government, while emphasizing the non-political character of the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'ís of Namibia presented information on the Bahá'í Faith,

including the statement *Bahá'u'lláh*, to a number of regional governors, council members, senior ministry officials and tribal chiefs. Additionally, on 25 April 1995, the First Lady, Mrs. Kovambo Nujoma, visited the home of a Bahá'í for tea and to receive the statement *Bahá'u'lláh* and other literature on the Bahá'í Faith.

A Bahá'í was asked to perform a song during the official celebrations held to mark the anniversary of the birth of President Theodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea. After the song, the youth personally gave to the President copies of *Call to the Nations*, *The Promise of World Peace*, a book of Bahá'í prayers in vernacular languages, and a book on consultation.

Her Highness Princess To'oa Tosi Malietoa, daughter of the Head of State of Western Samoa, paid a visit to Fiji in August. Some 600 people received her during her stay, including eight high chiefs and the elders of their tribes, to whom she presented copies of *The Prosperity of Humankind*. In addition, she talked about the Bahá'í Faith with prominent women and leading members of the government. Her Highness's tour was organized as part of the Ocean of Light Project.

Children

In the Bahá'í Faith, deeds of service and sacrifice belong to all alike, regardless of age. Children, too, are summoned to serve others, to share Bahá'u'lláh's message, and to work for the betterment of humanity. Bahá'ís believe that it is through good character and a sincere desire to serve humankind that the benefits of intellectual development can be revealed. For this reason, community efforts to train and educate Bahá'í children begin with moral classes.

The Bahá'í community of Niamey, Niger, takes advantage of the power of universal participation to bring Bahá'í teachings to its young people. "Almost every Bahá'í in town," according to one account, "is either a parent, a transporter, a teacher, a student, or a host to a Bahá'í class." Monthly study sessions are also held for the teachers during which a variety of teaching strategies are presented. The Bahá'í community of Yigo in the Mariana Islands hosts regular Bahá'í children's classes for almost 50 children

of various religious backgrounds. Parents of children who are not Bahá'ís often observe the classes. Two communal preschools managed by Bahá'ís in Managua, Nicaragua, received approval from the Ministry of Education to teach the Bahá'í Faith in classes through use of prayers, songs, celebrations of Bahá'í Holy Days, and various texts.



Participants in a Bahá'í teacher-training course held on 18 May 1995 in Myanmar.

In Panama, Oscar Torres Wilde, a Bahá'í, conducted a seminar on moral leadership at the Faculty of Education of the University of Panama which attracted the participation of various professors and students. A moral education seminar took place from 9 to 11 June

1995 in Bangkok, Thailand, attended by Bahá'ís from various ASEAN countries. Quito, in the northern sierras of Ecuador, was the scene for a workshop on moral leadership, which took place on 15 and 16 July 1995. The executive body of the Solomon Islands radio station has approved the use of *The Virtues Guide* for the content of a radio program sponsored by the Bahá'í community.

In India, the Inspector General of Prisons expressed to the National Spiritual Assembly her desire that the Bahá'ís take charge of training trainers for a moral education program that would reach more than 8,000 inmates in four prisons. In addition, the Bahá'ís were requested to provide audiovisual materials and books, as well as to make monthly visits to speak about spiritual matters to a general meeting of prisoners.

The Bahá'ís of Venezuela have developed classroom material for moral education in primary and secondary schools, which, in September 1995, were adopted by a regional school board. Principles of moral education were offered by Bahá'ís to school teachers in Costa Rica, Macau, Taiwan, Peru, and Russia (Chita). In January 1996, Universidad Núr, a large private university in

Bolivia, celebrated its tenth anniversary with a program held in Santa Cruz. The inspiration for Núr comes from the Bahá'í Faith. The first Bahá'í primary school of Madagascar was inaugurated on 29 May 1995 in Beravina Lovasoa, under the patronage of Mrs. Thérèse Zafy, the First Lady. The National Minister of Education and a number of other dignitaries also attended the ceremony.

In Tuvalu, a Bahá'í kindergarten which is registered by the government opened this year in the National Bahá'í Center. In February 1996, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Kwun Tong, in Hong Kong, held its first children's moral education class, in an estate facility. Before approving the Bahá'í classes, representatives of the estate observed how the Bahá'ís conducted a similar class and reviewed the proposed curriculum.



Universidad Núr in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, celebrated its tenth anniversary this year.

In Finland, the Bahá'í Child Education Committee organized a Nordic Conference on Child Education, which was held in Mariehamn from 13 to 16 April 1996. The theme was "Civic Education for an Emerging Global Society", and attendees came from Finland, Norway and Sweden. The Malawi Government's Ministry of Education and UNICEF invited Mrs. Nahid Mazloum, a Bahá'í of Malawi, to be the interim chairperson of the Sensitization Sub-Committee for launching a program of Malawi's Education for All. The launching day, 6 September 1995, was attended by the State President and the First Lady, as well as other dignitaries. The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation aired the opening prayer, offered by a Bahá'í child and then subsequently sung by a group of Bahá'í children.

On 21 and 22 November 1995 the Bahá'í community of Mongolia, representing the Bahá'í International Community, took part in a meeting in Ulaan Baatar of nongovernmental organizations whose aim was to promote the Convention on the

Rights of the Child. The event was organized by the Mongolian Development Center, an agency based on Bahá'í principles.

Youth

From the earliest days of the Bahá'í Faith's history, youth have played a special role in its promotion. Today's youth continue to contribute significantly by traveling, offering periods of full-time service, and engaging in special projects.

Many Bahá'í communities, in their efforts to foster positive action on the part of their youth, have established traveling performance groups known as Bahá'í youth workshops (see *The Bahá'í World 1994-95*, pp. 172-77).

