

THE
BAHÁ'Í
WORLD

2005-2006



THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD
2005–2006

162 OF THE BAHÁ'Í ERA

THE
BAHÁ'Í
WORLD

2005-2006

AN INTERNATIONAL RECORD

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HAIFA

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Introduction to the Bahá'í Community

In the United States of America, scores of volunteers organize support to areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina. In Cambodia, literacy and community banking skills are taught to villagers, assisting them to manage their own small businesses. Government officials join religious representatives in Cuba for a gathering promoting interfaith understanding. In Alaska, performers from diverse indigenous tribes provide the inspirational opening to a conference on the provision of essential services to children from low-income families. Young teenagers in Colombia dedicate their spare time to planting trees, visiting the elderly, and teaching children. In Russia, visual artists contribute to a popular exhibition exploring the themes of spiritual search. In Tajikistan, children from the Roma community are empowered to become active participants in the progress of their society. Hundreds in the Gambia benefit from free lessons in basic computing skills to assist them in finding employment. Young Malaysians sing about gender equality and peace to an audience of influential citizens. Improving the legal and political responses to genocide is debated at a conference in the United Kingdom. Islanders off Australia's northern coast participate in lively radio discussions on the meaning and purpose of life.

Although all these activities are being carried out in far-flung areas of the planet and their participants come from diverse backgrounds, they are all initiatives of the Bahá'í community, rooted in a united, optimistic view of the world and its future.

The Bahá'í International Community, comprising members of the Bahá'í Faith from all over the globe, now numbers more than 5 million souls. Its members represent 2,112 ethnic and tribal groups who live in thousands of localities in 191 independent countries and 45 dependent territories. What was once regarded by some as a small, obscure sect was reported by the *Britannica Book of the Year 2005* 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.

This article offers a brief introduction to the Bahá'í community, its history, its spiritual teachings, and its aims and objectives.

Origins

In 1844, a young Persian merchant named Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad declared Himself to be the Promised Qá'im awaited by Shia 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. Many thousands of Bábís were persecuted, tortured, and killed in the following years, but the growth of the new religion continued even after the Báb Himself was imprisoned and later executed 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. "I . . . sympathize with Bábísm with all my heart," wrote the Russian novelist Count Leo Tolstoy in 1903, "inasmuch as it teaches people brotherhood and equality and sacrifice of material life for service of God."

The Bábí religion sprang from Islam in much the same manner that Christianity sprang from Judaism or Buddhism did from Hinduism. That is to say, it was apparent early in the Báb's ministry that the religion established by Him was not merely a sect or a movement within Islam but 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 past religious dispensations.

Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí was one of the leading adherents of the Bábí Faith Who was arrested and imprisoned because of his allegiance to the Báb. Because of pressure on the Persian shah from European diplomats, He was spared from execution but was banished from Persia to Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople, and finally 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 initial 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 "Glory of God," and publicly declared His mission on the eve of His exile from Baghdad, in April 1863.

Bahá'u'lláh was still nominally a prisoner when He passed away near Acre in May 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 Bahá'u'lláh revealed the equivalent of more than 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. "The teachings of the Bábís . . ." Tolstoy further commented in 1908, "have through Bahá'u'lláh's teachings been gradually developed and now present us with the highest and purest form of religious teaching." In 1914, the eminent British biblical scholar the Reverend T.K. Cheyne wrote, "If there has been any prophet in recent times, it is to Bahá'u'lláh we must go. Character is the final judge. Bahá'u'lláh was a man of

the highest class—that of prophets.” A leading Oxford academic, Professor Benjamin Jowett declared, “This Bahá’í Movement is the greatest light that has come into the world since the time of Jesus Christ. You must watch it and never let it out of your sight. It is too great and too near for this generation to comprehend. The future alone can reveal its import.”

In His Will and Testament, Bahá’u’lláh appointed His eldest son, ‘Abbás Effendi, Who adopted the title “‘Abdu’l-Bahá” (“Servant of Bahá”), as His successor and the sole authoritative interpreter of His teachings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had shared His Father’s long exile and imprisonment and was 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 outbreak of World War I in 1914, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had returned to His home in Haifa, just across the bay from Acre, and devoted Himself to caring for the local people, fending off famine by feeding them from stores of grain He had safeguarded for such an emergency. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s humanitarian services and His 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 but declined to use. “One more eloquent of speech, more ready of argument, more apt of illustration, more intimately acquainted with the sacred books of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muhammadans, could, I should think, be scarcely found even amongst the eloquent and subtle race to which [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] belongs,” commented the distinguished Cambridge orientalist Professor Edward G. Browne, “These qualities, combined with a bearing at once majestic and genial, made me cease to wonder at the influence and esteem which he enjoyed even beyond the circle of his father’s followers. About the greatness of this man and his power no one who had seen him could entertain a doubt.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed away in 1921 and is buried on Mount Carmel in a vault near the spot where He had interred the remains of the Báb some years before. Among the legacies that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá bequeathed to history is a series of letters called the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*,

which He had addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America during the years of World War I. These 14 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. In the following decades, the Bahá'í teachings were spread throughout the world and attracted people from all walks of life. "It is a wondrous Message that Bahá'u'lláh and his son 'Abdu'l-Bahá have given us," wrote the dowager Queen Marie of Romania in 1926. "Their writings are a great cry toward peace, reaching beyond all limits of frontiers, above all dissension about rites and dogmas . . . It teaches that all hatreds, intrigues, suspicions, evil words, all aggressive patriotism even, are outside the one essential law of God . . . If ever the name of Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá comes to your attention, do not put their writings from you. Search out their Books, and let their glorious, peace-bringing, love-creating words and lessons sink into your hearts as they have into mine."

Another legacy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is His Will and Testament, which Bahá'ís regard as the charter of the administrative order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh. This document appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and authorized interpreter of its teachings. Successorship to the Founders of the Bahá'í Faith would be shared by the Guardian and an elected Universal House of Justice, whose complementary role would be to create legislation regarding the application of the Faith's laws.

During the period of his Guardianship, from 1921 to 1957, Shoghi Effendi concentrated on four main areas: the development of the Bahá'í World Centre in the environs of Haifa; the translation and interpretation of the Bahá'í sacred writings; the rise and consolidation of the institutions of the Bahá'í administrative order; 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 secretly from Persia and interred by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a spot designated by Bahá'u'lláh on Mount Carmel. 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 and initiated construction of the International Bahá'í Archives building to

house the original Bahá'í scriptures and artifacts from the early days of the Bahá'í Faith. This building, the first on the arc-shaped path on the site designated as the world administrative center of the Bahá'í community, was completed in 1957. Shoghi Effendi's actions laid the foundations, literally and figuratively, for the further development of the Bahá'í World Centre.

Shoghi Effendi was also instrumental in interpreting the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and in translating them from the original Persian and Arabic into English. The Guardian had served as secretary to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for a number of years and was a student at Oxford University at the time of his Grandfather's passing. Shoghi Effendi's mastery of Persian, Arabic, and English, coupled with the authority conferred upon him as the appointed interpreter of the Bahá'í writings, made him uniquely qualified to undertake their translation. He also translated *The Dawn-Breakers*, a history of the Bábí Faith; authored *God Passes By*, a history of the first century of the Bahá'í Faith; and wrote thousands of letters to communities and individuals around the world, elucidating passages from the Bahá'í writings and giving direction and impetus to Bahá'í communities.

Under Shoghi Effendi's leadership, the Bahá'í Faith significantly evolved from its obscure roots in nineteenth-century Persia to its current status as an independent global religious community. Dr. Eduard Beneš, who became President of Czechoslovakia in 1935, described the Bahá'í Faith as "one of the great moral and social forces in all the world . . . Such a movement as the Bahá'í Cause which paves the way for universal organization of peace is necessary." The British diplomat and founder of the World Congress of Faiths, Sir Francis Younghusband noted, "Its roots go deep down into the past and yet it looks far forward into the future. It realizes and preaches the oneness of mankind. And I have noticed how ardently its followers work for the furtherance of peace and for the general welfare of mankind."

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 of varying duration, during which 12 National Spiritual Assemblies were elected.

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 to expand existing communities in 120 countries and territories that had previously been opened. These ambitious targets were in certain instances 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 as to whether an individual could be named who met the demanding spiritual qualifications specified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi had no children and died without designating such a Guardian to follow him. He had, however, taken steps towards the election of the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. 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 protecting the unity of the Faith and collaborating with National Spiritual Assemblies around the world to ensure that the goals of the Ten Year Crusade were won. Upon Shoghi Effendi's passing, these men and women guided the Bahá'í community to complete the plan initiated by the Guardian and to hold the first election of the Universal House of Justice in 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 initial 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

members coming from four continents and representing a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Based on the authority conferred on it by the Founder of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice is now elected every five years. It stands as the acknowledged central authority in the worldwide Bahá'í community and has, during the past 43 years, launched eight global plans for the advancement of the Faith. From a worldwide population of 408,000 in 1963, the Bahá'í community has grown to more than 5 million members, and the number of National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies has grown from 56 to 179.

Spiritual and Moral Teachings and Bahá'í Community Life

The force that unites this diverse body of people is the vision achieved through their 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 world's great religions have been established by Messengers or Manifestations of this Divine Reality—Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muhammad—Who have been sent throughout history to deliver a divine message commensurate with humanity's stage of development. Though the religions' social teachings change through this process of progressive revelation, the spiritual essence of all the major religions remains the same: humanity has been created to know and to worship God. The Bahá'í perspective sees 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 the divine Messengers.

At this stage of humanity's development, the unity of the human race must be recognized, the equality of women and men must be established, the extremes of wealth and poverty must be eliminated, and the age-old promise of universal peace must be realized. Liking the development of the human race to that of an individual, the Bahá'í writings say that we have passed through stages analogous to infancy and childhood and are now in the midst of a tumultuous

adolescence, standing 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 are binding on Bahá'ís. Central to these is daily obligatory prayer. Study of and meditation upon the Bahá'í sacred writings each morning and evening are also enjoined. Bahá'ís between the ages of 15 and 70, with certain exceptions, observe an annual 19-day, dawn-to-dusk fast. 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 counseled Bahá'ís to be honest and trustworthy, to render service to humanity with an abundance of deeds rather than mere words, to be chaste, and to avoid gossip and backbiting. He enjoined a high standard of personal morality and decency upon His followers. 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. Pending the further development of Bahá'í communities, these meetings often occur in rented facilities, people's homes, or in local Bahá'í centers. The Bahá'í writings call for the erection in each community of a beautifully designed House of Worship, surrounded by gardens and functioning as a spiritual center of activity. A variety of social and humanitarian institutions are also to be established around it. Seven Bahá'í Houses of Worship presently exist—in Australia, Germany, India, Panama, Samoa, Uganda, and the United States. Plans have been launched for the construction of an eighth House of Worship in Chile, and sites have

been purchased around the world for the erection of many more. The Houses of Worship are open to people of all faiths—or those professing no particular faith—for prayer and meditation. Services are nondenominational. There are no sermons, only readings and prayers from the Bahá'í writings and scriptures of other faiths with music by an *a capella* choir. This preserves 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, coinciding with 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 to establish 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, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that represents the collective voice of national Bahá'í communities around the world, enjoys special 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 the Office of the Environment and the Office for the Advancement of Women, collaborate with National Spiritual Assemblies around the world. The Bahá'í International Community's activities 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 the major world summits and NGO forums sponsored by the United Nations during the past decades.

