

Human Rights and the Rights of the Child: Implications for Children's Participation in the Bahá'í Community

BY GREG DULY

Although subject to the criticism of promoting "...a certain culturally specific 'Western' model,..."¹ international human rights, both in conceptual and legislative terms, is gaining increasing importance as a normative framework for the guidance and protection of humankind.² Nevertheless, the validity of the universality of human rights, particularly as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) developed in 1948³, is potentially undermined by questions about its provenance (i.e. having been established by a small group of mostly Western nations) and perceptions of cultural insensitivity.⁴

In regard to children's rights, however, these criticisms are significantly diminished. Children's rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children (CRC) which was adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly in November 1989. In contrast to the UDHR, the consultative process that resulted in the CRC occurred over a ten-year period and involved all members States of the United Nations. Importantly, between 1989 and 1999, the CRC was ratified by all but two countries—Somalia and the United States of America. Thus, theoretically, at least, the CRC, as a conceptual framework and legal instrument, should have legitimate claim to a universally accepted set of principles, norms and standards. Notwithstanding this achievement questions remain. Less so regarding the issue of the universality of the CRC and its broad intent than with its implementation at country level where the norms and standards embodied in it encounter local cultural values and attitudes about children that would appear to diverge from the intent of the Convention.

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Whilst the international debate surrounding children's rights may appear remote and esoteric to national and local Bahá'í communities, recent messages from the Universal House of Justice⁵ regarding the role of children in community life strikes a resonant chord with the current global focus on children's rights hence necessitating an examination of the ethics and principles underpinning these rights instruments and their relevance to the process of carrying "...forward an ever-advancing civilization"⁶ as well as the ultimate goal of the Bahá'í Faith—the unity of the human race. To this end, this paper will explore several key human rights issues of relevance to the Bahá'í community.

First, the author will investigate the issue of the universality of rights in light of criticism from cultural relativists. Second, the author will endeavour to resolve concerns about the secular nature of rights instruments by exploring the possibility that human and children's rights may, in fact, have spiritual, or religious influences. Finally, the paper will look more specifically at the relevance of child rights and prospects of children's participation in the Bahá'í community. Whilst the author will offer suggestions regarding the implications to the Bahá'í community of a rights orientation, it should be noted that this paper is not intended to present a definitive statement on this subject. Rather, it is the author's hope that this paper will provoke thought and contribute to an on-going examination of the significance of the messages from the Universal House of Justice and international child rights instruments concerning the historical relationships between adults and children, institutions and children, as well as the prescriptive and traditional attitudes about the roles and responsibilities children can undertake in the Bahá'í community in the pursuit of world unity.

The Universality of Human Rights: A Universal Truth or Cultural Imperialism?

Bahá'u'lláh taught that an equal standard of human rights must be recognized and adopted. In the estimation of God all men are equal; there is no distinction or preferment for any soul in the dominion of His justice and equity.⁷

Between 1853 and 1892, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, issued a series of Tablets and Letters that, when taken together, could be regarded as an embryonic form of a human rights charter. One of the underlying conceptions of Bahá'u'lláh's implied rights framework is the principle of universality. Correspondingly, the concept and indeed the feasibility of human rights⁸ as a normative framework, particularly as expressed in the UDHR, rests upon this

same principle—a presumption of universality. That is to say, the principles, standards and norms proclaimed in the Declaration are shared by all members of the human family regardless of race, religion, gender, nationality, socio-cultural status, and so forth. This issue of the universality of human rights is extremely significant as “...there can be no prospect of the universal application of [human] rights unless there is, at least, substantial agreement on their concept, scope and content.”⁹ The principal of universality is supported by two underlying concepts: a) an aspirational aspect, i.e. that all peoples of the world share a desire for and a belief in these rights, and b) an entitlement component, i.e. that all people are entitled to these rights and that this entitlement—a terminology incorporating both moral and legal considerations—is a function of one’s membership in the human race.

Unsurprisingly, the claim of universality of human rights is challenged by “...some real skepticism.”¹⁰ Economist and Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, postulates that this scepticism can be grouped into three basic categories: the legitimacy critique, the coherence critique, and the cultural critique.¹¹ Whilst all three critiques are relevant to the principle of universality, the analysis of this paper will focus on the cultural critique in that cultural relativists are among the strongest critics of the universality principle.

The claims of the cultural relativists regarding the purported lack of universality of human rights revolve around the following themes: a) limited participation in the development of the UDHR, b) a disproportionate emphasis on Western libertarian notions about individual autonomy without due regard for the value of collective social responsibility, and c) the secular tone of the Declaration and the human rights discourse that appears to devalue the role of religion as a social force and as a source of individual inspiration and contentment.

Limited participation in the development of the UDHR refers to the fact that at the time the Declaration was proclaimed (1948) only 58 countries participated in the dialogue and of these only 48 assented to its adoption.¹² The critics argue that since the Declaration had been drawn up without their participation it cannot be considered truly universal.¹³ In response, human rights apologists such as Dato’ Param Cumaraswamy, the Chairman of the Law Association for Asia and the Pacific Standing Committee on Human Rights, point out that despite the fact that the majority of the current member States of the United Nations did not participate in the drafting and adoption of the Universal Declaration in 1948, it should be “...realised that the... declaration came under close scrutiny as recently as 1993¹⁴ [at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna] and was reaffirmed by 171 member States.” ... These States adopted by consen-

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sus the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which [confirmed that]... 'The universal nature of these rights and freedoms is beyond question.'"¹⁵

Whilst the Bahá'í Faith is a proponent of the principle of universality, it does not argue its case in a manner that dichotomises the universality and relativist discourses. Although the universality of human rights is a foundational principle, the Bahá'í Faith acknowledges the validity of certain relativist arguments. Promoting universality without recognising bona fide culturally specific values and norms would be akin to proposing a global form of cultural homogeneity or uniformity. Clearly, the Bahá'í position straddles the two worldviews in a way that could be interpreted as ambiguous and non-committal. This interpretation would be incorrect, however, as explicated by Shoghi Effendi¹⁶ in the following citation:

Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it¹⁷ 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. Its watchword is unity in diversity...¹⁸

The reference to the primacy of individual autonomy pertains to notions about individual rights and freedoms as contrasted against, according to the relativists, the norms of other cultures that place high value on the concepts of collective responsibility (to the family, to the community, and to the state), loyalty, and discipline.¹⁹ Whilst this reasoning is compelling, both Cumaraswamy and Sen present two persuasive counter arguments. The first is that the "Western values" argument is most frequently made by the leaders of authoritarian institutions (e.g. both governmental and traditionalist religious bodies) who could be said to have a vested interest in diminishing the importance of individual human rights. Indeed, Cumaraswamy contends that these authority figures do not accurately represent the aspirations of their people who support the principle of the universality.²⁰ Regarding the second argument, Sen posits that in order for the relativists' claims to hold true one should not be able find historical evidence of individual rights and freedom as value system in these