In July, the Pillars of Peace Youth Group from Alberta, Canada, attended the Arctic Knights Conference in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada, and performed on several occasions: at the conference, at a downtown mall, at an alcohol and drug detoxification center, on the Hay River Reserve and in Kakisa, a native community. Their downtown performance was covered by CBC television and radio (the national media) and by the local newspaper, resulting in the group's being the lead story on the prime time news hour. At the native gathering held in Kakisa the youth were officially welcomed by the grand chief and invited to stay and participate in the council, which enabled them to perform and attend workshops.

Bahá'í Youth in Motion, a workshop in Ethiopia, carried out a well-received performance in July in the area of Nure, followed by a banquet lunch held at the local Bahá'í center. As a result, the coordinator of the American Peace Corps requested that the show be staged for his staff of 30 at the Teachers' College. The youth agreed and ultimately performed for more than 300 people, including teachers and students at the college. The youth also performed in the town of Awassa, where over one thousand people came to see the workshop in action, including members of the media.

Other youth workshops which were active this year include the Yakutsk Dance Workshop in Yakutia, Russia; Awake in the Netherlands; the Maui Youth Workshop in Maui, Hawaii; Panacea, composed of youth serving at the Bahá'í World Centre,

which traveled and performed for two weeks in Hungary; the Letters of the Living Project, which performed in Wallsend in the United Kingdom; the Youth for One World workshop from New Zealand, which traveled to Japan; the Dizzy Dance Theatre in Australia; and the Anchorage Bahá'í Youth Workshop in Alaska.

In addition to the efforts of youth workshops, youth engaged in a number of special endeavors to share the message of Bahá'u'lláh with the people of various areas. In the Sparks of Peace project, Bahá'í youth from all over the Caribbean went to Barbados for a two-week institute to study the Bahá'í teachings, and then split into five teams and spent two weeks teaching the Bahá'í Faith in Barbados, Tobago, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua, and Jamaica. A "youth movement" initiated in Orissa, India, resulted in the election of five new Local Spiritual Assemblies through an ambitious campaign covering 42 villages and cities in thirteen days. A youth group formed in the Czech Republic, engaging in such activities as regular visits to a home for the elderly, street teaching, and planning Holy Day observances. Anthems of Unity, their youth workshop, began offering performances. In Trinidad, two special teams were formed which focused on teaching the Faith and visiting Bahá'í communities to stimulate and encourage them.

The Youth for One World Bahá'í youth workshop from New Zealand performing on 9 August 1995 in the park in Nagasaki, Japan, which marks the place where an atomic bomb was dropped exactly fifty years before.



The Bahá'í youth of Zaire organized two days of reflection on 23 and 24 July 1995 on the theme of "Supporting Our Youth." The event took place in the Regional Bahá'í Center of Lubumbashi and was attended by over 200 people from various denominations and nongovernmental organizations, as well as the local



Mauritian Bahá'í youth visiting the President of the Republic and presenting to him a proposed contribution to a charter for the youth of Mauritius, July 1995.

authorities. Three young people traveled through Portugal to share the Bahá'í Faith, visiting Maia, Viana do Castelo, and Braga. The youth in Wa, Ghana, have formed an environmental group to help neighbors clean their surroundings free of charge and a football club as a way of teaching the Faith. Young Bahá'ís have been active in Seoul and Taejon, South Korea. A peace club and a dance workshop have been organized in each city and include the participation of both Bahá'í youth and those of other religions.

Members of the European Bahá'í Youth Council and youth from the American Bahá'í community participated in "Youth '95: Alliance for Progressive Global Change," a conference held in San Francisco, in the United States, from 17 to 20 June 1995. The event's chief organizers were Project Global 2000 and the World Federalist Association. It was also cosponsored by 52 international and national organizations and United Nations agencies, including the European Bahá'í Youth Council itself. Participants explored possible United Nations reform initiatives in light of the recommendations contained in the report of the Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood*. The Youth Council also sponsored a workshop on "Global Consciousness and the Bahá'í Faith," presenting the Bahá'í view of the individual's relationship to society and the world.

Eighty-one young Bahá'ís from six localities attended the Youth Music and Art Festival held on Majuro, in the Marshall Islands, from 25 to 30 December 1995. The enthusiasm and energy from the festival carried over to the National Deepening

Conference, also organized by the Youth Committee, which took place from 1 to 3 January 1996 on Majuro and which was also attended by the 81 youth.

The first Bahá'í Youth Camp was held in Georgia from 6 to 10 July 1995 "amidst luscious greenery, the environment being most suitable for meditation, prayer and contemplation." Fifty youth from all over Georgia attended the event. Bahá'í youth conferences were held in Bolivia, England, Germany, India, Madagascar, Malaysia, the Mariana Islands, and South Africa.

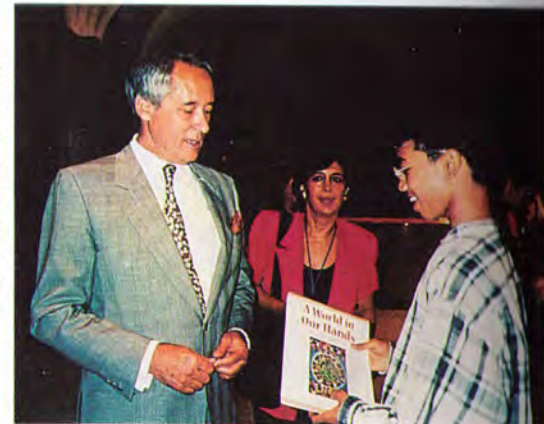
In addition to youth gatherings with diverse activities, Bahá'í communities often hold special study institutes for youth. The Bahá'í community of Argentina held a course entitled "Future Society" as one means of educating the youth. Some 25 facilitators traveled throughout the country during the year to hold classes. The aim is to transform the youth through the knowledge of Bahá'í texts and the promotion of learning. Youth study institutes were also held in Australia and Ireland.