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, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will 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.¹

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.²

To make its aims and objectives widely known and to promote its perspective on various issues, the Bahá'í International Community

not only collaborates with like-minded organizations within and outside of the United Nations, but it also engages in public information efforts to bring the spiritual and social principles of the Faith to the attention of people everywhere. The persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran since the 1979 Iranian revolution has prompted wide dissemination of information about the Bahá'í Faith in the international news media. More than 200 members of the Faith have been executed for their belief, which is considered as heresy by the regime, and thousands more have been 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 have responded in unity to this ongoing persecution in Iran—the land in which their religion was born—by petitioning their governments to take action against this injustice. It is, to some degree, as a result of these efforts that the persecutions have not been more extreme, although Iran's Bahá'ís still face the possibility of arbitrary imprisonment and execution, and are still denied fundamental rights and freedoms.³

The Bahá'í community has also taken a proactive approach to 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 awareness programs throughout the International Year of Peace and since, aimed at government figures, leaders of thought, and the general population. The centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's passing in 1992 was commemorated, in part, with the publication of a statement detailing His life, teachings, and mission, designed to increase knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith among members of the public. A statement presenting the Bahá'í perspective on social development, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, was disseminated at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995, and later that year a statement entitled *Turning Point for All Nations* was released as a contribution to discussions on the future of the United Nations during its 50th anniversary. In 1999, the Bahá'í International Community released *Who Is Writing the Future? Reflections on the Twentieth Century*. Most recently, in 2002, the Universal House of Justice addressed a message to the world's religious leaders.⁴

The Bahá'í community has also been continually engaged in a series of international teaching plans. It has seen rapid expansion in different parts of the world, perhaps 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. New national governing bodies are also being formed elsewhere, as the Universal House of Justice deems communities to have reached a sufficient level of maturity.

In just over 160 years, the Bahá'í community has succeeded in establishing a pattern of community life that promotes the spiritual development of the individual and channels the collective energies of its members towards the spiritual and material revival of society. It has acquired the capacity to reach large populations with its teachings. It has learned to translate the principle of consultation, promoted by Bahá'u'lláh, into an effective tool for collective decision making and to educate its members in its use. It has devised programs for the spiritual and moral education of its younger members and has extended them not only to its own children and junior youth but also to those of the wider community. It has created a rich body of literature which includes volumes in scores of languages that address both its own needs and the interest of the general public. It has become increasingly involved in the affairs of society at large, undertaking a host of social and economic development projects. Particularly since 2001, it has systematically educated thousands of its members through a worldwide program of training to develop the skills, insights, and knowledge needed to build a new and prosperous society that draws upon the talents and contribution of every member.

The work of the Bahá'í community increasingly attracts the attention and admiration of influential people concerned with humanity's future direction. At celebrations in 2005 marking the centenary of the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in Germany, Gabriele Mueller-Trimbush, Stuttgart's deputy-mayor for social affairs, remarked, "The respect you pay to other world religions, your openness for people who have different opinions, your message of peace for the world we live in, makes you a greatly appreciated partner for us. Stuttgart highly values the activities of the Bahá'í community, because it participates in the social life of our city in an exemplary manner."

The mayor of Kingston, Jamaica, Desmond McKenzie recently commented, "The Bahá'ís have applied their Faith to many of our social problems, including social prejudices, economic deprivation,

and physical disadvantages, and, in so doing, they have contributed immensely to reducing tensions in these areas.”

“In many ways, Bahá’ís embody the spirit of community cohesion that is so important to our society,” wrote Tony Blair, prime minister of the United Kingdom, in March 2005, “The Bahá’í community, in its outlook on life, and in its proactive work in the interfaith, cohesion, and antidiscrimination fields, shows how much faith-based bodies can contribute to wider society.”

The existence and growth of the Bahá’í community offer irrefutable evidence that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work together in harmony. While Bahá’ís are aware of the turmoil in the world surrounding them, their view is succinctly expressed in the following words, taken from *The Prosperity of Humankind*:

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.⁵

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

NOTES

¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters*, 2nd rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 203.

² Ibid., p. 204.

³ See pp. 41–42, 115–27 for further information on the continuing persecution of Iran’s Bahá’í community.

⁴ For the full text of this message and a report on its presentation around the world, see *The Bahá’í World 2002–2003* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2004), pp. 79–87 and 89–98.

⁵ Bahá’í International Community Office of Public Information, *The Prosperity of Humankind* (1995). See *The Bahá’í World 1994–95* (Haifa, World Centre Publications, 1996), pp. 273–296, for the complete text of this statement.

WRITINGS
AND MESSAGES

*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.*

—Bahá'u'lláh



Bahá'í Sacred Writings

*A compilation from the writings of
Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the
subject of identity.*

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

All praise and glory be to God Who, through the power of His might, hath delivered His creation from the nakedness of non-existence, and clothed it with the mantle of life. From among all created things He hath singled out for His special favor the pure, the gem-like reality of man, and invested it with a unique capacity of knowing Him and of reflecting the greatness of His glory. This twofold distinction conferred upon him hath cleansed away from his heart the rust of every vain desire, and made him worthy of the vesture with which his Creator hath deigned to clothe him. It hath served to rescue his soul from the wretchedness of ignorance.

This robe with which the body and soul of man hath been adorned is the very foundation of his well-being and development. Oh, how blessed the day when, aided by the grace and might of the one true God, man will have freed himself from the bondage and corruption of the world and all that is therein, and will have attained unto true and abiding rest beneath the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge!¹



The most glorious fruit of the tree of knowledge is this exalted word: Of one tree are all ye the fruit, and of one bough the leaves. Let not man glory in this that he loveth his country, let him rather glory in this that he loveth his kind.²



Great is the station of man. Great must also be his endeavors for the rehabilitation of the world and the well-being of nations. I beseech the One true God to graciously confirm thee in that which besemeth man's station.³



The incomparable Creator hath created all men from one same substance, and hath exalted their reality above the rest of His creatures. Success or failure, gain or loss, must, therefore, depend upon man's own exertions. The more he striveth, the greater will be his progress. We fain would hope that the vernal showers of the bounty of God may cause the flowers of true understanding to spring from the soil of men's hearts, and may wash them from all earthly defilements.⁴



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. This wronged One hath, ever since the early days of His life, cherished none other desire but this, and will continue to entertain no wish except this wish. 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.⁵



The first utterance of Him Who is the All-Wise is this: O children of dust! Turn your faces from the darkness of estrangement to the effulgent light of the daystar of unity. This is that which above all else will benefit the peoples of the earth. O friend! Upon the tree of utterance there hath never been, nor shall there ever be, a fairer leaf, and beneath the ocean of knowledge no pearl more wondrous can ever be found.

O children of understanding! If the eyelid, however delicate, can deprive man's outer eye from beholding the world and all that is therein, consider then what would be wrought if the veil of covetousness were to descend upon his inner eye. Say: O people! The darkness of greed and envy becloudeth the radiance of the soul even as the clouds obstruct the light of the sun. Should anyone hearken unto this utterance with a discerning ear, he will unfurl the wings of detachment and soar effortlessly in the atmosphere of true understanding.⁶

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

God says in the Qur'án: "Take ye hold of the Cord of God, all of you, and become ye not disunited."⁷

In the contingent world there are many collective centers which are conducive to association and unity between the children of men. For example, patriotism is a collective center; nationalism is a collective center; identity of interests is a collective center; political alliance is a collective center; the union of ideals is a collective center, and the prosperity of the world of humanity is dependent upon the organization and promotion of the collective centers. Nevertheless, all the above institutions are, in reality, the matter and not the substance, accidental and not eternal—temporary and not everlasting. With the appearance of great revolutions and upheavals, all these

collective centers are swept away. But the Collective Center of the Kingdom, embodying the institutions and divine teachings, is the eternal Collective Center. It establishes relationship between the East and the West, organizes the oneness of the world of humanity, and destroys the foundation of differences. It overcomes and includes all the other collective centers. Like unto the ray of the sun, it dispels entirely the darkness encompassing all the regions, bestows ideal life, and causes the effulgence of divine illumination. Through the breaths of the Holy Spirit it performs miracles; the Orient and the Occident embrace each other, the North and South become intimates and associates, conflicting and contending opinions disappear, antagonistic aims are brushed aside, the law of the struggle for existence is abrogated, and the canopy of the oneness of the world of humanity is raised on the apex of the globe, casting its shade over all the races of men. Consequently, the real Collective Center is the body of the divine teachings, which include all the degrees and embrace all the universal relations and necessary laws of humanity.

Consider the flowers of a garden. Though differing in kind, color, form, and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm, and addeth unto their beauty. How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of hues, form, and shape, enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament, and character are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men.⁸



O peoples of the world! The Sun of Truth hath risen to illumine the whole earth, and to spiritualize the community of man. Laudable are the results and the fruits thereof, abundant the holy evidences

deriving from this grace. This is mercy unalloyed and purest bounty; it is light for the world and all its peoples; it is harmony and fellowship, and love and solidarity; indeed it is compassion and unity, and the end of foreignness; it is the being at one, in complete dignity and freedom, with all on earth.

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 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.⁹



Qualities of the spirit are the basic and divine foundation, and adorn the true essence of man; and knowledge is the cause of human progress. The beloved of God must attach great importance to this matter, and carry it forward with enthusiasm and zeal.¹⁰



I hope that in this nether world thou shalt attain unto heavenly light, thou wilt free the souls from the gloom of nature, which is the animal kingdom, and cause them to reach lofty stations in the human kingdom. Today all people are immersed in the world of nature. That is why thou dost see jealousy, greed, the struggle for survival, deception, hypocrisy, tyranny, oppression, disputes, strife,

bloodshed, looting, and pillaging, which all emanate from the world of nature. Few are those who have been freed from this darkness, who have ascended from the world of nature to the world of man, who have followed the divine Teachings, have served the world of humanity, are resplendent, merciful, illumined and like unto a rose garden. Strive thine utmost to become godlike, characterized with His attributes, illumined and merciful, that thou mayest be freed from every bond and become attached at heart to the Kingdom of the incomparable Lord. This is Bahá'í bounty, and this is heavenly light.¹¹



The mass of the people are occupied with self and worldly desire, are immersed in the ocean of the nether world and are captives of the world of nature, save those souls who have been freed from the chains and fetters of the material world and, like unto swift-flying birds, are soaring in this unbounded realm. They are awake and vigilant, they shun the obscurity of the world of nature, their highest wish centereth on the eradication from among men of the struggle for existence, the shining forth of the spirituality and the love of the realm on high, the exercise of utmost kindness among peoples, the realization of an intimate and close connection between religions and the practice of the ideal of self-sacrifice. Then will the world of humanity be transformed into the Kingdom of God.¹²



The Almighty hath not created in man the claws and teeth of ferocious animals, nay rather hath the human form been fashioned and set with the most comely attributes and adorned with the most perfect virtues. The honor of this creation and the worthiness of this garment therefore require man to have love and affinity for his own kind, nay rather, to act towards all living creatures with justice and equity.¹³



And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the oneness of the world of humanity; that all human beings are the sheep of God and He is the kind Shepherd. This Shepherd is kind to all the sheep, because

He created them all, trained them, provided for them and protected them. There is no doubt that the Shepherd is kind to all the sheep and should there be among these sheep ignorant ones, they must be educated; if there be children, they must be trained until they reach maturity; if there be sick ones, they must be cured. There must be no hatred and enmity, for as by a kind physician these ignorant, sick ones should be treated.

And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that religious, racial, political, economic, and patriotic prejudices destroy the edifice of humanity. As long as these prejudices prevail, the world of humanity will not have rest. For a period of 6,000 years history informs us about the world of humanity. During these 6,000 years the world of humanity has not been free from war, strife, murder, and bloodthirstiness. In every period war has been waged in one country or another and that war was due to either religious prejudice, racial prejudice, political prejudice, or patriotic prejudice. It has therefore been ascertained and proved that all prejudices are destructive of the human edifice. As long as these prejudices persist, the struggle for existence must remain dominant, and bloodthirstiness and rapacity continue. Therefore, even as was the case in the past, the world of humanity cannot be saved from the darkness of nature and cannot attain illumination except through the abandonment of prejudices and the acquisition of the morals of the Kingdom.