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cultures. This, however, is disproved by Sen who presents multiple examples to the contrary. "In sum," according to a report on the Ramsey Colloquium, "...an integrated reading of the Declaration makes clear that it is neither individualistic nor statist, but a charter of rights for the flourishing of persons in community."²¹

A Bahá'í perspective on this particular issue is instructive. Bahá'í literature suggests that the concepts of the rights of the individual and the rights of the collective (family, community, nation) are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it would appear that they are mutually reinforcing as the following citations demonstrate:

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed.²²

Concern that each human being should enjoy the freedom of thought and action conducive to his or her personal growth does not justify devotion to the cult of the individual that so deeply corrupts many areas of contemporary life. Nor does concern to ensure the welfare of society as a whole require a deification of the State as the supposed source of humanity's well-being... Only in a consultative framework made possible by the consciousness of the organic unity of humankind can all aspects of the concern for human rights find legitimate and creative expression... 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.²³

In reference to the secular nature of human rights deliberations, the concern here is that whilst mention is made to the freedom of worship in the Universal Declaration,²⁴ the contemporary discourse is conducted in a form and a manner that appears to diminish the role of religion as a social force and religious tenets as normative frameworks. This subject will be discussed at greater length in the following section.

In summary, the author endeavoured to examine the pivotal yet contentious issue of the universality of human rights and concluded that the concept has been subjected to sufficient debate as to permit the human race to accept that:

All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. [And that] The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner on the same footing and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.²⁵

Equally, the author posited that the inherent tensions between the principle of universality and cultural relativists need not be dichotomised by rights promoters, world and religious leaders, and civil society. Rather, they should encourage a dialectic that will, through a consultative process, achieve coherence and unity of thought on this issue.

Human rights - An expression of spiritual values?

One of the ironies of the human rights debate is that the concept is largely perceived to have originated in a context of Western secular liberalism.²⁶ This perception is aided by the fact that the contemporary rights discourse is influenced by classical modernism and a positivist interpretation of the philosophy of natural law.²⁷ On the contrary, religious contributions to the development of human rights concepts are historically rather significant and quite direct. This connection can be traced to the development of natural law which is widely accepted to be the precursor to the concept of human rights. Whilst worldviews about natural law have been heavily influenced by Hobbesian thought (e.g. the notion that, motivated purely by self-interest, human beings agree to give up their more unsociable freedoms in exchange for peace), there is evidence establishing its numinous qualities. Thomas Aquinas, for example, asserted that “natural law is a special subset of the divine law which pertains to moral behaviour, and is accessible to everyone through reason - including unbelievers.”²⁸ Enlightenment philosophers, such as Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke, Clarke, and Paley acknowledged that the will of God, as our Creator, becomes the highest natural law and that “...our moral duties arise from this mandate and, in turn, these moral duties lead to civil and international laws.”²⁹

This belief system is not limited to Christian philosophers and theologians. Islam and Judaism also subscribe to a belief in a “...universal moral law rooted in the righteousness of God...” and the principle that “[s]ince human beings are created in the image of God and loved by him [*sic*] as individuals each is worthy of dignity and respect.” Furthermore, with reference to the UDHR itself, Damien Keown, a scholar of Indian Religion, submits that “...each of the thirty articles of the Universal Declaration shows them to be in harmony with early Buddhist teachings both in letter and in spirit.”³⁰

Bahá'í scripture contains numerous references to human rights. Not only do Bahá'í writings attribute a spiritual or divine source for human rights, Bahá'u'lláh, proffered many formulations on the subject of rights that, as already mentioned, could be regarded as a notional basis for a Human Rights Charter, as well as an international code of conduct, and a legal framework for human rights administration. Examples of these writings include, *inter alia*, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (The

Book of Laws), Bishár'at (Glad Tidings), Tarázát, (Ornaments), Tajalliyát (Effulgences), and Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise).³¹ Due to the vastness of the body of His work, a reproduction of these and other writings of Bahá'u'lláh are beyond the scope of this paper.³² Briefly, however, the rights principals articulated in His works are echoed in many of the concepts and principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other rights instruments. Examples include, *inter alia*: the inherent nobility of human beings, the equality of humankind, the protection of the rights of any member of the human race, the equality of women and men (and the importance of educating women), the protection of minority rights, the right to independently investigate Truth, the harmony of science and religion, religious harmony and tolerance, the elimination of poverty, and the establishment of international structures and regulatory institutions endowed with the mandate to establish and ensure human security and world peace. The essence of Bahá'u'lláh's writings on these subjects has been provided in summary form by His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá³³ and is provided in Annex I, although interested readers are encouraged to seek the original texts.

Establishing the spiritual origins of human rights is a matter of some consequence. If the human rights discourse is bound to a positivist, or modernist, paradigm, humanity's capacity to fully actualise the potential inherent in rights concepts is likely to be circumscribed. If Hobbes' self-interest postulate is to be accepted as the norm, what motivation is there for humanity to internalise and acts in ways that respects the UDHR's pivotal principle of inherent human dignity? Surely, a resigned compliance to international law will not create social norms wherein human rights flourish and human beings will live in a world characterised by sustainable peace, security and co-operation in the truest sense of these terms. An awareness of the divine source of human rights and indeed life itself "...endows us with the capacity for self-transcendence."³⁴ In other words, a willingness to freely commit one's self to the types of personal and social behaviour required to make the world truly peaceful and secure. Speaking to the issue of the spiritual origins of human rights, Vaclav Havel contends that :

"Politicians at international forums may reiterate a thousand times that the basis of the new world order must be universal respect for human rights, but it will mean nothing as long as this imperative does not derive from the respect of the miracle of Being... Only someone who submits to the authority of the universal order and of creation... can genuinely value himself and his neighbours, and thus honor their rights as well."³⁵

This is a sentiment which reinforces 'Abdu'l-Bahá 's assertion that :

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All who hold fast to the one reality will be in agreement and unity. Then shall the religions summon people to the oneness of the world of humanity and to universal justice; then will they proclaim equality of rights and exhort men to virtue and to faith in the loving mercy of God.³⁶