Women

A particular emphasis is placed in the Bahá'í writings on the special contributions women will make to the peace process. This fact and the principle of the equality of men and women necessitate that systematic efforts be made both to assist women to reach their potential and to build families which assist this process.

Bahá'í women and men took part in a workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 30 September 1995 with a theme of "Health,

Singaporean Bahá'í youth Jordan Melic presenting France's UN ambassador with a copy of A World in Our Hands, which was commissioned by the UN and which he coedited.



number of years to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and at the time of the latter's passing was a student at Oxford University. His mastery of Persian, Arabic, and English, coupled with the authority conferred upon him by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the appointed interpreter of those writings, made him uniquely qualified to undertake their translation. He also translated a history of the Bábí Faith, authored a history of the first century of the Bahá'í Faith, called *God Passes By*, and wrote thousands of letters to communities and individuals around the world, elucidating passages from the writings, and thus giving direction and impetus to Bahá'í activities.

Development of the Administrative Order

Shoghi Effendi's work in developing the Bahá'í administrative order is one of the most dramatic legacies of his years as Guardian. The first step in this development was to encourage the organized, planned expansion of Bahá'í communities in places where local and national Bahá'í councils, known as Spiritual Assemblies, would eventually be established. The Guardian effected this global expansion of Bahá'í communities through a series of international plans that ran for varying numbers of years and during which twelve National Spiritual Assemblies were founded.

At the time of Shoghi Effendi's sudden passing in 1957, the Bahá'í community was in the middle of a global plan of expansion and consolidation called "The Ten Year Crusade." During this period, which concluded in 1963—the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His mission in the Garden of Ridván in Baghdad—the goal was to open 132 new countries and major territories to the Faith and expand existing communities in 120 countries and territories previously opened to the Faith. These ambitious targets were actually exceeded by the end of the plan, in spite of the difficulties posed by the Guardian's death.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in His Will and Testament, had authorized the continuation of the Guardianship through the appointment by the Guardian of a successor from among his own sons, should

he have them, or other direct descendants of Bahá'u'lláh. Such a designation was dependent upon the decision of Shoghi Effendi whether an individual could be named who met the demanding spiritual qualifications specified by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi had no children and died without designating such a Guardian to follow him. He had, however, taken steps toward the election of the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith which was to function, with him, as one of the two authorized successors provided for in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He had also appointed a number of individual Bahá'ís to an auxiliary institution of the Guardianship called "Hands of the Cause of God." These individuals had been charged with the duty of protecting the unity of the faith and collaborating with the National Spiritual Assemblies around the world to ensure that the goals of the Ten Year Crusade were won. Upon the passing of Shoghi Effendi, these persons gathered together to guide the Bahá'í community to the completion of the plan initiated by the Guardian and towards the first election of the Universal House of Justice, which took place in April 1963.

Conceived by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the institution of the Universal House of Justice is established on principles laid down in the Bahá'í sacred writings. Its election, by the members of the 56 National Spiritual Assemblies that existed in April 1963, clearly demonstrated the principle of unity so central to the Bahá'í Faith, with the nine elected members coming from four continents and representing a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Basing itself on the authority conferred on it by the Founder of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice has stood as the acknowledged central authority in the worldwide Bahá'í community since 1963. During the last 32 years, the Universal House of Justice has launched six global plans for the advancement of the Faith. From a worldwide population of 408,000 in 1963, the Bahá'í community has grown to approximately five million members; the number of National and

Harmony, and Human Rights of Women," sponsored by the United Nations Development Program. The participants of the Fifth Swiss Congress of Women, held from 19 to 21 January 1996, passed a resolution based on the Bahá'í submission which calls upon the Swiss government to include education for peace in the normal school curriculum, giving due consideration to the question of human rights and violence-free conflict resolution.

Six members of the Union Luxembourgeoise des Femmes Bahá'íes attended and presented a written statement to a public hearing on the status of women held by the Parliament of Luxembourg on 29 January and 2 February 1996. At the International Women's Conference held in Belarus from 24 to 26 November 1995, the Bahá'í model of consultation was hailed as an effective tool for conflict resolution. The Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women of the Eastern Caroline Islands was represented at an in-country workshop on counseling and interpersonal communication skills which was held on Yap from 11 to 15 December 1995. Swedish Bahá'í women were active and noticeable participants in the Women's Day ceremonies on 8 March 1996 in their country. Then from 19 to 21 April 1996 the Bahá'ís of Orebro, Sweden, participated in an exhibition focusing on the role of women in enterprises, held by the Women-Vision organization. A twenty-minute video entitled *Waves of One Sea* was produced by Token Productions on the women, and particularly Bahá'ís, from all over the continent of Africa who had gathered in Dakar, Senegal, in November 1994, for the 5th Preparatory Conference for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. The film was broadcast during the Beijing conference on 7 September 1995 by the 25 national affiliate broadcasters of WETV, a global access television network based in Canada.

Bahá'í communities are increasingly organizing events aimed at encouraging, educating, and empowering women. The Olinga Institute in Kerala, India, reported that its fifth course specially designed to promote the empowerment of women was held from 24 to 26 November 1995. Participants included many families.

The Bahá'í women of Ikot Oko Ibon, Nigeria, secured a piece of land to farm, using the proceeds to support women's activities

in the state. The women also conducted an institute on the Bahá'í Faith and family life.