If this prejudice and enmity are on account of religion consider that religion should be the cause of fellowship, otherwise it is fruitless. And if this prejudice be the prejudice of nationality consider that all mankind are of one nation; all have sprung from the tree of Adam, and Adam is the root of the tree. That tree is one and all these nations are like branches, while the individuals of humanity are like leaves, blossoms, and fruits thereof. Then the establishment of various nations and the consequent shedding of blood and destruction of the edifice of humanity result from human ignorance and selfish motives.

As to the patriotic prejudice, this is also due to absolute ignorance, for the surface of the earth is one native land. Every one can live in any spot on the terrestrial globe. Therefore all the world is man's birthplace. These boundaries and outlets have been devised by man. In the creation, such boundaries and outlets were not

assigned. Europe is one continent, Asia is one continent, Africa is one continent, Australia is one continent, but some of the souls, from personal motives and selfish interests, have divided each one of these continents and considered a certain part as their own country. God has set up no frontier between France and Germany; they are continuous. Yet, in the first centuries, selfish souls, for the promotion of their own interests, have assigned boundaries and outlets and have, day by day, attached more importance to these, until this led to intense enmity, bloodshed, and rapacity in subsequent centuries. In the same way this will continue indefinitely, and if this conception of patriotism remains limited within a certain circle, it will be the primary cause of the world's destruction. No wise and just person will acknowledge these imaginary distinctions. Every limited area which we call our native country we regard as our motherland, whereas the terrestrial globe is the motherland of all, and not any restricted area. In short, for a few days we live on this earth and eventually we are buried in it, it is our eternal tomb. Is it worthwhile that we should engage in bloodshed and tear one another to pieces for this eternal tomb? Nay, far from it, neither is God pleased with such conduct nor would any sane man approve of it.

Regarding the economic prejudice, it is apparent that whenever the ties between nations become strengthened and the exchange of commodities accelerated, and any economic principle is established in one country, it will ultimately affect the other countries and universal benefits will result. Then why this prejudice?

As to the political prejudice, the policy of God must be followed and it is indisputable that the policy of God is greater than human policy. We must follow the Divine policy and that applies alike to all individuals. He treats all individuals alike: no distinction is made, and that is the foundation of the Divine Religions.¹⁴



O ye Cohorts of God! If you observe that a soul has turned his face completely toward the Cause of God, his intention is centralized upon the penetration of the Word of God, he is serving the Cause day and night with the utmost fidelity, no scent of selfishness is inhaled from his manners and deeds, and no trace of egotism or prejudice is seen in his personality—nay rather is he a wanderer in

the wilderness of the love of God, and one intoxicated with the wine of the knowledge of God, occupied wholly with the diffusion of the fragrances of God, and attracted to the signs of the Kingdom of God; know ye of a certainty that he is confirmed with the powers of the Kingdom, assisted by the heaven of Might; and he will shine, gleam, and sparkle like unto the morning star with the utmost brilliancy and splendor from the horizon of the everlasting gift. If he is alloyed with the slightest trace of passion, desire, ostentation, or self-interest, it is certain that the results of all efforts will prove fruitless, and he will become deprived and hopeless.¹⁵



O ye friends of God! Through the Appearance of the Blessed Perfection the theories are abrogated and the facts are established. The time of superficiality is gone by and the cycle of reality hath appeared. One must become the incarnation of Servitude, the personification of Love, the embodiment of Spirituality, and the mirror of Mercy.¹⁶



The word of truth, no matter which tongue utters it, must be sanctioned. Absolute verities, no matter in what book they be recorded, must be accepted. If we harbor prejudice, it will be the cause of deprivation and ignorance.¹⁷



Man is degraded in becoming the captive of his own illusions and suppositions. The earth is one earth, and the same atmosphere surrounds it. No difference or preference has been made by God for its human inhabitants; but man has laid the foundation of prejudice, hatred, and discord with his fellowman by considering nationalities separate in importance and races different in rights and privileges.¹⁸



Be kind to all people, love humanity, consider all mankind as your relations and servants of the most high God. Strive day and night that animosity and contention may pass away from the hearts of men, that all religions shall become reconciled and the nations love

each other so that no racial, religious, or political prejudice may remain and the world of humanity behold God as the beginning and end of all existence. God has created all, and all return to God. Therefore, love humanity with all your heart and soul. If you meet a poor man, assist him; if you see the sick, heal him; reassure the affrighted one, render the cowardly noble and courageous, educate the ignorant, associate with the stranger. Emulate God. Consider how kindly, how lovingly He deals with all, and follow His example. You must treat people in accordance with the divine precepts—in other words, treat them as kindly as God treats them, for this is the greatest attainment possible for the world of humanity.¹⁹



Consider the prejudice of patriotism. This is one globe, one land, one country. God did not divide it into national boundaries. He created all the continents without national divisions. Why should we make such division ourselves? These are but imaginary lines and boundaries. Europe is a continent; it is not naturally divided; man has drawn the lines and established the limits of kingdoms and empires. Man declares a river to be a boundary line between two countries, calling this side French and the other side German, whereas the river was created for both and is a natural artery for all. Is it not imagination and ignorance which impels man to violate the divine intention and make the very bounties of God the cause of war, bloodshed, and destruction? Therefore, all prejudices between man and man are falsehoods and violations of the will of God. God desires unity and love; He commands harmony and fellowship. Enmity is human disobedience; God Himself is love.²⁰



Prejudice—whether it be religious, racial, patriotic, or political in its origin and aspect—is the destroyer of human foundations and opposed to the commands of God. God has sent forth His Prophets for the sole purpose of creating love and unity in the world of human hearts. All the heavenly Books are the written word of love. If they prove to be the cause of prejudice and human estrangement, they have become fruitless. Therefore, religious prejudice is especially opposed to the will and command of God. Racial and national

prejudices which separate mankind into groups and branches, likewise, have a false and unjustifiable foundation, for all men are the children of Adam and essentially of one family. There should be no racial alienation or national division among humankind. Such distinctions as French, German, Persian, Anglo-Saxon are human and artificial; they have neither significance nor recognition in the estimation of God. In His estimate all are one, the children of one family; and God is equally kind to them. The earth has one surface. God has not divided this surface by boundaries and barriers to separate races and peoples. Man has set up and established these imaginary lines, giving to each restricted area a name and the limitation of a native land or nationhood. By this division and separation into groups and branches of mankind, prejudice is engendered which becomes a fruitful source of war and strife. Impelled by this prejudice, races and nations declare war against each other; the blood of the innocent is poured out, and the earth torn by violence. Therefore, it has been decreed by God in this day that these prejudices and differences shall be laid aside. All are commanded to seek the good pleasure of the Lord of unity, to follow His command and obey His will; in this way the world of humanity shall become illumined with the reality of love and reconciliation.²¹



The great question appertaining to humanity is religion. The first condition is that man must intelligently investigate its foundations. The second condition is that he must admit and acknowledge the oneness of the world of humanity. By this means the attainment of true fellowship among mankind is assured, and the alienation of races and individuals is prevented. All must be considered the servants of God; all must recognize God as the one kind Protector and Creator. In proportion to the acknowledgment of the oneness and solidarity of mankind, fellowship is possible, misunderstandings will be removed and reality become apparent. Then will the light of reality shine forth, and when reality illumines the world, the happiness of humankind will become a verity. Man must spiritually perceive that religion has been intended by God to be the means of grace, the source of life and cause of agreement. If it becomes the cause of discord, enmity, and hatred, it is better that man should be

without it. For in its teachings we seek the spirit of charity and love to bind the hearts of men together. If, on the contrary, we find it alienates and embitters human hearts, we are justified in casting it aside. Therefore, when man through sincere investigation discovers the fundamental reality of religion, his former prejudices disappear, and his new condition of enlightenment is conducive to the development of the world of humanity.²²



This is a new cycle of human power. All the horizons of the world are luminous, and the world will become indeed as a garden and a paradise. It is the hour of unity of the sons of men and of the drawing together of all races and all classes. You are loosed from ancient superstitions which have kept men ignorant, destroying the foundation of true humanity.

In the days of old an instinct for warfare was developed in the struggle with wild animals; this is no longer necessary; nay, rather, co-operation and mutual understanding are seen to produce the greatest welfare of mankind. Enmity is now the result of prejudice only.²³

NOTES

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), section xxxiv.

² Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006), pp. 127–28.

³ Ibid., p. 174.

⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, section xxxiv.

⁵ Ibid., section cxI.

⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2006), sections I.10–II.

⁷ Qu'rán 3:103.

⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), sections 14.2–3, and 14.5.

⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), sections I.1–3.

¹⁰ Ibid., section III.8.

¹¹ Ibid., section 180.1.

¹² Ibid., section 223.1.

¹³ Ibid., section 225.12.

- ¹⁴ Ibid., sections 227.8, 227.11–13, and 227.15–16.
- ¹⁵ *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas*, vol. 1 (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930), p. 42.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., vol. 11 (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1940), pp. 430–31.
- ¹⁷ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 151–52.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 232.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 291.
- ²⁰ Ibid., pp. 299–300.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 316.
- ²² Ibid., pp. 327–28.
- ²³ *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London: Addresses and Notes of Conversations* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), pp. 19–20.

*Unto the Most Holy Book every one
must turn and all that is not expressly
recorded therein must be referred to
the Universal House of Justice.*

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá



Highlights of Messages from the Universal House of Justice

Unique among the world's religious communities, the members of the Bahá'í Faith maintain a complete unity of purpose and vision, inspired and preserved by their adhering to the sacred writings of Bahá'u'lláh, and their turning to His appointed successors: the authorized interpreters of these writings, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi; and the institution designated to administer the laws of the Faith.

This clear center of authority, now embodied in the institution of the Universal House of Justice—the community's elected international governing council—was conceived by Bahá'u'lláh to protect His Faith from factionalism and to provide the world with a model framework for the practical establishment of unity.

Since its first election in 1963, the Universal House of Justice has guided the growth and development of the Bahá'í community. Consequently, the Faith's integrity has been preserved, its unity maintained, and its expansion around the world directed and sustained.

The Universal House of Justice is the sole institution of the Bahá'í Faith that is empowered to enact further application of Bahá'u'lláh's laws. While it cannot annul or modify any directive explicitly given by Bahá'u'lláh in His writings, it does have the

authority to decide on matters not specified in the texts, and performs a number of specific functions “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

Through its communications, the Universal House of Justice provides vision and direction to the worldwide community. On occasion, it addresses the wider community, setting forth the Bahá'í perspective on issues that are of particular concern to the well-being of the peoples of the world, the purpose being to inspire constructive action in relation to them.

In the year under review, a number of significant communications from the Universal House of Justice offered guidance to the Bahá'í community.

Worldwide growth and development of the Bahá'í Faith

One of the most important of the regular communications of the Universal House of Justice is the message released each year during the Festival of Ridván (21 April–2 May). As the Bahá'í world community embarked on the fourth year of its current five-year plan of growth and development, the message of the Universal House of Justice written at Ridván 2005 presented an upbeat assessment of the community's ongoing efforts to strengthen the skills and capacities of its members through the use of training institutes employing course materials developed by the Ruhi Institute in Colombia, which has given a sense of global coherence to the process of learning in which the Bahá'í community is engaged. The Universal House of Justice noted that more than 200,000 people worldwide had completed Book 1 of the Ruhi Institute and that some 10,000 Bahá'ís were now qualified to act as tutors for the courses through “study circles.” There were now sizeable groups of trained Bahá'ís in some 150 geographical locations, known as “clusters,” experimenting with, or ready to initiate, intensive programs designed to develop the community and extend its activities and influence. The experiences being garnered in these locations were being systematically analyzed and shared to assist the efforts of Bahá'ís all over the world.