In light of An-Na'im's argument that "...there can be no prospect of the universal application of [human] rights unless there is, at least, substantial agreement on their concept, scope and content"³⁷ the recognition of the sacred origins of human rights carries with it significant implications for overcoming the dichotomy between the so-called secular and relativist worldviews. What can, in the final analysis, galvanise the requisite unity of thought and purpose in a world riven by factionalism, fanaticism, materialism, militant nationalism, secularism, racial and gender bigotry, ecclesiasticism, and scepticism? If the solution were merely an acknowledgement of the divine nature of human rights, what then has prevented the religions of the world from overcoming the barriers to human security? It would appear, historically at least, that religions have approached the rights dialogue from a particularist perspective, i.e. some religious leaders have fuelled the relativist arguments either out of self-interest or due to the lack of a vision of humanity that could transcend their respective orthodoxies. The Bahá'í writings, however, suggest that the recognition of the divine origins of human rights can indeed create a powerful tool for achieving human security and engaging "the world's population in assuming responsibility for its collective destiny" when conducted within a "consciousness of the oneness of humankind."³⁸

The fact that this consciousness is emerging among the world's religions can be attested to by the development of a document known as the Declaration towards a Global Ethic which is grounded in the conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family and a belief that a common set of core values can be found in the teachings of all the world major religions. Many of the principles contained in the Declaration concern human rights. Additionally, the Declaration considers the universal recognition of human rights and human dignity by the religions of the world as the cornerstone of a "new global order."³⁹ An excerpt from this Declaration is reproduced in Annex II.

Clearly, providing sufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate the sacred nature of human rights is a challenge of immense proportions. Whilst eminent persons such as Vaclav Havel assert that human rights are endowed by God, secular human rights activists argue, on the other hand, that placing respect for human rights and faith in God into the same concept violates one of the tenets of human rights e.g. the right to deny the existence of God. This paper submits, though, that the secular and religious perceptions are essentially compatible on

this point. Whilst activists express this right as the freedom to choose one's belief system (including atheism), the Founders of the world's major religions articulate this right as free will, or agency. In other words, the decision to accept the existence of God must be voluntary and borne from informed awareness and rational thought rather than blind faith. This concept receives comprehensive treatment in the Bahá'í writings.

In conclusion, the author argues that respect for human rights will be strengthened through a recognition of two basic concepts. First, that human rights are God-given rights and, secondly, a consciousness of the organic oneness of the human race. These concepts will enable humanity to transcend both the secular paradigm that can alienate the "...billions of people who structure their daily routines around spiritual practices..." and to free humanity from the traditional religious practices that many suspect of particularism and power abuse.⁴⁰ The spiritual origins of human rights suggests important implications for understanding the potential roles and responsibilities for children in their personal development as well as development of community life; a point that will be explored in the following section of this paper.

Children's Rights: A Consensus Enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child

One of the many implications of the principle of the universality of human rights is that children are also rights holders with entitlements as well as capabilities and responsibilities to act as agents of social change. Whilst this may seem self-evident in this day and age, an historical examination reveals rather shocking attitudes towards children over the years. In European societies of the eighteenth Century, for example, children were deemed to be property of their parents. Dr. Judith Ennew, a member of the Centre for Family Research at Cambridge University, observes that :

[I]n England, child abduction was not theft in the legal sense unless the child happened to be dressed. The thief was regarded as having stolen the clothes. Apart from that, child theft was tantamount to stealing a corpse. In the case of both a dead body and a live child, no legal person was involved.⁴¹

Three hundred years later the litany of violations against and deprivations of children continues to make depressing reading: (a) some 600,000 million children live in households that earn less than \$1 per day; (b) more than 110 million children of primary-school age are not enrolled in school; (c) during

the 1990s more than 8 million children were either permanently disabled, seriously injured or died as a result of armed conflict; (d) as of the year 2000, over 300,000 children have been recruited to participate in armed conflicts; and (e) an estimated 100 million children work in dangerous circumstance e.g. bonded labour, prostitution & pornography.⁴² Clearly, these horrific conditions place upon us, as citizens of the world, an obligation to ensure that children's rights are realised, a responsibility that includes providing children with a voice and a means for affecting change on matters concerning their well being.

Likewise, a recognition of the divine heritage of human rights carries with it significant meaning with respect to the role of children in the realisation of humanity's collective spiritual destiny which is, according to Bahá'í teachings, the organic unity of humankind.⁴³

Children's rights are enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. The CRC is the most widely ratified international Convention in history (191 countries). Only Somalia and the USA are not party to the treaty.⁴⁴ The CRC is underpinned by four fundamental principles (viz. (1) equal value and rights of all children and the prohibition of discrimination (Article 2); (2) the best interests of the children (Article 3); (3) the right of the child to life, survival and development (Articles 4 & 6); and (4) the right to freely express views and to be heard (Articles 12 & 13). This paper will examine the theoretical relevance and practical ramifications of the Convention to Bahá'í community life and the overall aims of the Bahá'í Faith.

Children's Participation: Definition and Debate

Children's participation is attracting growing attention from a multitude of academics and practitioners alike. An explanation for this interest lies in the ontological presumption that children possess capabilities and are seen as full human beings (i.e. they are not people who only become fully human when they become adults; a world view of some considerable prevalence). The CRC recognises that children are not mere dependants, the property of parents or guardians.⁴⁵ Children are increasingly competent and are genuinely interested in what is going on around them, especially that which affects them. Whilst they are in need of protection they have strengths. This presumption includes the notion that children's views and opinions are significant and are the by-product of their capability to reflect, analyse and consider consequences. From this perspective, children and youth, when encouraged, become agents of social change, active and involved citizens in society, to the extent of their individual

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and collective developing capacities, maturity and competence.⁴⁶ Early research in this area would appear to validate this hypothesis.

Gillian Mann, a researcher on care and protection of separated children at the Refugee Studies Centre in the UK, invokes a broad denotation of participation as “taking part in a social process.”⁴⁷ With specific reference to children’s participation, though, Mann defines it as:

...the process of children’s involvement in the decisions which affect them and the community in which they live. To be genuine and effective, it means listening to children and respecting their views and the way in which they choose to express them. It involves recognising and nurturing their strengths, interests and abilities through the provision of meaningful opportunities to contribute to their own development and that of their peers, families and communities. In this way, child participation encourages reciprocal learning between children and adults as well as the establishment of respectful horizontal relationships across generations.⁴⁸

Mann’s definition is very helpful in that it describes, in clear terms, the developmental processes and outcomes associated with child participation. It is also very useful due to the emphasis it places on self-actualising human potential in contrast to the traditional view that external forces (e.g. parents, guardians, teachers, etal) bear exclusive responsibility for the shaping and moulding of a child’s character. Finally, Mann’s denotation incorporates the concepts of co-operation, tolerance and mutual respect, concepts implied in her references to “reciprocal learning” and “respectful horizontal relationships.”