In Kenya, the ninth annual National Women's Conference was held from 10 to 13 August 1995 in Nakuru. The theme of the conference was "Women and Peace." Women of the Bulgarian Bahá'í community held the first National Women's Seminar this year, organized by the European Task Force for Women. The theme of the seminar was "Encouragement." In the Baltic States, a seminar was held incorporating the three themes of "Encouragement, Transformation, and Service." The event was attended by five representatives of the three Baltic State Bahá'í communities, who gathered in Kaunas on 5 and 6 August 1995. Bahá'í women in the Czech Republic held a seminar on 18 and 19 November designed to encourage Bahá'í women to arise and use their talents to serve the Bahá'í Faith.

The European Task Force for Women sponsored a training course to assist Bahá'í women in "Becoming Ensigns of Peace." Held in Acuto, Italy, the course attracted 73 women from 26 countries.

The Minister of Social Affairs and Promotion of Women in Chad, Mrs. Achta Selgue, approached the Bahá'í community of N'Djamena this year to ask for help with organization of a program for Pan-African Women's Day. Consequently, the Bahá'í community hosted a public meeting for prayer and meditation and participated in a round table discussion about the status of women and eradication of poverty.

In honor of International Women's Day this year, the Bahá'í women of the Central African Republic offered an exhibition of

This tapestry, designed and assembled by Vickie Hu Poirier, a renowned American Bahá'í artist, was displayed for the first time at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Bahá'í women from around the world contributed to the piece.



sewing, soap-making and other handicrafts, as well as a display of books on women, and made a presentation on women in the Bahá'í world community during activities sponsored by the Organization of Women of Central Africa.

In Malawi, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Lilongwe sponsored a reception in celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March 1996. Participants included various people of prominence in Malawian society, including Mrs. F. Malewezi, the wife of the Vice-President.

In Gabon, a public conference on equality of rights of women and men was held in Libreville on 7 March, organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly to observe International Women's Day. Radio Africa No. 1, which is broadcast in all francophone countries of Africa, covered the event. Then on 8 March, a Bahá'í speaker kicked off a seminar organized by the Ministry of Women's Status in recognition of International Women's Day. The President of the Republic was in attendance, as well as the Minister of National Education, the wife of the Prime Minister and other personalities, the media and an audience of nearly 300 women from all over the country. The Bahá'í address was covered by a television channel and by *l'Union*, the national daily newspaper.

In Bariloche, Argentina, five distinguished women were honored by the Bahá'í community on 8 March to commemorate International Women's Day. The women were also interviewed for a program on a popular radio station. The National Spiritual Assembly of India's Office for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the All India Women's Conference, observed International Women's Day by holding a conference at the National Bahá'í Center on 15 March. The theme chosen was "Women and Men: Partnership for a Healthy Planet."

Various Bahá'í communities have arranged other types of events to promote the advancement of women and their participation in the peace process. In Nepal, David Walker has won acclaim for his work with women who are illiterate. Reports indicate that as Regional Director of PACT, a USAID organization, he has been instrumental in bringing literacy to 150,000

women a year in Nepal. His efforts were the subject of a documentary video, part of the *Visionaries* program by the Public Broadcasting System in the United States. Mr. Walker credits the Bahá'í Faith as the source of his inspiration for this work.

On Rarotonga, in the Cook Islands, the Bahá'ís held a public meeting on 9 October 1995 on the topic of the equality of women and men. More than thirty people attended the event, including a number of the island's prominent women.

A conference entitled "Active Role of Women in the New World Order," held in Adana, Turkey, on 7 April 1996, attracted 550 participants, including members of the Union of Adana Women's Associations, and on 9 April a live program was aired on local television in which Bahá'í views were discussed. L'Association bahá'ie de Femmes in France hosted on 20 January the symposium "Women—A Constructive Complementarity," held in Clemenceau Hall, at the Palais du Luxembourg, the seat of the French Senate.

Bahá'í women's committees all over the world have given special attention to family life, believing that the condition of women in society and family functioning powerfully affect each other. In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs invited the participation of the Bahá'ís in a two-day national workshop on the situation of displaced/dislocated families and street children, on 29 and 30 June 1995.

Chile hosted two events regarding women and family this year. On 3 and 4 June 1995 a conference in Labranza attracted participants from both north and south. On 30 September and 1 October the Local Spiritual Assembly of Puerto Montt hosted a meeting with the assistance of the Committee for Women and the Family for the South and the Bahá'ís of Bollilco, Loncopulle, Osomo, Temuco, and Valdivia.

Reports were received of two fora held in Malaysia on the subject of the family. The Office for the Advancement of Women organized a public forum on laws pertaining to the family, held 17 June 1995, in which the Minister of National Unity and Social Development participated. In Ipoh, the Local Spiritual Assembly sponsored a National Forum on Family on 1

October. The Bahá'ís of Sri Lanka also related news of two such events in their community this year. On 31 December a regional family conference was held in Colombo, and another was held in Adams Peak Estate on 7 January 1996.

The National Bahá'í Women's Committee of Albania held a conference from 27 to 29 October 1995 on the theme of "Man, Woman, Family, Society: In Search of a New Paradigm." Special efforts were made to include both women and men in this conference, and keynote talks and workshops were offered by Albanian professionals and Bahá'í speakers from Europe. Albanian State Television filmed part of the opening evening session, brief segments of which were shown on prime time news.

The special concern within Bahá'í communities for eradicating violence within families spurred seminars and conferences across the globe over the past year. On 5 November 1995 a symposium on creating a violence-free society was held by the Bahá'í community of Yokohama, Japan. During the event the need was cited to create unity-based families rather than families based on power and pleasure.