The Universal House of Justice celebrated the “continual enhancement of the spiritual life of Bahá'í communities every-



The members of the Universal House of Justice, 2005–2006.

where,” contrasting the growing solidarity within the Faith with the evidences of the decline in society, the “breakdown in which a demoralized world is entrapped.” As Bahá’ís focused on devotional meetings, children’s classes, and study circles, a renewed spiritual vitality could be discerned in the community, accounting for the growing participation of people of diverse backgrounds from the wider community, many of whom chose to join the Faith.

On 30 October 2005, a letter to the Bahá’ís of the world announced the names of 81 individuals appointed to a new five-year term as members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors for the Protection and Propagation of the Bahá’í Faith. Five Continental Boards of Counsellors have the responsibility of educating, encouraging, and motivating Bahá’í communities through their interaction with National Spiritual Assemblies and with 990 Auxiliary Board members who work at the regional and local level. The new contingent of Counsellors were invited to the Bahá’í World Centre for a conference from 27 to 31 December to deliberate on the features of the next five-year plan of growth and development to be launched at Ridván 2006. A seminal letter from the Universal House of Justice addressed to the conference of the Continental Board of Counsellors, dated 27 December 2005, and widely circulated to Bahá’ís throughout the world, provided analysis of the activities of the community over the previous



Gathered on the steps of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice on Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel, are members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors together with, at front, center, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, members of the Universal House of Justice, and the International Teaching Centre.

five years, and gave clear direction for its future evolution. The letter emphasized the need for individual believers, communities, and institutions to continue developing their capacities and maintaining their focus. The Universal House of Justice highlighted the importance of cultivating a “pattern of behavior” in community life that attracts people: “A nurturing environment is being cultivated in which each individual is encouraged to progress at his or her own pace without the pressure of unreasonable expectations. At the heart of such developments is a growing awareness of the implications of the universality and comprehensiveness of the Faith.”

A letter from the Universal House of Justice addressed to all National Spiritual Assemblies on 28 December 2005 offered

further guidance on the curriculum of training institute programs. Assemblies everywhere were encouraged to adopt the books of the Ruhi Institute as the main sequence of courses for institutes. The message also explored the idea of the development of other courses branching out from the main sequence, addressing areas of action specific to a particular culture or population.

As the gathering in the Holy Land of the Continental Counsellors drew to a close, the Universal House of Justice addressed a message to the Bahá'ís of the world, dated 31 December 2005:

We are moved to share with you the feelings of joy, triumph, and confidence which have characterized several days of focused deliberation on the present Five Year Plan and on the global enterprise that will succeed it. Persistent questions of how to sustain the process of growth, of how to achieve a balance between expansion and consolidation, that have engaged the Bahá'í community for nearly half a century found clear answers in the experiences shared from diverse clusters on all continents.

The Universal House of Justice expressed its interest at the sharing in the conference of "accounts of obstacles surmounted, fresh learning acquired, and creative insights discovered."

The situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran

Several letters during the year detailed specific events related to the persecution of Iran's long-suffering Bahá'í community. On 29 September 2005, the Universal House of Justice confirmed that Bahá'í students in Iran had once again been denied access to higher education:

The Iranian government had publicly announced that applicants of the national university entrance examination would no longer be asked to state their religion on the application form. Their hopes thus being raised, the students took their exams without having to list their religion. However when the test results were made known, reference to the applicant's religion remained on the form and the religion of the Bahá'í applicants was registered as Islam. Appeals to the governmental agency overseeing the examination process went unanswered. The Bahá'ís, as a matter

of principle, would not deny their Faith, so they could not accept or use the exam cards to apply for admission into either public or private institutions of higher education.

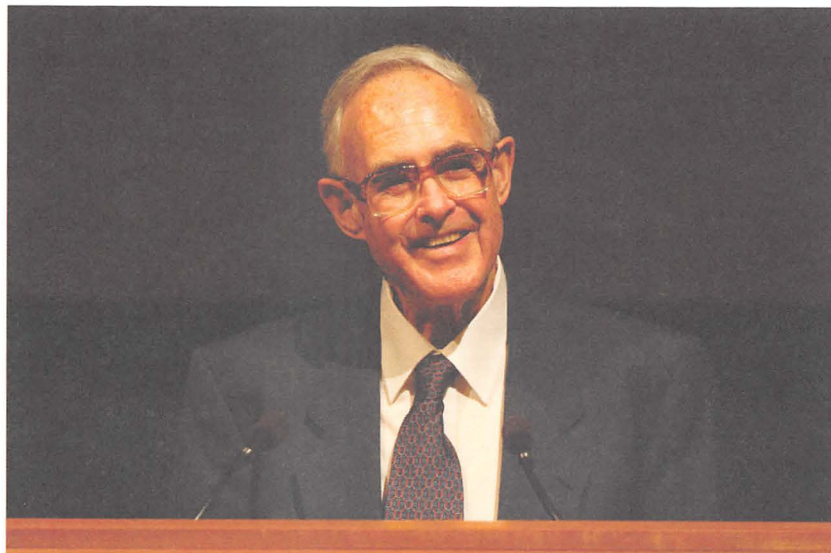
On 20 December 2005, a message of condolence was sent to the Bahá'ís in Iran following the death in a prison in Yazd of Mr. Dhabíhu'lláh Mahramí, "his sacrifice once again demonstrating to the world that Bahá'ís—who harbor no intention or desire save service to the world of humanity, the fostering of fellowship and friendship, and the establishment of universal peace—rather than being intimidated . . . embrace with meekness the persecution that is meted out to them through ignorant prejudice."

In a further message, sent on the same day to National Spiritual Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice noted that it was

particularly poignant that on the very day Mr. Mahramí's body was being laid to rest, a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly . . . In addition to expressing the General Assembly's serious concern at 'the continuing discrimination, and other human rights violations against persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities,' including the Bahá'ís, the Resolution notes explicitly 'the escalation and increased frequency of discrimination and other human rights violations against the Bahá'í[s], including cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, the denial of freedom of religion or of publicly carrying out communal affairs, the disregard of property rights, the destruction of sites of religious importance, the suspension of social, educational and community-related activities and the denial of access to higher education, employment, pensions, adequate housing, and other benefits.'²

The release of *The Tabernacle of Unity*

On 20 April 2006, the Universal House of Justice announced to all National Spiritual Assemblies the completion of a volume of newly translated writings from Bahá'u'lláh, entitled *The Tabernacle of Unity*. The main feature of this small book is Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Mánikchí Şáhib, a prominent Zoroastrian. The Universal House of Justice wrote that the contents of the book "offer a glimpse of



Ian Semple, a former member of the Universal House of Justice, at the centenary celebration of the German Bahá'í community, held in Stuttgart.

Bahá'u'lláh's relationship with the followers of a religion that had arisen, many centuries before, in the same land that witnessed the birth of His own Faith.”³

Bahá'í Internet Agency

The rise of computer technology has greatly increased opportunities to make known to society at large the activities of the Bahá'í community. On 16 June 2005, the Universal House of Justice announced to all National Spiritual Assemblies its decision to create an international Bahá'í Internet Agency to assist Bahá'í institutions in addressing issues as they pertain to the Internet.

The Centenary of the Bahá'í Faith in Germany

On 10 September 2005, the Universal House of Justice addressed a special message to those gathered at celebrations for the centenary of the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in Germany. “This is a moment for reflection, profound reflection,” it wrote, “one that recounts the highlights in contrast to the dark aspects punctuating the history

of crisis and victory that depicts the evolution of the German community . . . No other community in the Western world can claim to have demonstrated a greater resilience in the face of formidable obstacles that threatened to rob you of the shining triumph, the potent prospects, signalized by your very meeting on so auspicious an occasion.”

The message reviewed the outstanding achievements of the community throughout its 100-year history and encouraged the Bahá'ís in Germany to “seize the opportunities open to them to move resolutely to the next chapter of their destiny, which is unfolding so brilliantly.”⁴

NOTES

- ¹ *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1972), pp. 3–4.
- ² For further details on the ongoing persecutions in Iran's Bahá'í community, see pp. 115–27 of this volume.
- ³ For further information on *The Tabernacle of Unity*, see pp. 89–92 of this volume.
- ⁴ For further details on the celebrations of the centenary of the Bahá'í Faith in Germany, see pp. 85–88 of this volume.

EVENTS
2005-2006

*The progress of the world, the
development of nations, the tranquility
of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell
on earth are among the principles and
ordinances of God.*

—Bahá'u'lláh



The Year in Review

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Bahá'ís the world over have been engaged in a systematic process designed to foster the quantitative and qualitative growth of their worldwide community. In the year under review, there has been an impressive proliferation of activities aimed at fostering spiritual and social development, inspired by training programs which have galvanized individuals and communities. "Core activities," comprising children's classes, study circles, and devotional meetings, are being carried out worldwide with increasing skill, enthusiasm, and effectiveness. The momentum generated by these endeavors is reflected in Bahá'í contributions to many diverse areas, including education, racial unity, social and economic development, gender equality, the arts, and interfaith dialogue.

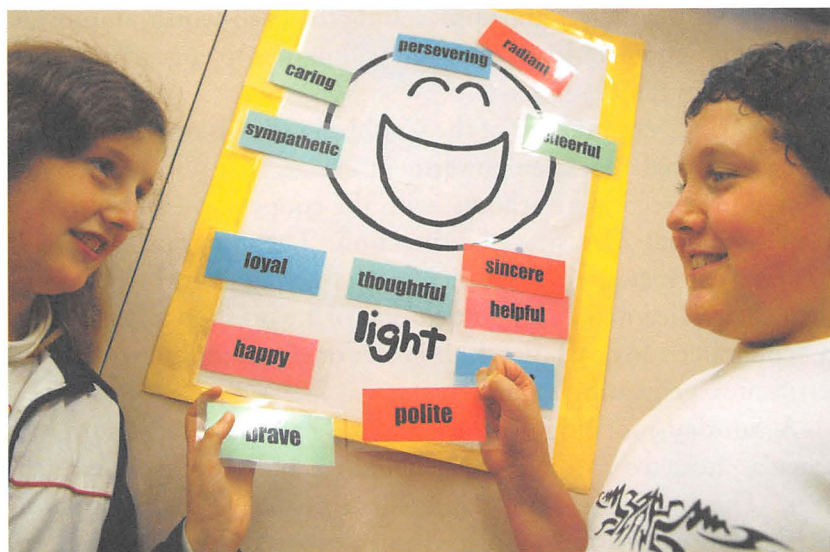
Though capturing all of the events of the year 2005–2006 would be impossible to attempt, the highlights included here should provide a salient glimpse of the character of the Bahá'í community and its efforts to uplift the whole of humanity as it moves through a period of turbulent transition to embrace unity and a lasting peace.

Education of children, junior youth, and youth

In calling for the building of a new global civilization, Bahá'u'lláh requests that particular attention be paid to education: "We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the child."¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá described the education and training of children as being among "the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God."²

In light of the paramount importance attached to education in the Bahá'í writings, it is not surprising that children's classes have been a vital concern of the Bahá'í community since its earliest days. The Universal House of Justice has given them high priority by designating them as one of the "core activities" of present-day Bahá'í community life. Indeed, in many parts of the world, children's classes are the first activity in a process of community building which give rise to other developments, including the education of junior youth (11–14 year olds), parents and the extended family, and the spiritual and material development of the wider community. Stories from around the world attest to the commitment that individuals and communities in the past year have made to the education of the young in spiritual and moral values.

Junior youth in Colombia joined Bahá'í-inspired groups with great enthusiasm, resulting in the establishment of strong friendships and a sense of belonging. Their confidence in contributing to the betterment of society has increased as they have carried out service projects including tree planting, visiting the elderly, and helping children's class teachers. Also in Colombia, a Bahá'í mother planning a class invited a group of children she had noticed playing in the common area of their high-rise apartment buildings. More than a dozen of them attended for many months every Saturday morning. Their parents proved to be receptive to the idea of spiritual education for their children and supported the teacher's efforts. In Texas, USA, a Bahá'í schoolteacher launched a similar program in an apartment complex largely inhabited by Spanish-speaking immigrants. More than 20 children attended the classes while their mothers enthusiastically invited more young people from the neighborhood.