As helpful as Mann’s definition is, this author proposes an alternative that is meant to be more specifically relevant to the thesis of this paper in that it endeavours to embody the aspects of spirituality and social transformation. For the purpose of this paper, then, children’s participation refers to:

Processes that empower children to take responsibility for their spiritual development, to foster a sense of moral purpose and pro-social attitudes in order to engage—to the extent of their individual and collective developing capacities and in an authentic manner—in actions, behaviour and forms of service that will contribute to social transformation characterised by unity, justice, co-operation, reciprocity, and mutual respect and helpfulness.

Classic reactions to the concept of children’s participation range from outright scepticism to a concern “that children’s rights conflict with the rights of

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parents and adults.”⁴⁹ On the one hand, there are those who feel that the participation of children in community or state affairs is ludicrous; a cute but meaningless activity for which they have little capacity and that has no place in the “real” world. Situated at another point on the spectrum are those adults who are threatened by the notion of children’s rights and participation out of a fear of losing control. In Uganda, for instance, many still hold the view that the reason for children’s existence is the satisfaction of adult needs and interests.⁵⁰

There are several possible rejoinders to these concerns, two of which will be made here. The first and most obvious is that children’s participation is established in international law as a legitimate, inalienable right, or entitlement. There are, fortunately, several additional reasons that justify the importance of children’s participation that extend beyond the legal argument. Although there are many justifications for children’s participation, Mann provides an excellent formulation. The advantages of authentic children’s participation, according

Benefits to the Child	Benefits to the Family	Benefits to the Community
1) they develop a sense of personal competence, self-confidence & sense of purpose in their lives.	1) parents & guardians become increasingly aware of a child's competence & strengths.	1) when children become involved in community activities, their skills & abilities become apparent to others.
2) they acquire/expand skills in problem-solving, negotiation & communication.	2) parents & guardians gain important insights into the reality of children's lives.	2) people come to recognise children's capacity to prioritise their concerns, formulate ideas & work toward solutions.
3) they learn to empathise & co-operate with others.	3) it develops mutual respect between parents & children.	3) people appreciate that children bring creativity & understanding to issues in the community.
4) it promotes social responsibility.		4) The recognition of children as social actors contributes to the social capital of the community & to improved quality of life.
5) less likely to accept problematic situations as being out of their control.		
6) it fosters the development of citizenship.		
7) it prepares children to work together for change.		

to Mann, manifest themselves in three distinct ways: (a) benefits to the child, (b) benefits to the family, and (c) benefits to the community. The following table summarises Mann's thinking according by category:

Coincidentally, Mann's categorisations—that is the manner in which the benefits of children's participation accrue not only to the child but to the family and community as well—would seem to reinforce Bahá'í thought regarding the interconnectedness of individual and societal development. As cited earlier, the Bahá'í Faith seeks neither the “devotion of the cult of the individual” nor the “deification of the State” but, rather, healthy and mutually supportive relationships between the constituent members of society deriving from a “...consultative framework made possible by [a] consciousness of the organic unity of humankind...” In this sense, Mann's analysis appears to bear out the truth of George Bernard Shaw's aphorism: “We are members of one another; so that you cannot injure or help your neighbour without injuring or helping yourself.”

Effective Participation of Children: Exemplary Evidence

Despite the fact that the philosophy and practice of child participation is still in an embryonic state there is growing empirical evidence demonstrating that children's participation can foster responsible behaviour and practice and meaningful social change. In Budapest, for example, children between the ages of ten and fifteen manage (with the exception of the engine driver) the Pioneer Railway, a thirteen mile-long track carrying children and tourists on field trips through scenic areas overlooking the Danube River.⁵¹ Children from five schools in Rochdale, Lancashire conducted research, jointly with the local police force, as part of the Rochdale Safer Cities Programmes, on problems associated with the security of the city's elderly residents. This child-led research activity led to recommendations for specific low-cost crime prevention measures for these vulnerable citizens.⁵²

The Greenlit programme in the UK is an intervention wherein children between the ages of ten and thirteen submit proposals to companies for renovating land damaged or neglected by businesses. Through a process of consultation, the proposals are agreed then funded by the corporations. Children are responsible for the full spectrum of activities—e.g. site surveys, analysis, design, costing and implementation of the project.⁵³ In Bolivia, Save the Children Canada facilitates a project known as the “Leadership of Children in Integrated Community Health.” Having identified health issues to be a major concern in the communities, the children were then trained as community health promoters in the concepts of traditional and modern medicine and provided with first aid kits. “These children are now responsible for these kits in their communi-

ties. They alone are able to detect and resolve simple respiratory problems and diarrheal disease, and clear up minor injuries.”⁵⁴

During the recent Great Lakes Region Consultation on the Protection and Development of Children Affected by Armed Conflict held in Kampala Uganda in December 2000, five children from war torn Eastern Congo participated in a workgroup session whose purpose was to allow the children, aged between twelve and fifteen (two of whom had served in active combat with the brutal local Mai-Mai rebels over a two year period) to identify the characteristics of a good national or community leader. The characteristics identified by the children were someone who is: loving, will give advice, not greedy, honest, clean of body, respectful of others, sincere, and a unifier (i.e. someone who doesn't bring conflict). These are remarkable insights with profound implications for systems of governance if we are to take these views seriously. Adult reaction to the first characteristic (to be loving) was fascinating. The moment the term was mentioned the adults interrupted in an attempt to convince the children that the necessary qualities for leadership were to be strong, to be powerful and so forth, characteristics typically associated with an authoritarian style of governance. Despite this intervention and after much debate, the children insisted that “to be loving” was a vital quality for good leadership and continued to itemise the other characteristics heretofore cited.⁵⁵

Children in the Bahá'í Community: Prospects for Participation

A comparison between the Bahá'í writings and the CRC reveals remarkable congruence in thought, intent and spirit concerning child rights and child development. This is perhaps not surprising in light of the importance placed on human rights by Bahá'u'lláh.

On the other hand, there are a number of Bahá'í laws that could be considered inconsistent with the CRC, although no value judgement is attributed to either Bahá'í law or the CRC in making this observation. An example of this concerns the age limit defining the status of a child. The Convention defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, *majority* is attained earlier.”⁵⁶ The latter part of this definition is in reference to country specific laws that may set an age limit lower than eighteen. Bahá'í law uses the term “age of maturity” and sets this at fifteen years. Fifteen is the age at which a person is deemed capable of making independent decisions regarding one's religious affiliation and other matters affecting their spiritual development. It is the age at which, should one decide to declare themselves a Bahá'í, an individual is required to assume responsibility

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for observing Bahá'í law (e.g. fasting, prayer, etc.) and is the minimum age at which marriage can occur.⁵⁷

It is interesting to note, however, that whereas in most countries the age of *majority* generally corresponds to other civic rights such as the right to vote, within the Bahá'í Faith the age of *maturity* "...relates only to purely spiritual functions and obligations and is not related to the degree of administrative capacity..."⁵⁸ Hence, the minimum voting age; a term referring both to one's eligibility to vote and to be voted for; is twenty-one. Service on elected Bahá'í local and national administrative institutions (a form of service that approximates, in terms of mandate and scope, to the responsibilities of municipal councils and national governments) is another feature unique to the Bahá'í Faith. Whilst in most countries the right to vote is applicable once an individual reaches 18 years of age, the majority of the world's nations set the eligible age for service on municipal and nationally elected governing bodies much higher. Voting rights in the Bahá'í community, on the other hand, carry with them both the right and responsibility to vote and to serve on administrative institutions.