In Antigua, in the East Leeward Islands, a symposium was held from 24 to 26 May 1995 to consult on strategies for eradicating family violence. Representatives from eleven Caribbean nations, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the Caribbean Community Secretariat gathered for this event, which was cosponsored by the Bahá'ís of the East Leeward Islands, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and UNICEF.

On 15 April 1996 a seminar was held in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, on the "Violence-Free Family," attended by the Honorable Prince Ma'atu and his wife the Honorable Alaileula, who is the granddaughter of the Malietoa, the Head of State of Western Samoa; the speaker of the Legislative Assembly; the High Commissioner of Tonga to the United Kingdom; and the Head of the United States Peace Corps. Drs. Moojan and Wendi Momen, Bahá'ís from the United Kingdom, spoke about the causes of violence in the family and creating peaceful families. The seminar was also noteworthy in that it was the first time the issue of family violence had been addressed in that manner in Tonga.

In Gaborone, Botswana, a conference was arranged by the Bahá'í National Women and Child Education Committee which was entitled "Creating a Violence-Free Family," to follow up on issues raised during the United Nations Year of the Family. The formal program was followed by music, folk dancing, and a short dramatic presentation by the Gaborone Bahá'í youth.

The tragedies befalling families in war-torn areas of the world inevitably affect their most vulnerable members in especially brutal ways, as is apparent in the former Yugoslavia. The National Spiritual Assembly of the United States has participated in efforts to bring the issues of concern to women to the attention of those implementing the Dayton Accords. Because of these efforts, Katharine Cosby and Firuz Kazemzadeh of the United States Bahá'í community were invited by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton to a coffee reception at the White House on 29 January 1996 in recognition of ongoing humanitarian assistance to the people of Bosnia. The work of integrating women's concerns and issues more fully into the Bosnian peace process continues.

Cultural Events and Indigenous Bahá'ís

Members of the Bahá'í community of Canada participated in the first Sacred Assembly held between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples from 6 to 9 December 1995 in Hull, Quebec. The Bahá'í presence in the Assembly received media coverage in the form of three interviews for the official video, a television and a radio interview, and the airing by the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation of the Pow-Wow Eskimo Drum performance given by a Bahá'í, his presentation about the Faith, and an interview in the Inuktitut language.

On 24 and 25 November 1995, the Bahá'ís of Malaysia held a cultural festival in the Kapit Division, which included performances of Iban cultural dances, the reciting of "pantun" (poems), and field events for women and children.

The Bahá'í community of Coronado, Costa Rica, organized a celebration of the Day of the Cultures which was attended by about 1,500 people, including many school children. The highlight of the event was a performance by a group of Guaymí Bahá'ís who had traveled from their homes in the hills near the

Panamanian border to the program's site near the city of San José.

Approximately one thousand Inuit people from Greenland, Canada, Chokotka (Russia) and Alaska converged on Nome, Alaska, from 24 to 30 July 1995 in order to participate in the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. The Nome Bahá'í community contributed significantly towards the success of the event.

The Pacific Horizons International Conference, held in Auckland, New Zealand, from 10 to 13 January 1996, attracted over 1,500 Bahá'ís from 26 countries. The conference program was a blend of workshops, keynote speeches, and entertainment, with a focus on issues that affect indigenous people.

Patricia Locke, who is a Bahá'í from the United States, is the first Native American woman to win a MacArthur Fellowship. Mrs. Locke served as the chair of the Indigenous Women's Caucus at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and is the executor of an international institute dealing with Native American language issues. She has



helped seventeen American Indian nations establish post-secondary institutions on their reservations and has assisted Indian nations in enacting language, culture, and educational policies within the area of their jurisdictions.

Race Unity

In the United States and Canada, a great many significant gatherings were convened in various communities in honor of Race Unity Day, reflecting those Bahá'ís' continuing response to the special appeals addressed to them by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi for their "ceaseless exertions" in addressing this "most vital and challenging issue." The following are some representative examples.



Memorable moments from the Pacific Horizons Conference in New Zealand, January 1996: facing page, a Maori performance; this page, from top, a Samoan group; the children's presentation; a performance by Tongan visitors.



The Bahá'ís in Salt Lake City, Utah, organized a "Color Me Human" conference in late June/early July 1995 whose theme was "raising the first generation free of prejudice." The event was extremely successful, was attended by members of a number of Bahá'í Youth Workshops, and included the participation of about eighty Bahá'í youth in a local parade. The mayor of Salt Lake City proclaimed "Color Me Human" week, and the conference concluded with an outdoor festival.

A number of Bahá'í communities in Indiana participated in and hosted celebrations of Race Unity Day. The Bloomington Bahá'ís organized festivities in a park which included a presentation by a representative of Indiana University. In Fort Wayne, the Bahá'ís took part in the Black Expo, at which the Indian Dawnbreakers Bahá'í Youth Workshop performed and invited people to the next day's Race Unity Day program. Observances were also held in Gary and Indianapolis.

An observance of Race Unity Day in Peoria, Illinois, called upon the expertise of Reginald Newkirk, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada and a worker in the field of human rights and race relations for more than two decades. Mr. Newkirk spoke at a meeting on 10 June 1995 to students and parents of the group Tomorrow's Scientists, Technicians and Managers, at which the Central Illinois Bahá'í Youth Workshop also performed. The Mayor of Peoria declared 11 June "Race Unity Day."

On 10 June the Bahá'í community of Jackson-Madison County, Tennessee, were joined by Bahá'ís from Henderson and Decatur counties at the first-ever race unity gathering in the three neighboring counties, held at Jackson's Highland Park. A city councilman proclaimed "Race Unity Day" in Jackson.