Participants in the Youth Empowerment Program in Swindon, UK.

In Tajikistan, a Bahá'í began classes with young people from the Roma community, who are generally shunned by the local Tajik and Uzbek populations. Many illiterate Roma children, aged between 5 and 17, attended the classes three times a week. Among their activities was a visit to see a dentist at work. He was so inspired by their teacher's dedication that he explained to the Roma children about their history and the importance of education. He appealed to them to become the generation that changes the fortunes of their people and grow to be outstanding servants to the community. The students said they wished to become educated and subsequently registered their younger siblings for children's classes.

In Swindon, United Kingdom, the Bahá'í-inspired Youth Empowerment Program entered its fifth year with 10 learning mentors from six schools completing a facilitator course and establishing the program in their respective schools. The program addresses the theme of spirit as a motivating force in the development of young people. Two education courses, entitled "Tranquility Zone" and "Discovery Zone," have been developed for young people. Role playing, games, and activities help the youth internalize insights they gain about their potential and capacities. Three factors are being used to measure the success of the program: young people feeling

better about themselves and appreciating their self-worth, improved behavior at school and at home, and willingness to engage in learning and community service.

The Bahá'í community of the Caribbean islands of St. Kitts and Nevis facilitated moral empowerment classes as a pilot project in selected local secondary schools, with the cooperation and blessing of the national Ministry of Education. The program included the study of materials about virtues and activities involving their practical application. At the conclusion of a workshop and training in September 2005, the islands' minister of education presented the certificates, generating media interest.

A Sunday morning Family Virtues Breakfast in Manitoba, Canada, attracted as many as 80 children and their parents each week. The program—which is held in one of Winnipeg's most socially deprived suburbs—placed an emphasis on helping children build positive moral capacities. Virtues were taught using crafts, drawing, reading, and participative games. Organizations were keen to make donations towards food, craft supplies, and equipment. Other social service groups began to inquire about the project's successful approach.

A four-day seminar on "Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment" was held in New Delhi, India, in December 2005, organized by the Foundation for Advancement of Science, Bhopal. More than 90 participants attended from 15 countries. Those attending the seminar heard how in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, where junior youth programs were initiated three years previously, the young participants had become the most active and enthusiastic members of their communities, keen to apply their skills to the teaching of younger children and other junior youth. In Lucknow, a Bahá'í youth association, "The Peacemakers," conducted spiritual empowerment programs in two government schools with 84 students. The junior youth attended classes in which moral dilemmas were acted out and discussion was encouraged about creative solutions to problems. On 1 August 2005, the Bahá'í community of Panchgani and the New Era High School celebrated the school's 60th anniversary. Among the presentations was a performance depicting the early history of the school by secondary students.



A group of participants at the Norwegian Bahá'í summer school takes part in a 10-hour hike across the Besseggen mountain range. More than 430 Bahá'ís from 12 countries attend the summer school.

During a period of great civil unrest and soul searching in Paris, France, a group of Bahá'ís was able to initiate a children's class. A large educational center showed interest in providing them with a venue. Initially, the center asked the Bahá'ís to work only with children. However, after seeing the positive effects on the attendees, the center arranged for a group of 12 junior youth also to begin a program. In Australia, a psychology student, in the course of being interviewed for a volunteer counseling position at a multicultural center, mentioned her training in Bahá'í junior youth programs. Her interviewer was very interested and inquired about the possibility of starting a program at the center, aimed particularly at young people who had recently immigrated to Australia. A successful bid for government funding resulted in a 20-week pilot project.

In California, USA, the Bahá'í-inspired organization known as the Children's Enrichment Program (CEP), underwent several major changes as it evolved into the Leadership Enrichment & Arts

Program (LEAP) this year. Over a 12-year period, the Bahá'í-inspired organization and its staff developed a new curriculum for the after-school program. Marketed as Full-Circle Learning, the curriculum has been made adaptable for in-school, after-school, summer, weekend, and home-school programs. It also has won honors such as the John Anson Ford Human Relations Award, which lauded CEP for “infusing character education, conflict resolution, and community service into academic and arts enrichment.” The program is supervised by the Multicultural Organization for Neighborhood Arts (MONA), a non-profit Bahá'í-inspired organization established to provide programs for social good and promote the oneness of humanity through the arts, classes, and job skills training for young people.

A Bahá'í in Taiwan established a moral education class at her child's elementary school. The mother of one participant expressed an interest to learn more and joined a training institute program along with some of her friends. As a result of the training, these women established five new children's classes for almost 30 children. When they observed the positive effect that the classes were having on their younger children, they also formed a group for junior youth. A weekly class started by a 12 year old in Nicaragua continued into its fourth year. Initially, 11 neighborhood children attended and liked the class so much that during their vacations they went to the class daily. Speaking with the children's parents, this young Bahá'í learned that they valued the lessons that were helping their children to understand and practice spiritual qualities in their daily lives. In Romania, the Mayflower Kindergarten in Covasna offers a full-day program as well as English lessons in the afternoons. The school, which began in 2001, has renovated three classrooms for the use of its kindergarten pupils.

In Mongolia, a camp was organized to train teachers to work with junior youth. Fifty-eight participants attended and plans were made for volunteers to spend their summer holidays in villages and then to visit them regularly during the year in order to maintain contact with the junior youth there. Each of the volunteers pledged to work with one urban and one rural group. A junior youth program in Cameroon has been started by the Bahá'í-inspired nongovernmental organization (NGO) Emergence—Foundation for Education and Development. After about 18 months of concerted effort, 21

junior youth groups with 418 participants had been established in six areas. In March 2005, a junior youth program was launched in Nepal in Morang, Sunsari, Kathmandu, and Lalitpur. Receptivity to the program has been high, not only among the estimated 600 participants but also among other members of the wider community, who encouraged junior youth to join the program.

Bahá'í-inspired organizations that work with older youth have discovered that junior youth programs can be a natural extension of their activities. In Guyana, the Varqa Foundation has incorporated a junior youth component into its larger effort, entitled Youth Can Move the World (YCMTW). The YCMTW program provides youth with instruction that strengthens their identity as agents of personal and community transformation. After receiving training that prepares them as YCMTW facilitators, they return to their home communities and initiate youth activities with their peers and with junior youth groups. In Kosovo, a Bahá'í-inspired social and economic development project, Global Perspective Development Centre (GPDC), has been working with youth for several years. In 2005, a junior youth program was integrated into the existing Global Motion project of GPDC, which uses the arts as a tool for personal and social transformation. Of the 100 or so participants in the project, a number of key individuals were chosen to work further with other groups.

In Florida, USA, the annual Project Badi summer program offers reading circles to improve the literacy skills of young people. The project has been carried out in four predominantly African-American and Caribbean neighborhoods in the Broward, Tampa, and Palm Beach areas. Some 40 young Bahá'ís carried out daily, two-hour-long reading circles for dozens of "at-risk" junior youth in neighborhoods. The reading circles have served as a launch pad for local Bahá'ís to offer ongoing character development classes to children and junior youth. Families of the reading circle students are also engaged in monthly gatherings which incorporate presentations prepared by the junior youth. Some parents have shown an interest in a Spiritual Parenting course. A columnist from the *Tampa Tribune* wrote, on 23 July 2005, that the program gave "hope in a world that seems so fractured and self-centered."

The new government syllabus for religious and moral education in Botswana, aimed at the senior primary level, now includes the



*Chloe Maclean,
a pupil from a
Sydney primary
school, reads a
prayer at the
service held in the
House of Worship
on Universal
Children's Day.*

Bahá'í Faith as one of the religions that can be taught. The syllabus adopts a theme-based approach by which teachers can select different religions to illustrate the themes. Bahá'ís in Lusaka, Zambia, sponsored an essay competition for young people on the theme, "The role of family in bringing peace." The entrants from a number of secondary schools explored themes of "gender inequality" and "decline in moral leadership" in their essays.

Some 6,000 primary school children in Australia are attending Bahá'í classes in more than 300 state-run schools. Offered to provide religious instruction to children from the Bahá'í community, the classes are also attracting many other children. In April 2005, Bahá'ís launched monthly workshops in Brisbane designed to create a new generation of peacemakers. The junior youth who attend develop insights and skills to realize their role in the establishment of peace in the world. On 8 December 2005, some 800 people attended a devotional service held in the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney, Australia, to celebrate Universal Children's Day. An unaccompanied choir—with members aged between 5 and 12 years old—provided the music while other children read from the world's religious scriptures. After the service, a variety of activities were offered including

performances by dance and music groups, face painting, storytelling, and a display of children's art on the theme of the environment, and respect for people of different races, cultures, and religions.

Advancement of women

Speaking in Chicago in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told the Federation of Women's Clubs, "Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible."³ Activities undertaken around the globe, particularly the widespread education of women and girls in developing countries, demonstrate the Bahá'í community's continued commitment to this ideal.

The Bahá'í International Community gives priority to promoting this fundamental Bahá'í principle at the international, diplomatic level. Some 21 Bahá'ís participated in the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) held in New York from 27 February to 10 March 2006. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, the Commission has become a global rallying point for those concerned about, and dedicated to, the advancement of women. Representatives attended from more than 400 organizations. The two main themes under discussion at this year's Commission were the "enhanced participation of women in development" and the "equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels." Bahá'í delegates, from as far afield as Brazil, Japan, Switzerland, and Togo, addressed the themes in various ways. One of them, Ms. Zarin Hainsworth from the United Kingdom, facilitated three NGO workshops during the Commission: the first explored positive values learned from influential women; a second looked at how issues of international trade affect women; and the third addressed the plight of widows. On 28 February, the Bahá'í International Community hosted a luncheon at its New York offices for South Africa's First Lady, Mrs. Zanele Mbeki, who spoke about her new program—South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID).

Bahá'ís in New Delhi participated in a two-day consultation to discuss the declining male-female ratio. The meeting at the India Habitat Centre brought together policy makers, members of international and religious organizations, as well as representatives of civil



Some 21 Bahá'ís from 10 countries participate in the 2006 United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), an annual meeting on women's issues.

society. Concern was expressed at the ongoing decline in the ratio of women to men, which dropped from 945 women to every 1,000 men in 1990, to 927 to every 1,000 in the year 2001. Sex selection is common in Indian families that have more than two children where, if the first child is a female and the next child is desired to be male, the female fetus is terminated. Participants discussed the need for a more comprehensive framework to deal with the problem, including addressing legal issues, reviewing policy, and providing a blueprint for future planning.

A production entitled *For the Love of Peace* was organized by the Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in May 2005. Six young singers from the Bahá'í Unity School and Junior Youth Empowerment Program performed in front of a full house in a presentation about peace and gender equality. Multimedia programs presented perspectives on Malaysia's economy, security, and health in relation to the rest of the world, and the message of the oneness of humanity and the beauty of diversity. The audience included many officials from the National Council of Women's Organizations, members of NGOs, interfaith representatives,

and the general public. Australia's Bahá'í community made a submission to the Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services. The submission recognized that balancing work and family responsibilities is an increasing challenge for many families and suggested that a wide range of measures are needed to assist families to fully meet this challenge. The Australian Bahá'í community is also represented on a working group for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW).