Despite the twenty-one year age restriction, Bahá'í youth are not prohibited from participating on various committees, whether, national or local, and are, in fact, strongly encouraged to engage in all aspects of Bahá'í work considering their capabilities to be of "...great assistance to the Cause even though not yet legally of age."⁵⁹ Explanations as to why the minimum voting is set at twenty-one are as yet sketchy but are no doubt, in the opinion of the author, strongly correlated to a minimum level of maturity and life experience required to serve on elected institutions which shoulder onerous responsibilities in the provision of guidance and support to Bahá'í communities and individuals. Whilst the age of twenty-one is currently applicable, it would appear that this age will be subject to review. In His *Directives of the Guardian*, Shoghi Effendi indicates that voting rights are fixed at twenty-one "...for the present."⁶⁰

Participation is central to the Bahá'í concept of a vibrant and healthy community. Participation, in a Bahá'í social context, is a process whereby community members are "...engaged in applying knowledge to create well-being, thereby generating new knowledge and contributing in a substantial and meaningful way to human progress."⁶¹ Admittedly, however, whilst there is no evidence in Bahá'í literature proscribing the participation of children in community affairs—indeed, there are numerous examples of children making outstanding, even heroic, contributions throughout Bahá'í history—these examples are the exception rather than the rule. The Universal House of Justice plainly states that: "Even though children's activities have been a part of past Plans, these have fallen short of the need."⁶²

The November 26, 1999 and Ridvan 2000 messages⁶³ from the Universal House of Justice concerning children and junior youth suggest a fundamental shift in our concept of the potential roles for these particular community members as it concerns community life and the progress of the Faith. Referring to children as the "...most precious treasure a community can possess..." and a "...trust no community can neglect with impunity..." the Universal House of Justice calls upon individual believers and Bahá'í institutions alike to create a cultural milieu in which children are "...thoroughly integrated into the process of community development..." and made to "...feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose."⁶⁴ As previously explicated, this sense of belonging and purpose can be most effectively achieved through the use of participatory approaches.

The messages from the Universal House of Justice suggest the need for the Bahá'ís of the world to reflect on traditional attitudes, approaches, and relationships regarding the role of children in their own spiritual development, their roles, responsibilities and capabilities in the development of Bahá'í community life, and their potential for making contributions to the processes of social transformation and world unity. "Creative attention must be devoted to involving them in programmes of activity that will engage their interests, mold their capacities for teaching and service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth."⁶⁵

Although the Universal House of Justice places considerable emphasis on spiritual and academic educational training (e.g. children's classes, study circles, training institutes and other forms of scholastic training) as the bedrock upon which a child's development should rest, it would seem that this "represents only a part of what must go into developing... the characters and shaping... personalities" of children.⁶⁶ What then are examples of other ways in which children can be thoroughly integrated into the process of community development so as to feel a sense of belonging and purpose? The following are a few of the author's suggestions, all of which are provided with the stipulation that the participation should be calibrated to the extent of the individual and collective capacities of the children:

- **The Nineteen Day Feast**⁶⁷: In practice, the role of children in the functioning of this young institution has been consigned to the periphery. Children attend, of course, the spiritual portion of the Feast and are occasionally requested to perform certain forms of service during the event (e.g. drama and music presentations; serving refreshments during the social segment), but these decisions and the manner in which they are carried out are made, for the most part, by adults on behalf of children. Yet, there would appear to be no prohibition against children participating in planning Nineteen Day Feast programmes and schedules. This is an area of

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service for children that could be explored by Local Assemblies. Likewise, the goal of thoroughly integrating children in the life of the community presents a particular challenge to Local Assemblies as it implies a need to structure the administrative portion of the Feast in a manner that enables children to engage meaningfully in the consultations in a manner that would encourage them to present their views and to be assured that these views are taken seriously. Consideration should be given to the training of adults in the types of facilitation skills that foster children's participation. As well, some sort of a systematic method could be developed to help children prepare themselves in advance for the consultative segment of the Feast.

- **Appoint children as assistants to Auxiliary Board Members**⁶⁸: The appointment of children to this role is rather unconventional, but an idea that has been implemented in certain countries. Not only would the practice provide the Board Members with new perspectives, it should enable these children to develop confidence, a healthy self-esteem, and a sense of identity and purpose. It would, moreover, provide them with opportunities to accelerate the development of skills and capabilities they will need to function as adult Bahá'ís.
- **Committee appointments**: Appointing children and junior youth to local and national committees is not a common practice within the Bahá'í community. This is probably out of habit more than any other reason. Research, however, has shown that children can act responsibly and make important contributions when conditions are created for fostering their participation. Again, specific skill sets and structures might need to be developed in order to ensure their role is not limited to tokenistic gestures or that they are overwhelmed by adult opinion.
- **Children and Junior Youth Projects**: Children can be encouraged to plan, implement and reflect on projects of their own making. There is sufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate that children can work responsibly on service projects at levels of sophistication and complexity beyond the expectations of adults. In Kampala, Uganda, for example, as part of an on-going Bahá'í junior youth movement, Bahá'í children redesigned and installed a new visitors information display at the entrance of the Bahá'í House of Worship. An expansion of this concept is that children and junior youth can be encouraged, with the help of a skilled facilitator during the initial stages, to participate in formal analytical and planning sessions along with adults and to make presentations of their recommendations to the Local and National Assemblies.

- **Social and Economic Development Projects:** Bahá'í children should not merely be beneficiaries of social and economic development, or community development, projects. As demonstrated in the section entitled "Effective Participation of Children: Exemplary Evidence," children can play a central role in planning, implementing and evaluating a wide range of projects such as in the areas of primary health care, education and the environment, to name but a few. Since Bahá'í social and economic development projects are ultimately intended to benefit non-Bahá'ís as well as Bahá'ís, children's participation would have the added advantage of providing Bahá'í children with opportunities to interact with the entire community (i.e. with non-Bahá'í community members) in an integrative and constructive way.