From 22 to 25 February 1996, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Charleston, South Carolina, sponsored a conference with the theme of "Race Unity: A Prescription for the Healing of the Nation," during which an array of speakers "diagnosed" the problem of racial disunity and "prescribed" remedies from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Each year many Bahá'í communities in the United States take part in local events commemorating the life and work of Martin

Luther King Jr. In Torrance, California, Bahá'ís made an effort to unite diverse groups in the city on 14 January 1996 in the "Revitalize the Dream" event, dedicated to remembering and recommitting to Dr. King's dream of racial harmony.

Hard work on 1996's Martin Luther King Day events in Savannah, Georgia, earned the Bahá'ís an even greater role in the



Participants in a conference on racial unity organized by the Bahá'ís of Romania.

future. The Bahá'í community was one of the celebration's major sponsors, alongside various corporations, and Bahá'ís worked behind the scenes on several of the weekend's events, including the annual parade—billed as the nation's largest, as Atlanta's parade was not held this year. In addition, a Bahá'í was named to the mayor's newly formed Human Relations Commission.

At the end of March 1996, the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada presented its fourth annual Bahá'í Race Unity Award to Sylvia Hamilton, a noted filmmaker, human rights educator, published author, and coeditor and contributor to the first-ever collection on African-Canadian women's history.

Late April 1995 saw more than 30 students from schools throughout the Cowichan Valley in British Columbia, Canada, plus more than 70 students from the Maxwell International Bahá'í Secondary School, gather together for a conference entitled "Healing the Wounds of Racism," held at the Maxwell School in British Columbia.

For the fourth year in a row, many mayors across Canada proclaimed "Unity in Diversity Week," a concept originally put forward by the Bahá'í community. Educational fora, multicultural suppers, pancake breakfasts and many arts evenings with

entertainment from representatives of different cultures were held. The focus of Unity in Diversity Week is to celebrate diversity as a source of strength and unity.

Efforts to promote race unity are not exclusive to American and Canadian Bahá'í communities. In Bermuda, the Bahá'í community organized a concert in Victoria Park, Hamilton, in celebration of Race Unity Day. Subsequently, the House of Assembly of Bermuda voted to send a letter of thanks and congratulations to the Bahá'í community.

From 27 May to 3 June 1995, the Bahá'í community of Rockdale, Australia, in association with other concerned groups in that country, hosted a week of prayer for reconciliation between non-Aboriginal Australians and Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The Honorable George Thompson of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, who was asked to give an address, later spoke in Parliament about the program.

The Albury and Wodonga Bahá'í communities of Australia held their annual multicultural evening on 24 June 1995 to commemorate National Refugee Week. Held at the Wodonga Civic Center, the event attracted 400 people of 30 different nationalities. The Honorable Lou Liebermann, Federal Member for Indi, opened the evening.

On 24 March 1996, the Council of Churches of Leiden, the Netherlands, held an interreligious meeting on Anti-Racism Day with the cooperation of the Bahá'ís of Leiden and Leiderdorp, a Buddhist group, representatives of several Christian churches, and a Muslim community. The motto of the event was "Unity in Diversity." The program included a performance by the Bahá'í youth workshop Awake and the reading of a few Bahá'í texts on the theme.

On 19 August 1995 in Hawaii, as part of the activities for Aloha Peace Week, which commemorates the end of World War II, Joy DeGruy Leary offered insights into "Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury" during a seminar held on the university of Hawaii campus. More than 70 people attended the event. Mrs. Leary, a cultural diversity consultant and a Bahá'í, stated that world peace will only be

established after the long-standing prejudices that separate people are abolished.

Peace

Innumerable presentations, big and small, are made on the subject of peace each year by Bahá'í communities throughout the world. The following are just a few of the efforts which have taken place in the Bahá'í world this year.

The Bahá'ís in the Congo played a leading role in the organization of the World Peace Day observance held on 19 September 1995 at the United Nations Information Center in that country. The Bahá'í speaker represented all the national religious communities at the event.

The Bahá'ís of Quetta, Pakistan, organized a peace walk on 17 September 1995, involving about 1,300 students from six different boys' schools. The walk ended at the Bahá'í Center in Quetta, where 2,000 gas balloons were released.

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Athens, Greece, decided to create a poster in commemoration of the United Nations International Day of Peace. The text was quoted from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "...let us try...peace, and if the results of peace are bad, then we can choose...to go back to the old state of war!" As the Bahá'ís put up the posters during September they met with many positive responses. The quotation was published in *Athens News* on 19 September 1995.

More than one hundred people attended a celebration of International Peace Day on 17 September 1995 at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Panama City, Panama. The celebration included a devotional program and presentations on peace.

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Puerto de la Cruz in the Canary Islands organized a series of activities for World Day of Prayer for Peace on 24 September. The theme for the effort, which was supported by the municipality and a number of civic organizations, was "United for Peace."

The Fourth Festival for International Understanding, organized by Bahá'ís, was held in Altenkirchen, Germany, on 21 May 1995, with the motto "World Peace through World Unity," under the patronage of the Minister of State for the Interior and

Sport in Rhineland-Palatinate. The event was also attended by the district council president, the mayor and some 450 guests.

This year on World Environment Day, soil from sixteen additional countries was deposited into the Peace Monument in Brazil.¹ The countries which contributed soil this year were the Bahamas, Bermuda, Guinea, Jordan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Latvia, Malaysia, New Caledonia, Peru, Romania, the Philippines, the Slovak Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Ukraine, and Vanuatu, bringing to 84 the total number of nations and territories contributing thus far. This year's ceremonies were attended by approximately 200 people, including diplomats from Switzerland, Latvia, and Romania, and the Secretary of the Environment for the state of Rio de Janeiro.