More than 600 people attended a Bahá'í-organized film festival in Australia in October 2005 which had "Woman" as its theme. Entries to the Harmony Film Festival in Sydney were submitted from 25 filmmakers of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, and from countries including Australia, Japan, Russia, Spain, and the United States. A film from a child's perspective about the equality of the sexes won the Best Film award. The Australian-made movie *The Arm*, by Los Angeles-based filmmaker Bitá Haidarian, tells the story of an eight-year-old girl whose father refuses to let her swap her household chores with her brother's because lawn mowing is "for boys." The girl takes matters into her own hands and ends up with a humorous and telling result. The judges, from the film industry, included documentary filmmakers Peter Butt and Mitzi Goldman, movie director Mojgan Khadem, film and television journalist Sandy George, and actor Nick Tate. Shideh Faramand's six-minute comedy *In Time* won both the Audience Choice and Achievement awards. The film takes a humorous look at the social pressures on single women to get married and start a family. The award for the Most Original Concept went to Anis Fanaeian for *Remember Tomorrow*, a film about a professional woman who chooses motherhood over a successful career.

Ms. Françoise Barsacq, the president of France's Bahá'í Association of Women (ABF), was elected secretary-general of the National Council of French Women during its general assembly in September 2005. Ms. Barsacq works with members of the Executive Committee of the Council, alongside the vice-president of the French Parliament. Her appointment has increased the scope of ABF to work with all French associations.

Efforts to protect immigrant women and girls from violence were boosted by a \$300,000 grant from the United States government. The Bahá'í-inspired Tahirih Justice Center, based in Washington, DC, was the recipient of an Edward Byrne Grant, as part of the Science, State, Justice, and Commerce Appropriations Bill signed into law by President George W. Bush. Grant proceeds are spread over a number of years and will be used to “strategically increase Tahirih’s institutional capacity to enable it to respond to a 400 percent increase in demand for its services,” said executive director Layli Miller-Muro. The office, which receives up to 50 calls a day for help, serves immigrant women and their families through legal representation, social service referrals, and access to its network of pro bono attorneys and physicians. The center’s annual fundraising benefit, held on 27 September 2005, was attended by more than 400 guests and supporters, including Queen Noor of Jordan, who is renowned for her global efforts on behalf of women and children. The benefit, which included the recital of prayers from the Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions, concluded with a Bahá'í prayer for unity.

Involvement in the life of society

As an international nongovernmental organization, the Bahá'í International Community involves itself in wide-ranging activities to advance the welfare of society, including consultative work with the United Nations, participation in dialogues with leaders of thought, and interactions with the wider public. Bahá'í communities at the national and local levels are often very effective at mobilizing resources in response to extraordinary circumstances, as was the case this year in the American Bahá'ís' contribution to assisting those affected by Hurricane Katrina. Throughout the world, countless individual Bahá'ís also dedicate themselves to the service of society, many of them excelling in their professional and volunteer activities.

In August and September 2005, Bahá'ís in the USA were mobilized into extraordinary action in response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina along much of the north-central Gulf Coast of the country, most notably in New Orleans and coastal Mississippi. The National Spiritual Assembly was quick to allocate money from the

Bahá'í National Humanitarian Fund to meet the needs of evacuees of all faith communities. The Assembly's Office of Development established links with local Bahá'ís and other partners to determine how the community's resources could be placed to greatest advantage. At the local level, Bahá'ís joined in relief efforts, many taking into their homes those who had lost much of their property. Local Spiritual Assemblies provided volunteers and material assistance, some organizing the delivery of truckloads of supplies to the disaster area, others establishing communications centers or informational Web sites. In Houston, as many as 200 Bahá'ís joined volunteers trained by the Second Baptist Church, inflating air mattresses, setting up showers and health facilities, sorting food, clothing and bedding, and welcoming exhausted evacuees on their arrival. Some 20 Bahá'ís from Harris and Galveston counties focused their care on children. With the approval of the Houston Parks and Recreation Department and guidance from Bahá'í institutions, the Bahá'ís offered crafts, cooperative games, music, and supervision in a designated play space.

The annual Bahá'í Conference on Social and Economic Development for the Americas, held in Orlando, Florida, 15–18 December 2005, was told that the Bahá'ís were able to respond quickly and efficiently to Hurricane Katrina because of the decentralized structure of Bahá'í communities, and the Faith's emphasis on individual initiative. Mr. William Davis, Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, told the conference, "The Bahá'ís responded in a remarkable way. No one asked, 'how many of us are we?' and 'can we can do this?' They simply said, 'this is a need, we must do it, that's who we are as Bahá'ís, we respond to the human needs.'"

Around the world, Bahá'í communities gathered to pray for the victims and survivors of the hurricane. In Malaysia, a prayer session united people of various faiths. Ms. June Loh, secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of Malaysia, said that the sympathy and aid that went to New Orleans from across the world showed humanity's ability to come together in moments of crisis.

In July 2005, the devastating floods in Maharashtra state, India, led students of a Bahá'í educational establishment in Satara—the Mona School—to assist people in afflicted villages. Pupils surveyed the area and identified families that needed immediate help. Kits

containing basic household items were distributed to 110 families in eight villages. They also helped two schools in flood-affected areas by raising money to replace school uniforms and books. Students also prayed with people in the affected areas for their successful recovery from the difficulties caused by the flooding.

School children in the Pacific nation of Kiribati were the recipients of books donated by Australian Bahá'ís. The Bahá'í communities of Logan City and Redlands, in conjunction with community groups in South East Queensland, collected old and new books to be donated to Kiribati's schools, which are chronically underresourced.

The Bahá'í-inspired Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute in London, Ontario, Canada, hosted a presentation on helping ex-combatant children from Colombia reintegrate into civilian life. The Colombian Ambassador to Canada, Jorge Visbal Martelo, was present at the event as was the staff of the International Organization for Migration, based in Colombia. A 17 year old told the audience of her experience as an armed combatant in Colombia, when she became involved with an illegal guerilla group at the age of 12. "Lack of family support led me to join an armed group," she said, "I joined willingly and thought I was fighting for our country to obtain peace. I later realized I had given up my youth for a cause I no longer could support."

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom hosted a reception in London in January 2006 for Canadian senator General Roméo Dallaire, the force commander of the United Nations mission to Rwanda, who exposed humanity's failure to stop the genocide in that country. General Dallaire shared many of his painful experiences in Rwanda with members of the Assembly and their guests, and candidly expressed his views about the essential oneness of humanity and the need to develop new attitudes to stave off conflict and contention in the world. The practical application of Bahá'í principles in post-conflict societies was further explored in a conference in November 2005 of the Bahá'í International Politics and Law Special Interest Group in Cambridge, England, entitled "Countering evil through law and policy." The presentations, given at the Lauterpacht Research Centre for International Law, ranged from the religious and theoretical analysis of the problem of evil, to discussions of legal and political responses on how to counter war



Some graduates of the advanced computer class offered by the Bahá'í community of the Gambia.

or genocide. The scrutiny of evil led to reflection on issues such as human rights abuse, terrorism, and hatred.

In Banjul, the Gambia, 56 students received graduation certificates on completing classes to gain computer skills, offered free of charge by the Bahá'ís. Since 1998, more than 900 students have benefited from the classes, which are designed to help those who cannot otherwise obtain computer skills to get a job. Students have ranged from teenagers to the middle-aged, and include both men and women. The courses, offered at basic and advanced levels, usually involve two sessions of two hours per week for three months and are held in a specially designed room in the new national Bahá'í center. The teachers are Gambian Bahá'ís and youth volunteers from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Participants at a European conference on law, held in the Netherlands in December 2005, heard how the challenges that terrorism throws at governments can only be countered by global governance deeply grounded in unity. The Bahá'í keynote speaker, Dr. Wendi Momen, told the audience of law professionals that the challenges to

the law terrorism poses are not only in the area of balancing safety with human liberty, but also in the creation of new laws to fit a new system of governance that is better adapted to the present globalized world. The conference attracted participants from seven countries.

In December 2005, a Bahá'í from Alberta, Canada, received one of France's most prestigious awards. Pierre-Yves Mocquais, professor and former dean of humanities at the University of Calgary, was named Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques in recognition of his extensive contribution to the study of French-Canadian literature and culture. Dr. Mocquais's work examines the identity and culture of Francophones as a minority group and, most recently, of French immigrants who settled in Saskatchewan early in the twentieth century without having spent time in Québec.

In Germany, a doctor who developed psychotherapeutic techniques based on the Bahá'í teachings was presented with the Cross of Merit ribbon of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. Dr. Nossrat Peseschkian was honored on 23 January 2006 "in recognition for extraordinary services to the nation and its people." He received the award in the office of the prime minister of the state of Hesse. Dr. Peseschkian founded the German Society for Positive Psychotherapy and the Wiesbaden Further Education Circle for Psycho- and Family-Therapy. His methods involve using stories and innovative transcultural methods, through which the patient is able to see himself and his personal problems in a holistic context.

The theme of "Japanese Traditions and Moral Education" was explored at a conference hosted by the Association of Bahá'í Studies Japan in Yokohama, from 16 to 18 September 2005. Participants consulted upon a wide range of historical topics and modern issues. A member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Japan, Shannon Higgins, reflected on the current moral crisis in Japanese education and the experiences of children who struggle to find meaning and identity amidst disconnected social settings, bullying, classroom breakdown, and a disintegrated curriculum devoid of vision and spiritual direction.

The Japanese Ambassador to the United States told a gathering at Green Acre Bahá'í School in Eliot, Maine, that he had "deep admiration" for the effort Bahá'ís have made in "attending to world peace and human harmony." Taking the theme of "Peace in the 21st

Century,” the Honorable Ryoza Kato spoke on 4 September 2005 about Japan’s growing role in peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts around the world. His speech capped off a week-long celebration of the role played 100 years ago by Green Acre’s founder, prominent American Bahá’í Sarah Farmer, in promoting activities that supported negotiations that ended the Russo-Japanese War.

Diplomats, academics, and media representatives were among the prominent people at the official opening of the national Bahá’í center in Warsaw, Poland on 21 March 2006. Guest speaker Mr. Jacek Santorski, a business psychologist, spoke about building bridges between world religions by recognizing their essential oneness. The guests included embassy staff, professors of ethics and religious studies, publishers, and journalists from the press and radio.

The Austrian Bahá’í community celebrated the 50th anniversary of their national center, the Bahá’í-Haus in Vienna, in November 2005. Religious and government officials were among the numerous dignitaries who joined the first day of celebrations. The three-day event climaxed with a gathering in Vienna of some 120 Bahá’ís from around Austria.

An elegant Bahá’í center in Edinburgh, Scotland, was purchased in May 2005 after a united effort by the local and national Bahá’í communities. The center is in the historic Georgian New Town area of the city, within a building conservation zone and close to Edinburgh’s central business and shopping district. The four-story building has many spacious rooms suitable for the reception of distinguished visitors and for meetings of the Bahá’í Council for Scotland, the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Edinburgh, and the Bahá’í community in general.

Representatives of the Scottish Bahá’í community were invited to address Scotland’s Parliament as part of its weekly proceeding that allows people from different faiths to share their perspectives on the challenges facing the country. It was the first time an invitation had come to the Bahá’ís from a member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP). Carrie Varjavandi, a Bahá’í from Dundee, addressed the body on 18 January 2006. Ms. Varjavandi invited Parliament members to consider the current world situation: “The world today faces apparently intractable problems, which governments and peoples are



The presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament, the Right Honorable George Reid MSP, left, listens to Carrie Varjavandi of the Scottish Bahá'í community give her "Time for Reflection" address on 18 January 2006.

striving courageously to solve: climate change, poverty, and religious fanaticism, to name but a few," she said. She then suggested that the spiritual teachings of Bahá'u'lláh not only identified disunity as the underlying cause of these problems, but also offered a solution. Commenting on the address, Presiding Officer George Reid MSP made a direct connection between the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith and the words of Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns, saying, "the Bahá'í belief in the unity of mankind matches our commitment to build an inclusive society in Scotland."