These are but a few of the possibilities that can be considered by Bahá'í communities around the world. The purpose of this section was not to exhaust all options but, rather, inspired by the Messages from the Universal House of Justice, to provoke new ways of thinking about advancing the goal of integrating children into the life of the community and preparing them for a life of service out of a selfless desire to be of service to humanity. The possibilities are endless. What is required is a willingness to challenge accepted conventions and attitudes concerning children and the roles they have historically been assigned to play within the community.

Conclusion

This paper endeavoured to examine new concepts about the roles and responsibilities of children in the Bahá'í community, admittedly through a rather circuitous, but nevertheless important, route. Through his exploration of the universality of human rights, the author validated the claim for children—as members of the human race and individuals in their own right—to access the full spectrum of rights and responsibilities set forth in the UDHR and the CRC. The author's treatment of the spiritual origins of human rights and his review of the Universal House of Justice's messages on the subject of children and junior youth sought to expand the Bahá'í community's understanding of the nature of and scope for children in assuming responsibility for their own spiritual transformation, promoting the development of the Bahá'í community, and contributing to the process of the unification of the human race.

Based on studies and reports from experts in this field, evidence was provided illustrating the tremendous potential and capabilities latent within children to act as agents of social change, particularly when appropriate facilitation methods are employed that are calibrated to their individual and collective

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developmental stages. A major theme of this paper is that children are more capable than generally credited by adults—a mindset not restricted to non-Bahá'í communities—and that they are competent, genuinely interested in what is going on around them, and capable of making contributions to affect change. The author argued that children's participation is potentially a significant contributor to the achievement of sustainable peace and security in the world.

The paper concluded with a series of recommendations to the Bahá'í community as to how children can be "...thoroughly integrated into the process of community development..." and made to "...feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose." Whilst these recommendations may challenge current Bahá'í social conventions regarding children, it is felt that they are, nonetheless, consistent with the guidance provided by the Universal House of Justice. Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to bring into being "...a new race of men"⁶⁹ obligates the Bahá'í community to stretch the boundaries of social conventions and to introduce and put into practice new values and behaviour based on cooperation, tolerance and justice. This obligation applies equally to our attitudes, concepts and vision about children, a vision that is well captured in the following citation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

I pray in behalf of these children and beg confirmation and assistance for them from the Kingdom of Abhá so that each one may be trained under the shadow of the protection of God, each may become like a lighted candle in the world of humanity, a tender and growing plant in the rose garden of Abhá; that these children may be so trained and educated that they shall give life to the world of humanity; that they may receive insight; that they may bestow hearing upon the people of the world; that they may sow the seeds of eternal life and be accepted in the threshold of God; that they may become characterized with such virtues, perfections and qualities that their mothers, fathers and relatives will be thankful to God, well pleased and hopeful. This is my wish and prayer.

ANNEX I: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Summary of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings Regarding Human Rights

Taken from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London (1997) p. 27
Discourse of 'Abdu'l-Bahá given at the Theosophical Head Quarters
September 30th, 1911

Firstly: Bahá'u'lláh lays stress on the search for Truth. This is most important, because the people are too easily led by tradition. It is because of this that they are often antagonistic to each other, and dispute with one another. But the mani-

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festing of Truth discovers the darkness and becomes the cause of Oneness of faith and belief: because Truth cannot be two! That is not possible.

Secondly: Bahá'u'lláh taught the Oneness of humanity; that is to say, all the children of men are under the mercy of the Great God. They are the sons of one God; they are trained by God.... But the children of men are in need of education and civilization, and they require to be polished, till they become bright and shining. Man and woman both should be educated equally and equally regarded. It is racial, patriotic, religious and class prejudice, that has been the cause of the destruction of Humanity.

Thirdly: Bahá'u'lláh taught, that Religion is the chief foundation of Love and Unity and the cause of Oneness. If a religion become the cause of hatred and disharmony, it would be better that it should not exist. To be without such a religion is better than to be with it.

Fourthly: Religion and Science are inter-twined with each other and cannot be separated. These are the two wings with which humanity must fly. One wing is not enough. Every religion which does not concern itself with Science is mere tradition, and that is not the essential. Therefore science, education and civilization are most important necessities for the full religious life.

Fifthly: The Reality of the divine Religions is one, because the Reality is one and cannot be two. All the prophets are united in their message, and unshaken. They are like the sun; in different seasons they ascend from different rising points on the horizon. Therefore every ancient prophet gave the glad tidings of the future, and every future has accepted the past.

Sixthly: Equality and Brotherhood must be established among all members of mankind. This is according to Justice. The general rights of mankind must be guarded and preserved. All men must be treated equally. This is inherent in the very nature of humanity.

Seventhly: The arrangements of the circumstances of the people must be such that poverty shall disappear, and that every one as far as possible, according to his position and rank, shall be comfortable. Whilst the nobles and others in high rank are in easy circumstances, the poor also should be able to get their daily food and not be brought to the extremities of hunger.

Eighthly: Bahá'u'lláh declared the coming of the Most Great Peace. All the nations and peoples will come under the shadow of the Tent of the Great Peace and Harmony - that is to say, by general election a Great Board of Arbitration shall be established, to settle all differences and quarrels between the Powers; so that disputes shall not end in war.

Ninthly: Bahá'u'lláh taught that hearts must receive the Bounty of the Holy Spirit, so that Spiritual civilization may be established. For material civilization is not adequate for the needs of mankind and cannot be the cause of its happiness. Material civilization is like the body and spiritual civilization is like the soul. Body without soul cannot live.⁷⁰

ANNEX II: Towards a Global Ethic (An Initial Declaration)

1993 Parliament of the World's Religions

August 28 - September 5, 1993

Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

www.cpwr.org/calldocs/EthicTOC.html

We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic.

We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. 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.

We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely.

We confirm that there is already a consensus among the religions which can be the basis for a global ethic—a minimal fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental moral attitudes.

We all have a responsibility for a better global order. Our involvement for the sake of human rights, freedom, justice, peace, and the preservation of Earth is absolutely necessary. Our different religious and cultural traditions must not prevent our Common involvement in opposing all forms of inhumanity and working for greater humaneness. The principles expressed in this Global Ethic can be affirmed by all persons with ethical convictions, whether religiously grounded or not. As religious and spiritual persons we base our lives on an Ultimate Reality, and draw spiritual power and hope therefrom, in trust, in prayer or meditation, in word or silence. We have a special responsibility for the welfare of all humanity and care for the planet Earth. We do not consider ourselves better than other women and men, but we trust that the ancient wisdom of our religions can point the way for the future.

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We are convinced of the fundamental unity of the human family on Earth.

By a global ethic we do not mean a global ideology or a single unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion over all others. By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes.