*The Peace Pavilion,
Dartmouth, Nova
Scotia, Canada,
dedicated on
24 June 1995.*

On 16 June 1995 in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada, the foreign ministers attending the conference of the "Group of Seven" richest industrial nations (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) being held in Halifax officially unveiled the World Peace Pavilion. On 24 June, more than 500 people came to the pavilion to celebrate peace and to participate in its local dedication. The idea of the World Peace Pavilion was conceived in 1989 by a group called Metro Youth for Global Unity, whose members were from various cultural and religious backgrounds, including the Bahá'í

Faith. The words of Bahá'u'lláh, "Let your vision be world-embracing," are inscribed in the concrete of the monument in letters 25 centimeters high, extending across fourteen meters. For the inauguration, Dartmouth's mayor, a federal member of Parliament, and the Premier of Nova Scotia all gave short talks applauding both the spirit of the project and the initiative of the youth who had begun it.

Interfaith Activities

On 13 August 1995, an "Interfaith Gathering for Peace with Justice" was held at Kakaako Waterfront Park in Honolulu, Hawaii, officially kicking off the Aloha Peace Week. A peace offering was made on behalf of the Hawaiian Bahá'í community in the form of conch shell blowing, and the Hawaiian Institute of the Bahá'í Faith offered sacred Hawaiian chants and sang the words of Bahá'u'lláh which begin "Blessed is the spot."

Each year one of the major churches in the Bhunya region of Swaziland holds a unity night vigil, the purpose of which is for the different churches to gain a better understanding of each other's beliefs and activities. The Bahá'ís have been invited to participate each year; this year they were able to introduce an audience of about 450 to the Faith and to offer Bahá'í songs.

On 5 November 1995, Bahá'ís of Drogheda, Ireland, were the only non-Christian group represented at a special ecumenical service held to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the arrival of Augustinian friars in the area. The President of the Republic of Ireland, Mary Robinson, was in attendance at the ceremony, during which a verse from Bahá'í writings was read. The Bahá'í Faith was one of the four faiths featured in a symposium organized by the Faculty of Catholic Theology of Burgos, in Spain, for the study of leading monotheistic religions, attended by the Archbishop of Burgos.

Other interfaith activities in which Bahá'ís participated this year included the following: on 30 July 1995, Bahá'ís in the Cook Islands participated in and sang three songs for a national prayer service organized by the Religious Advisory Committee and attended by over 1,000 people, including the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister; Bahá'ís participated in an interreligious

¹ See also *The Bahá'í World 1992-93*, pp. 185-87, *The Bahá'í World 1993-94*, p. 135, and *The Bahá'í World 1994-95*, p. 147.

gathering held on 6 August in the gardens of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's offices in Paris, France, offering writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá during the service; and from 19 to 22 October in Geneva, Switzerland, Bahá'ís offered their perspective during a program featuring round table discussion about teaching tolerance in schools.

Bahá'ís have taken a central role in interfaith efforts initiated since the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in the United States. A Bahá'í was elected chairman of Interfaith Disaster Recovery of Greater Oklahoma City, and the new organization's mission statement begins with the words of Bahá'u'lláh "So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth." The mission statement has been distributed to all churches and synagogues in the area, as well as to governmental and other agencies involved in cleanup and recovery.

The Bahá'ís of Angola are now represented on a Council of the National Institute of Religious Affairs in Angola, which has the task of coordinating the activities of the various religious organizations in the country. The Bahá'í representative has also been invited to participate in a Commission for Humanitarian Assistance.

World Religion Day observances sponsored by Bahá'í communities in Singapore, Tanzania, and Sri Lanka each involved the participation of leaders of various religions.

Environment

David Chittleborough was the representative of the Bahá'í International Community at the Earth Charter Workshop, held at the Peace Palace in The Hague from 29 to 31 May 1995. The intent of the Earth Charter is to set out the moral imperatives of sustainable development as well as norms and standards for state and interstate behavior. Former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, R. Lubbers, chaired and addressed the opening session of the workshop, as did the heads of the two partners for the Earth Charter Initiative, Mikhail Gorbachev as President of Green Cross International and Maurice Strong as Chairman of the Earth

Council. During the workshop, several interventions were made giving the Bahá'í perspective on global environmental problems. At the end of the workshop, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands invited a group of about ten members to a reception and lunch which she and Prince Claus held in Noordeinde Palace. At that event, Dr. Chittleborough was introduced to the Queen as the representative of the Bahá'í International Community.

The Bahá'í community of Brazil, through its Office of the Environment and Development (EMAD), participated in ECO APLICADA 95, the Third Latin American Encounter of Environmental Educators, from 12 to 15 October in Rio de Janeiro. Parallel to the encounter, the Second International Show of Ecological Video Tapes took place. The video of the Bahá'í environmental art education project "Tomorrow Belongs to the Children" received two prizes.

The Bahá'í International Community was invited to send a representative to participate in the "Revelation and the Environment" symposium sponsored by the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church and held from 20 to 27 September on a cruise ship based in Piraeus, the main port for Athens, Greece. William Hatcher, as the Bahá'í representative, presented a paper.

From 21 to 26 April 1995, an exhibition of children's art from 38 different countries around the world was held at the Singapore Science Center. Entitled "Our Fragile Environment," the exhibition consisted of 220 pieces of artwork mounted onto specially designed and individually decorated canvas panels. The event was jointly organized by the Bahá'í Office of the Environment for Singapore and its counterpart in Taiwan, where the exhibition was first shown.