Two Bahá'ís joined representatives of religions, leaders of thought and politics at the Silver Jubilee celebration of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. The event took place at the cathedral in Utrecht on 1 December 2005. The program, broadcast live on television, included speeches, music, cultural dances, and excerpts from the writings of various religions and philosophies.

On 6 December 2005, a former British parliamentarian, Sir Sydney Chapman, received the inaugural Blomfield Award for Human Rights at a ceremony organized by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom and the Bahá'ís of

the London borough of Barnet. The Blomfield Award is named after Sara Louisa, Lady Blomfield, a prominent early British Bahá'í and philanthropist. It is presented to individuals in British public life who have offered consistent and exceptional support towards the defense of Bahá'ís in countries where they are persecuted for their religious faith, notably in Iran. Sir Sydney—who retired in 2005 after 26 years as Member of Parliament for Barnet—was honored for his defense of the human rights of the Bahá'ís by raising parliamentary questions and motions and speaking in debates. Sir Sydney said he attached great importance to the struggle for human rights and to efforts to reduce the damage to the earth's natural environment.

The challenge of establishing unity in diversity was among the topics explored at a conference held in Dublin, Ireland, to examine the impact of the Bahá'í teachings on a wide range of contemporary issues. Addressing the conference, held 2–3 July 2005, Dr. Iarfhlaith Watson, a lecturer in sociology at University College, Dublin, said sociologists have been looking at this issue since their discipline began. “As humanity experiences its collective coming of age, the challenge is to find a way of holding people together,” said Dr. Watson, “not so tightly that pathological consequences ensue nor too loosely that they become lost.” He concluded that allegiance to a higher cause—such as one common faith—could provide people with a shared value system that allows order to be maintained, but provides the freedom for diversity to be protected and flourish.

The First Lady of Fiji, Leba Qarase, visited the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, India, on 10 October 2005. A prayer service, held specially for the occasion, included chants in both Hindi and English of prayers from the Bahá'í, Christian, and Hindu scriptures. Mrs. Qarase then visited the Information Center, where she viewed panels on Bahá'í history and those displaying socioeconomic development projects. In the visitors' book, Mrs. Qarase wrote: “I already feel at peace. Glory be to God! It is a great experience going through the temple. May God Almighty bless the Bahá'í Faith!”

Six hundred children from 60 countries gathered in Aichi, Japan, for the 2005 Children's World Summit for the Environment. Four Bahá'í children from the United States, ranging in age from 10 to 14 years old, were selected as part of a small children's delegation for the Summit, held 26 to 29 July. His Imperial Highness Prince

Akishino of Japan was the summit's honorary president. The children enjoyed discussions about water conservation and consumption, and its environmental and social implications.

In Malaysia, the National Colloquium on Science, Religion, and Development attracted 120 participants, representing universities, colleges, interfaith groups, NGOs, and corporate organizations from Cambodia, India, Sabah, Sarawak, Singapore, and the United States. The event was the culmination of a series of five discourses on the subject held in Kuala Lumpur, Kota Kinabalu, and Kuching. Several workshop sessions on good governance, education, science and technology, and business and economics helped stimulate interesting discussions. There was a unanimous call at the end of the event for such dialogues to be held on a regular basis to encourage further exchange of ideas on the subject.

The Bahá'ís of Marquette, Michigan, USA, were among the participants of the second annual Earth Keeper Clean Sweep, which took place in April 2006. The effort collected more than 300 tons of “e-waste”—electronic equipment that is not easily recycled, including television sets, computers, and VCRs—from various sites across Michigan's Upper Peninsula, a sparsely populated region north of Lake Michigan. More than 350 volunteers from some 120 faith communities participated in the project. Dr. Rodney Clarken, a Bahá'í and one of the original signers of the Earth Keeper Covenant, said that such projects can help “break down the artificial barriers we have constructed between religions, nations, cultures, and the world in which we live. May these efforts reinforce a hundredfold our work toward creating a world in which all people can live in peace and prosperity.”

Presentations on HIV/AIDS, nutrition, the impact of trauma and injustice on moral development, and racial disparities in medical research were among numerous themes discussed at the 29th Annual Conference of North America's Association for Bahá'í Studies held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 11 to 14 September 2005. Almost 140 people made individual or team contributions on the theme of the conference, “Science, Religion and Social Transformation.” The role of inspiration in scientific endeavors was explored by Professor Redwan Moqbel from Edmonton, Canada. Dr. Faraneh

Pointing to a united future, dancers in the Singaporean Bahá'í junior youth dance troupe perform at an event for youth organized by the World Bank.



Vargha-Khadem from London, England, reviewed the continued public debate over religion and science in society, and expanded on the implications of current research in her own discipline of cognitive neuroscience.

Race unity

The worldwide Bahá'í community is among the most diverse bodies of people on earth. This diversity extends to the local and national levels, as Bahá'í communities comprise people from a wide variety of religious and racial backgrounds, ages, professions, and educational levels. However, far from being a source of conflict or contention, Bahá'ís believe that such diversity is a cause of unity. “The garden which is pleasing to the eye and which makes the heart glad, is the

garden in which are growing side by side flowers of every hue, form and perfume, and the joyous contrast of colour is what makes for charm and beauty,” observed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “Thus should it be among the children of men! The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord.”⁴

In Singapore, Bahá’í junior youth from European, Chinese, Indian, and Persian backgrounds entertained more than 500 young people at an event at the Anglo-Chinese Junior College on 1 June 2005, organized by the World Bank. The event aimed to increase the awareness of development issues among young Singaporeans and to inspire them to volunteer to assist local nongovernmental organizations. The young Bahá’ís performed dances portraying the need for unity among the peoples of the world and the vital necessity to eliminate prejudice of all kinds.

In the Republic of Ireland, the Bahá’ís of Cork hosted a multicultural celebration as their contribution to the city’s tenure as European Capital of Culture. Around 200 people from 16 different countries attended the event on 30 April 2005, which included contributions from China, the Czech Republic, France, Mexico, and Poland. A Dublin-based Bahá’í choir traveled to Cork to perform at the event. “It was a tangible evidence of unity in diversity with so many people from different countries and cultures coming together and having good fun,” said one of the organizers, Ms. Sabina Nagle.

In Alaska, the Bahá’í intertribal group Drums of Light opened the statewide Head Start conference. Head Start provides education, health, nutrition, and parent-involvement services to children from low-income families. The creative devotional program featured the words of Bahá’u’lláh in a harmonious chorus of voices accompanied by a handheld drum. Performers wore traditional regalia representing Athabascan, Inupiaq, Tlingit, and Tsimshian tribal groups, and verses in the songs were offered in native languages.

The second New Zealand Diversity Forum, on the theme “The Challenges of Cultural Diversity,” was held at Te Papa on 23 August 2005. The event was attended by more than 400 people from around the country. The forum’s sessions considered issues and actions

concerning community dialogue, refugee and migrant settlement programs, public policy, and cultural diversity in schools. The further development of a national interfaith network was also supported with leaders from seven faiths present, emphasizing the importance of interfaith cooperation and dialogue. Meanwhile, Dr. Jeanne Gazel, a race relations specialist from Michigan State University in the United States, visited New Zealand in October 2005, as a guest of the national Bahá'í community. During her stay, she presented the fifth annual Margaret Stevenson Memorial Lecture and visited cities in the North and South Islands. Dr. Gazel's talk, "Truth, Justice and Reconciliation: Achieving Unity through Diversity," highlighted the work of the Multi-Racial Unity Living Experience (MRULE) program that she cofounded in 1996 in response to a request from university officials to help resolve the problem of increasing social tension and segregation on campus.

A high school student won the 2005 Race Unity Speech Award, organized by the New Zealand Bahá'í community, by calling for the protection of diversity. The talk by 17-year-old Georgina Rood, which was broadcast on New Zealand's national radio, celebrated the varied cultural and racial characteristics that "make humanity more interesting." "Celebrating those differences as a force for unity and common good—rather than using them as a source of division—is the challenge we face, and have always faced," said Ms. Rood, a student at Sacred Heart College in Wellington. "Our generation can be the turning point—we have opportunities that our parents never had," she added. The topic of the speeches by the six finalists was a famous quotation from Bahá'u'lláh: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." The competition, which is open to all students in the last three years of high school in New Zealand, attracted 100 entrants from 10 regions.

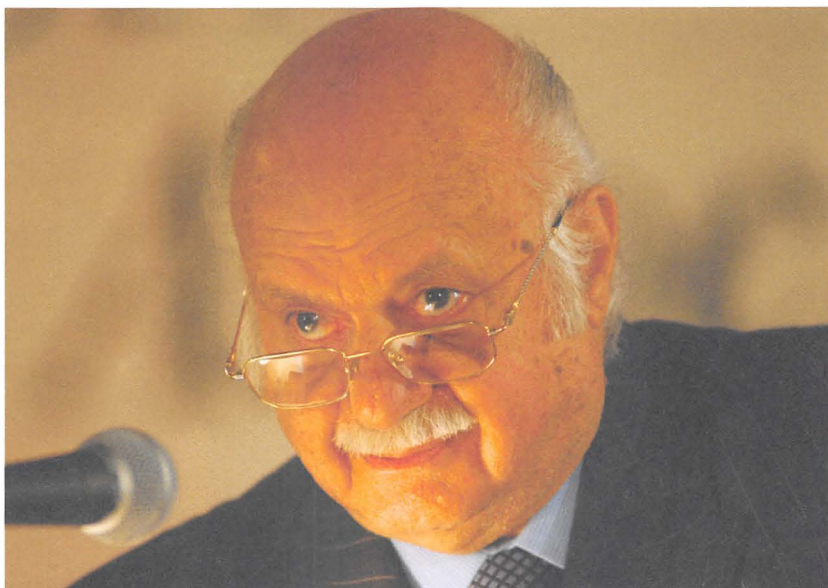
Foods from many cultures, dancing, music, face painting, and a wide variety of children's activities were the main attractions at an international dinner held in June 2005 in South Australia. More than 200 people from the Mount Gambier area attended. Cultural symbols of some of the cultures represented at the dinner were displayed. Costumes, everyday items of hospitality, and colorful regional maps all illustrated the area's rich diversity.

Interfaith

The essential unity of religions is one of the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'ís believe that “all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same” and that they “represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.”⁵ Bahá'ís worldwide are engaged in community interfaith activities and seek to foster friendship and understanding among members of different religions.

Representatives of nine religious communities came together in a united forum to offer prayers on the International Day of Peace at a gathering organized by the Bahá'í community of Tanzania. “This is an historic day,” said keynote speaker United Nations representative Eshila Maravanyika, who expressed her delight at witnessing the various religious denominations coming together in a united forum to offer prayers for peace on 21 September 2005. Bahá'í spokesperson Mitra Deliri Sabet said that “the purpose of the gathering was to provide a common ground where various religious organizations can come together and pray for a common goal—peace.”

A panel of experts stressed the importance of upholding the right to freedom of religion and belief at a symposium organized by the Bahá'í International Community in New York on 25 October 2005. Ms. Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, chaired the symposium entitled “Freedom to Believe: Upholding the Standard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” The event was organized to stimulate discussion and thinking about the implementation and protection of the right to freedom of religion and belief. “Perhaps now more than ever in our lifetimes, religious ideas and religious actors are asserting themselves at all levels of society,” Ms. Dugal said. “Against the backdrop of accelerating processes of globalization, the search for meaning, rootedness, and community is manifesting itself in diverse expressions of worship and belief.” Among the conclusions reached by the panel was a call for governments to tackle increased religious intolerance by promoting discussion both within and between religious groups, and by ensuring that women and political leaders are involved in the talks. The panel included Piet de Klerk, Netherlands Ambassador at Large for Human Rights; Asma Jahangir,



Professor Suheil Bushrui speaks at an interfaith seminar on “Faith and Social Responsibility.”

the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief; and Felice Gaer, Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights.