Footnotes

- 1 An-Ni'am, A. (1994). *What do we mean by universal?* Index on Censorship, 4/5, p. 121.
- 2 See, for example, Human Rights Watch's 1999 World Report : "Today, human rights are well established as the legitimate concern of all humanity. Governments regularly comment on each other's rights practices and make respect for human rights an important factor in their aid relationships." Human Rights Watch (1999). *Introduction. A Legitimate Concern*. World Report. www.igc.org/hrw/worldreport99/intro/index.html.
- 3 The UDHR was adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly Resolution 217A (III) of December 1948. www.un.org/Overview/rights.html.
- 4 Its secular tone and bias towards individual freedom at the expense of individual responsibility towards the community and various religious value systems.
- 5 Reference here is made to the Universal House of Justice letter dated November 26, 1999 and the Ridván 2000 message issued to the Bahá'ís of the World in April, 2000. The Bahá'í administrative structure is comprised of two pillars: (a) the elected bodies and (b) the appointed bodies. Whilst possessing unique roles and responsibilities, these two bodies work together in an integrative and harmonious manner. All the institutions within each of these bodies fall under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, the 9 member supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. Conceived by Bahá'u'lláh, "...the institution of the Universal House of Justice is established on principles laid down in the Bahá'í sacred writings. ... 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." (Bahá'í International Community (1998). The Bahá'í World—1996-97. Haifa, Israel: World Centre Publications. p. 9). The Universal House of Justice is elected on a five year cycle by the membership of all national Bahá'í councils around the world. Nine member national Bahá'í councils, or Spiritual Assemblies, govern the affairs of national communities, which are established in more than 230 countries and territories. The National Spiritual Assemblies are responsible for the full spectrum of administrative and spiritual matters of concern to the national Bahá'í community including, *inter alia*, the growth of the Faith, the consolidation of the Faith, adjudicating in personal conflict or problems, and external affairs. The National Spiritual Assemblies are elected annually by delegates who are themselves elected through universal suffrage. The third tier of the elected pillar is the local Bahá'í council, or Spiritual Assembly, a nine member governing body of lay people who guide and administer the affairs of the community as a whole. In any community where there are nine or more adult Bahá'ís (i.e. twenty one years of age or above) a Local Spiritual Assembly is elected on an annual basis through universal suffrage. The responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assemblies are roughly equivalent to that of the National Spiritual Assembly as it relates to their local jurisdiction. The appointed Body is also comprised of three Institutions. The Institutions of this Body are not responsible for the administrative of the affairs of the Faith. Their primary role is to advise, inspire and stimulate members of the Bahá'í community to various forms of service. They also advise National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. The members of the Continental Board of Counsellors are responsible for fulfilling these

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functions across a continent for which they are appointed. They in turn appoint and oversee the work of the Auxiliary Board Members who undertake this work within discrete administrative areas within a country. Auxiliary Board Members appoint Assistants who perform these functions within a specified geographical area generally covering several local Bahá'í communities.

- 6 Bahá'u'lláh (1997). Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 215. Bahá'u'lláh (1817—1892), né Mirzá Husayn-Álí, is the Founder-Prophet of the Bahá'í Faith. During [His] long years of exile and imprisonment, Bahá'u'lláh revealed the equivalent of over 100 volumes of writings, consisting of 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, ... ‘Abdu'l-Bahá [1844—1921], as His successor and sole authoritative interpreter of His teachings. ... ‘Abdu'l-Bahá appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi [1896—1957], to succeed Him after His passing as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and authorised interpreter of its teachings” (Bahá'í International Community (1998). The Bahá'í World—1996 - 97. pp. 5-6). “Following the death of Shoghi Effendi the world Bahá'í community has been directed by the Universal House of Justice ...” (Huddleston, John (1998). The Search for a Just Society. p. 401).
- 7 ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1997). Promulgation of Universal Peace. San Juan: MARS, Crimson Publications.
- 8 Whilst the UDHR presents an extensive array of rights, for ease of reference and for the purposes of this paper, they are classified into the following broad categories: civil, political, economic, social, and cultural, a classification taken from the International Bill of Right (IBHR). The IBHR “...consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Fact Sheet No.2 (Rev.1)*. The International Bill of Human Rights, Background. www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/fsz.htm#background.
- 9 An-Ni'am, A. pp. 120-1.
- 10 Sen, A. (1999). Development as Freedom New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. p. 227.
- 11 See Sen. pp. 227-48. The legitimacy critique refers to an “insistence that rights must be seen in postinstitutional terms as instruments, rather than as a prior ethical entitlement [which] militates, in a rather fundamental way, against the basic idea of universal human rights” (Sen. p. 229). The coherence critique “takes the view that rights can be sensibly formulated only in combination with correlated duties. A person's right to something must, then, be coupled with another agent's duty to provide the first person with that something. Those who insist on that binary linkage tend to be very critical, in general, of invoking the rhetoric “rights” in “human rights” without exact specification of responsible agents and their duties to bring about the fulfillment of these rights. Demands for human rights are, then, seen just as loose talk” (Sen. p. 230).
- 12 It is of relevance to note that more than 1,300 civil society organisations played a pivotal role in pursuing the development of the UDHR. Cultural relativists, however, would no doubt point out that all of these organisations were American.
- 13 Fifty-eight countries participated in a three year consultative process before the Declaration was adopted. The Declaration was passed by 48 members with 8 abstentions and two member countries absent from the vote. However, there is a certain validity to the cultural relativists perspective in that of these 58 countries the majority were Western with a significant number actively colonising much of the world's territory at that time.
- 14 Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute (2000). *Know your rights, standard of achievement*. www.udhr.org/history/default.htm. Kumaraswamy, D. P. (December 1997). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Is it Universal?* Human Rights Solidarity, vol. 7, no. 7. Asian Human Rights Commission Publications. www.ahrchk.net/solidarity/199712/v712_10.html.