The Bahá'í Office of the Environment for Taiwan, with the assistance of the Nantou and Tsaotun Bahá'í communities, and the sponsorship of the Jong Hsin New Village Provincial Library, held a showing of the Second Annual International Children's Art Exhibition "Animals and Me" from 17 to 22 October.

From 27 January to 4 February 1996, the Bahá'í community of Macau organized an exhibition resulting from an international

art contest for children to promote environmental awareness. Four schools then invited Bahá'ís to conduct workshops for their students which used games and activities to help teach the children to preserve the environment.



Activity associated with the International Children's Art Exhibition "Animals and Me," held in Macau in early 1996.

Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women in Madhya Pradesh. About 200 women and men gathered for this conference, which was the first of its kind to be held in the area.

Three students from PRODES, a social development program, organized a seminar held in Santa Ana, El Salvador, on 10 November 1995. The event was entitled "Working for Our Future and the Environment," and presenters offered comments on "Approaches to the Environmental Crisis," "Reconceptualizing the Environmental Problem," and "Alternative Solutions—A Moral Perspective."

Social and Economic Development

From 5 to 16 June 1995, ten Bahá'ís in Vanuatu took part in the Literacy Awareness Workshop in Tanna, sponsored by the National Community Development Trust. Following the participation of three Bahá'ís in a literacy training workshop at the beginning of 1995, an agreement was made between the Bahá'í community and the Literacy Association of Vanuatu for the funding of a three-year literacy project. The Bahá'ís are to offer trainers and trainees.

The Bahá'ís of India marked 1995 World Environment Day with a special conference in the village of Sondhwa, organized with the assistance of local women's groups and of volunteers from twenty villages in the Dhar and Jhabua districts and under the auspices of the

The National Spiritual Assembly of Guinea is operating a Bahá'í Village Schools project, consisting of three phases: establishing schools in four villages during a period of three years; literacy training for the women of the same villages; and a social and economic development project with a special emphasis on women. As of 1995, seven communities were involved in the project, with three villages in phase one, three in phase two, and one in phase three.



Children's environmental activity, Macau, 23 July 1995.

The Bahá'í community of Pakistan reported that it held its first national conference on social and economic development on 26 December 1995 in Rawalpindi. Projects included a tree planting, free medical or eye camps, and academic tutoring.

In Uganda, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Nabyoto initiated a number of social and economic development activities, including working with other concerned parties to begin adult literacy classes. The Bahá'ís of Dalkeith Estate, Sri Lanka, began conducting a class in English and one for literacy which has a focus on women. The Bahá'ís of Guyana are involved in several initiatives, including the development of a pilot literacy project targeting preadolescent youth.

On 5 August 1995, ten members of the Radio Bahá'í Institute in the Philippines completed a course on broadcasting, which featured hands-on training in programming, production, and broadcasting. One of the goals of Radio Bahá'í is the upliftment of the social, economic and cultural life of the people. The sixth seminar for Bahá'í radio stations was held in Vinto, Bolivia, from 3 to 13 February 1996, with radio personnel from the five Latin American stations—Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile—as well as Radio Bahá'í in the United States.

The third North American Bahá'í Conference on Social and Economic Development took place in Orlando, Florida, United States, from 21 to 26 December 1995. The conference had as its theme "Paths to Peace: Global Prosperity through the Advancement of Women, Human Rights, and Moral Development," and was attended by about 800 people from 28 countries. Guests of honor at the event were the Honorable Luiz Gushiken, member of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, and David Hofman and David Ruhe, former members of the Universal House of Justice. Eight National Assemblies sent representatives.

The emphasis in the Bahá'í Faith on service to humanity finds expression in a number of ways in community life. One such expression is the contribution to the health of various segments of society. The organization Health for Humanity joined with the University of Tirana in Albania to hold the first International Medical/Surgical Conference of Tirana, on 30 and 31 May and 1 June 1995. The event attracted more than four hundred Albanian physicians and 34 visitors from Switzerland, Holland, Spain, the United States, Canada, England, France, and Germany. Twenty Albanians and 16 visiting professors made 38 presentations in surgery, internal medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, and pediatrics. The national television aired a summary of the scientific proceedings and some interviews four times a day throughout the country. 1995 was also the first year of Health for Humanity's project to improve eye care in Albania, with a goal of reducing vision loss and blindness in that country.



Family greenhouse project sponsored by the Mongolian Development Center, an agency based on Bahá'í principles. The project aims at encouraging families to grow vegetables, thus improving the nutrition of children.

Village representatives in Vientiane, Laos, purchase cement rings for two water-wells destroyed by floods, October 1995.



The Bahá'ís of Côte d'Ivoire are taking part in a nationwide effort to eliminate river blindness. Local Bahá'í communities participated this year in distributing the medicine used to combat the disease.

In February 1996, the Bahá'í Health Agency of South Africa, with the assistance of that of the United Kingdom, carried out a health care project in Polini in which 60 people were served by a doctor and nurses. The doctor, who is a Bahá'í, also addressed the women in the village about child care, hygiene and primary health care and gave a presentation to the students of two schools on primary health care. This same health agency assisted the community of Zingqayi in conducting a feasibility study and submitting to the authorities a request for a supply of water to the area.

The continuing problem of polio was highlighted in a health project in Uganda, jointly funded by the Bahá'í community and the Canadian Public Health Authority. The objectives of the campaign were to increase immunization coverage against the six "killer diseases" and to improve general health through health education in the community. As a result of the campaign, immunization coverage has been shown to have doubled or tripled in more than half the communities where health workers have been trained, new immunization centers have been established, at least 80 percent of the communities have cleaned their water sources, some have collected funds and repaired their boreholes and others are building protected springs, and there are an increased number of pit latrines in many villages.