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- 15 *ibid.*
- 16 See note number 6 for an explanation of the role of Shoghi Effendi.
- 17 The Bahá'í concept of a unified world order and universal values and norms.
- 18 Shoghi Effendi (1938). The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. pp. 41-2.
- 19 An-Na'im; Sen. p. 231-46.
- 20 Cumaraswamy. p. 3: "Many Asian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), intellectuals and ethnic and cultural minorities, gathering in Bangkok at the same time as the Asian States met, issued the NGO Bangkok Declaration that presented a clear contrast to human rights relativism. They upheld the universality of human rights and argued that cultural and religious traditions did not constitute an obstacle to the realisation of international human rights norms."
- 21 See Ramsery Colloquium (April 1998). *On Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Fifty Years Later: A Statement of the Ramsey Colloquium*. The Journal of Religious and Public Life. FirstThings.com. www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9804/ramsey.html.
- 22 'Abdu'l-Bahá. p. 168.
- 23 Bahá'í International Community (1995). The Prosperity of Humankind. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. pp. 10-12.
- 24 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Article 18.
- 25 *The Vienna Declaration*. Quoted by Cumaraswamy. No. 5.
- 26 Keown, Damien (1995). *Are there "Human Rights" in Buddhism?* Journal of Buddhist Ethics. London: University of London, Goldsmiths. pp. 1-2. jbe.la.psu.edu/2/keown2.html. See, for example: "It might be suggested, in defense of Buddhism, that concern for human rights is a postreligious phenomenon which has more to do with secular ideologies and power-politics than religion, and it is therefore unreasonable to accuse Buddhism of neglect in this area" (p. 1) and "The concept of a "right" has a long intellectual history in the West," (p. 2).
- 27 Havel, V. (1994) *The Need for Transcendence in the Postmodern World*. p. 3. www.worldtrans.org/whole/havelspeech.html; Feiser, James, ed. (1997). Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. p. 4. www.utm.edu/research/iep/; An-Na'im. pp. 127-8. In a speech made in 1994 in the USA, Havel critiques the modernist concept that "This modern anthropocentrism inevitably meant that He who allegedly endowed man with his inalienable rights began to disappear from the world. ... The existence of a higher authority than man himself simply began to get in the way of human aspirations."
- 28 *Natural Law*. In Feiser, James, ed. www.utm.edu/research/iep/n/natlaw.htm.
- 29 *ibid.*
- 30 Keown. pp. 3, 6, 7, 12.
- 31 It would be misleading if the author did not clarify that whilst rights issues form a significant part of Bahá'u'lláh's discourse on social structures, conduct and regulation, as well as forms of national and international governance, due to the fact that He wrote in a revelatory style these issues are woven randomly throughout His Tablets and Books and thus are not presented in the codified manner normally associated with legal texts. Whilst this fact does not diminish the validity of His pronouncements on rights issues, it must be acknowledged that Bahá'u'lláh did not use the legal language and terminology of human rights that characterises the UDHR and other rights documents.
- 32 The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are contained in more than one hundred volumes.
- 33 See note number 6 for an explanation of the role of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

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- 34 Havel. p. 4.
- 35 *ibid.*
- 36 `Abdu'l-Bahá. p. 99.
- 37 An-Na'im. pp. 120-1.
- 38 Bahá'í International Community. The Prosperity of Humankind. p. 6.
- 39 Keown.
- 40 Appleby, R. S. (2000). *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation*. Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. p. 2-3.
- 41 Ennew, J. Dr. (Summer 2000). *The History of Children's Rights: Whose Story?* Cultural Survival Quarterly. Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival Inc. p. 46.
- 42 Bureau of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session on Children (November 30, 2000). A World Fit for Children. New York. pp. 4-5. www.unicef.org/specialsession/pro.outcome.doc.
- 43 Shoghi Effendi (1997). Directives of the Guardian. San Juan: MARS, Crimson Publications. p. 191.
- 44 Rajani, R. (Summer 2000). *Questioning How We Think about Children*. Cultural Survival Quarterly. Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival Inc. p. 41.
- 45 The CRC Articles most commonly referred to as providing a child participation mandate are: Articles 12 & 13 regarding the freedom of expression; Article 14 regarding the freedom of thought, conscience & religion; Article 15 regarding the freedom of assembly; Article 17 regarding access to information; Article 23 regarding special support for disable children; Article 29 regarding education for personal fulfilment and responsible citizenship; and Article 31 regarding play and participation in cultural and artistic life.
- 46 Rajani. p. 43; Bell, B., Brett, R., Marcus, R., Muscroft, S. (1999). *Children's rights: reality or rhetoric*. In Muscroft, E., ed. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: The First Ten Years. London: The International Save the Children Alliance. p. 16.
- 47 Mann, G. (1999). Child Participation: A Working Paper for Save the Children Canada. London: Not published. p. 4.
- 48 *ibid.*
- 49 Bell, Brett, Marcus, Muscroft. p. 30.
- 50 Kakama, P.T. (13-14 April 1000) *Parental Responsibilities and Children's Rights*. A paper presented at the Miller du Toit Inc. Conference on The Trend from Parental Rights to Parental Responsibilities and Children's Rights, Cape Town, South Africa..
- 51 Hart, R. (1997). Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd. p. 126.
- 52 *ibid.* p. 78.
- 53 *ibid.* p. 77.
- 54 Mann. p. 11.
- 55 This consultation was sponsored and managed by the Save the Children Alliance with the financial assistance of the Norwegian Government. Observations cited in this section are those of the author who participated, not only in the consultations, but in this specific workgroup.
- 56 CRC, Part 1, Article 1.
- 57 Bahá'u'lláh (1992). Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Haifa: The Universal House of Justice. pp. 113, 133-4, 170.
- 58 Shoghi Effendi. Directives of the Guardian. p. 85.

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- 59 *ibid.*
- 60 *ibid.*
- 61 Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (2000). *Science, Religion and Development: Some Initial Considerations*. www.globalprosperity.org/main.cfm?SID=4.
- 62 The Universal House of Justice (2000) *Ridván Letter Written to the Bahá'is of the World*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre. p. 8.
- 63 The term Ridván refers to a place and time during which Bahá'u'lláh publicly announced His mission. Just before His banishment from Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh and His followers spent twelve days (between April 21 and May 2) in the Gardens of Ridván (Persian for Paradise). The Universal House of Justice issues a letter to the Bahá'is of the World on the anniversary of this period. The letter generally contains information about achievements of the Bahá'í Faith during the years, an assessment of world conditions and advice and guidance about the priorities of the Bahá'í community during the coming year.
- 64 Universal House of Justice (1999). *Letter dated 26 November 1999 to the Bahá'is of the World*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre. p. 2; Universal House of Justice. *Ridván Letter Written to the Bahá'is of the World*. p. 9.
- 65 Universal House of Justice. *Ridván Letter Written to the Bahá'is of the World*. p. 9.
- 66 *ibid.* p. 8.
- 67 "The centerpiece of Bahá'í community life is the Nineteen-Day Feast. Held once every 19 days, the Feast is the local community's regular worship gathering. Open to both adults and children, the Feast is the regular gathering that promotes and sustains the unity of the local Bahá'í community. The Feast always contains three elements: spiritual devotion, administrative consultation, and social fellowship. As such, the Feast combines religious worship with grassroots governance and social enjoyment." www.bahai.org/article-1-6-0-3.html.
- 68 See note number 5 for an explanation of Auxiliary Board Members.
- 69 Shoghi Effendi. *Directives of the Guardian*. p. 16.
- 70 'Abdu'l-Bahá. pp. 27-30.