Professor Suheil Bushrui, who was the holder of the Bahá’í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland until December 2005, participated in a seminar on “Faith and Social Responsibility” with His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales on 3 November 2005. Held at Georgetown University, the seminar brought together 40 senior religious leaders and scholars from various faiths. The purpose of the event was for faith leaders to discuss best practices for faith-based practical initiatives on employment, education, and community regeneration. The seminar featured a round-table discussion in the presence of the Prince, who was visiting the United States. Within the framework of unity in diversity, Professor Bushrui described religions as different spiritual paths representing an outward expression of underlying unity. He also emphasized that faith is more than just belief; it also entails a way of life that includes social responsibility and action in the world. Professor Bushrui further noted that believers of all faiths have a duty to lay aside theology and ideology in favor of developing a unity of vision and a spirit of cooperation.



Chief Matange (second from right) and other members of an African traditional religion during prayers at the International Day of Peace gathering organized by the Bahá'í community of Tanzania.

Only in this way can religion and faith serve the best interests of humanity as a whole. Professor Bushrui retired from his position as holder of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace on 31 December 2005. John Grayzel, an international development specialist, is the current holder of the Chair.

Senior government officials and representatives of diverse religious groups in Cuba gathered with Bahá'ís for an interfaith event in the newly reconstructed Bahá'í center in central Havana on 23 May 2005. The secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Havana, Ernesto Santirso, welcomed the guests, saying that the gathering's purpose was to open the center to the other religious communities. Caridad Diego Bello, the chief of religious affairs in the Cuban government, and two other officials from her office, joined Bahá'ís and representatives from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and African Yoruba religious communities at the gathering. Ms. Diego expressed her gratitude to the Bahá'í community of Cuba for bringing together the diverse group, and then spoke about interfaith harmony and the major social principles of the Bahá'í Faith. "These are principles

that even I as a nonfollower of any religion would agree with," said Ms. Diego, who is a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.

In Canada, a crowd of almost 200 gathered at Parc de la Paix in the Saint-Laurent district of Montréal, Québec, to mark the International Day of Peace. The deputy mayor of Montréal, Alain de Sousa, acknowledged the continuous support of the Bahá'í community to celebrate this day since its inception by the United Nations in 1982. Representatives from various religious organizations attended the event.

In Australia, an interfaith devotional meeting titled "Prayers for Peace" was hosted by the Bahá'í community of Palmerston, Northern Territory, on 21 September 2005, also to celebrate the International Day of Peace. There were prayers from all of the major faiths, as well as representation from the Larrakia nation, the Indonesian Consulate, and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). Fitting with the evening's theme, there was also a mini-exhibition of peace-themed artworks. This event coincided with the launch of the Palmerston City Interfaith Network, an advocacy group composed of representatives of local multicultural and faith organizations, whose main objective is to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding, and address issues of racism and religious intolerance.

A meeting on 10 March 2006 demonstrated increasing interest in interfaith affairs in Norway. The gathering brought together government officials with members of the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway. The aim of the Council, established in 1996, is to work towards equality and promote mutual understanding and respect between different religious and life stances. Norway's Department of Foreign Affairs called the meeting with the Minister of Church and Culture and the newly established Department of Integration.

From 21 to 23 October 2005, six Bahá'í representatives from France took part in a conference about interfaith education, hosted by the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC). The conference, focusing on the promotion of ethical education, was organized in collaboration with the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information in Paris. Six religions were represented at the conference, with the goal of exchanging experiences and ideas. The

participants comprised a range of children, youth, and adults. On Saturday 22 October, more than 40 participants attended an evening reception, hosted at the national Bahá'í center and featuring performances by the Diversity Dance Workshop.

Young members of the Bahá'í community in Singapore supported a national interfaith project aimed at bringing Singaporeans of all races and religions together. Some 40 youth gathered at Singapore's Bahá'í center on 15 April 2006 to fold paper lotuses as part of the Project Million Lotus 2006, which was sponsored by the Singapore Buddhist Federation. The purpose was to encourage young people of all races and religions to make a million paper lotuses as symbols of purity and harmony. In addition to the 15 April event, Bahá'í study circles in the city also folded lotuses for the project. The project has received support from Singapore's President S.R. Nathan. The lotuses were displayed at the Ngee Ann City Civic Plaza as the highlight of the "Growing Compassion, Harvesting Harmony" Singapore celebration of the Vesak Festival.

Bahá'í representatives joined more than 50 religious and spiritual leaders from 18 countries in an International Interfaith Dialogue on the theme "The Inner Voice of Peace," hosted by the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University at New Delhi and Mount Abu from 12 to 15 October 2005. Participants shared their vision, insights, and experiences on their efforts to create societies of peace and dignity. The President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, initiated the dialogue inviting constructive recommendations from the group on promoting a culture of peace.

World Religion Day, initiated in 1950 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, has now been adopted by many countries and communities around the world. In France, an intercultural and interfaith event with music and prayers was organized at the Bahá'í center in Nice for World Religion Day. Representatives attended from the five principal religions on the Côte d'Azur. Prayers from various faiths, including selections from the Bahá'í writings, were recited. California's fourth annual World Religion Day was held on 16 January 2006. A procession of faiths included children carrying each faith's holy book and reverently placing it on a table. Bahá'ís in South Bend, Indiana, USA, transformed their regular weekly devotional gathering at the Bahá'í center into a World Religion Day celebration. Readings from the



Drummers send out energy and inspiration during a Hush Harbor devotional meeting at the New York Bahá'í Center.

major world religions emphasized the “three onenesses” of God, of humanity, and of religion. In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the Bahá'í communities of southern Maine and coastal New Hampshire sponsored a combined Martin Luther King Jr. Day and World Religion Day celebration. Presentations by youth included singing and drumming. More than 200 people attended an interfaith concert spearheaded by a Bahá'í in Fostoria, Ohio, that benefited a local nonprofit organization and raised awareness of the area's religious traditions. Local civic and religious leaders praised the event for its warm spirit and celebration of diversity.

The arts

Bahá'ís throughout the world make extensive use of the arts to enrich community life, enhance activities and events, and convey the Faith's message to audiences. From the use of role playing in study circles to traveling youth performance troupes, the arts offer a powerful means to combine the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh with an appreciation of cultural diversity. Additionally, a number of individual Bahá'ís working in the arts have, in the past year, excelled in their fields and been lauded for their contributions to society and culture. The

world-renowned Voices of Bahá choir carried out its first major Caribbean tour in June and July 2005. The tour included concerts in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Venezuela, and ended in Coral Springs, Florida, where an audience of 600 enjoyed its final performance. The choir, which has performed at fund-raising concerts for numerous charitable organizations including UNESCO and UNICEF, contributed to local charities throughout the tour, including a fund in Jamaica set up to assist the families of policemen slain in the line of duty. The choir, which has now performed in more than 30 countries, includes a variety of styles of choral music in its repertoire, including African-American gospel, folk, and western classical. On its Caribbean tour, the choir included songs by Carlos Santana (performed by Grammy Award-winning Bahá'í musician K.C. Porter), calypso-style numbers composed and performed by the London-based singer and steel drummer Kiskadee, gospel songs, jazz, and a barbershop quartet.

In December 2005, two Bahá'í musicians received nominations in the prestigious Grammy Awards, the American recording industry's most coveted honor. Singer-songwriter Red Grammer received a nomination in the Musical Album for Children category for his CD, *BeBop Your Best*. Jazz singer Tierney Sutton received a nomination in the Jazz Vocal Album category for *I'm With the Band*. Mr. Grammer said the nomination was personally significant because "it reflects recognition of excellence by the music industry . . . It isn't a nomination by your listeners, it is a nomination by your colleagues." Ms. Sutton said she was deeply gratified to be nominated for the award: "The way we arrange our music is based on the principle of consultation, and our band is very much run on Bahá'í principles. So there is very much a sense with everybody in the band that what we do is essentially a spiritual thing." Earlier, in June 2005, Ms. Sutton won *JazzWeek's* Vocalist of the Year award.

A major theatrical production telling the story of Ṭáhirih, the nineteenth-century Persian poetess and heroine of early Bahá'í history enthralled audiences during a five-week run in Athens, Greece in the early summer of 2005. The play, entitled *Pure*, by British writer Annabel Knight, was performed by Shirin Youssefian-Maanian in a 140-seat tented arena at the prestigious Athinais Cultural Centre. The production was sponsored by five major companies including Greece's main dairy producer and a famous supermarket chain. The



Tierney Sutton and Red Grammer, two Bahá'í musicians nominated for 2006 Grammy Awards.

executive producer, as well as the lighting designer, of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games contributed their skills to the production. Numerous prominent people including many well-known politicians, actors, directors, and ambassadors attended performances. The play was featured on Athens International Radio and the BBC World Service, leading to the final two weeks of the run being completely sold out.

Some 2,000 people saw another historical figure from Bahá'í history come to life on the stage in a theatrical tour of Singapore and Malaysia during the summer of 2005. Australian actor Phillip Hinton performed *Portals to Freedom* in which he played Howard Colby Ives, a former Unitarian minister who encountered 'Abdu'l-Bahá on His 1912 journey to the United States and became a devoted follower and chronicler of His visit. Mr. Hinton played to two packed houses in Singapore's Actor's Den studio theater. He also held five workshops in collaboration with his wife, Ann, and professional storyteller Donna Jacobs Sife. Groups of around 25 participants were taken on a journey of discovery to assist them in becoming effective storytellers. In Malaysia, performances of *Portals to Freedom* were held in Johor Baru, Malacca, Ipoh, Penang, and Kuala Lumpur, where four per-

formances and two workshops were held in six days. Meanwhile, 48 Bahá'ís from around Malaysia took part in a training session in Balakong in May 2005, covering fresh approaches to storytelling, creative dramatics, and arts and crafts.

The annual “Somerfest” at the European Bahá'í House of Worship in Langenhain, Germany on 26 June 2005 attracted some 3,000 visitors, including a record number of international guests from as far away as Alaska and Samoa. The cultural program included presentations by an Italian choir and a Filipino women's dance group. A diverse array of music and international foods were also offered.

New York City's Bahá'í center commenced weekly jazz performances on Tuesday evenings in its John Birks Gillespie Auditorium, dedicated to the late jazz great—and Bahá'í—Dizzy Gillespie. Gillespie's former pianist and musical director, Mike Longo, presents the popular series of concerts which showcase some of the city's most skilled musicians. Meanwhile, American jazz saxophonist Jay Corre, who has worked with such legends as Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, and Frank Sinatra, toured Portugal in May 2005. In between numerous appearances at clubs, he shared his approach to music and the Bahá'í teachings with young people at the Lisbon Bahá'í center and with university students in the north of the country.

Conrad Lambert, professionally known as Merz, a Bahá'í musician based in the west of England, released his second CD, *Loveheart*, to widespread critical acclaim. The *Daily Telegraph* called it “an album of rare musical intelligence, illuminated by intriguing arrangements.” The *Guardian* newspaper praised it as “eerie and hypnotic, with exquisite melodies.”

An international youth performance troupe, Lights of Unity, enjoyed great success and acclaim as it toured venues throughout Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom. Within a few weeks of its formation and first rehearsals, it performed at an Indian Community Mela Festival in Belfast's Botanic Gardens to an audience of some 2,000 people. Over several months, further performances to enthusiastic audiences at community centers, schools and youth clubs resulted in cast members leading discussions and workshops with young people, and media coverage on radio and in newspapers. Among the group's many significant achievements were a church-sponsored performance at a rare Protestant–Catholic sharing event in Moneymore, and the initiation of friendships and

workshops with junior youth in Short Strand, a small Catholic enclave in the predominantly Protestant eastern part of Belfast.

Some 700 visitors attended an exhibition in Moscow of contemporary art inspired by one of Bahá'u'lláh's best-loved mystical works, *The Seven Valleys*, from 18 January to 12 February 2006. The exhibition explored the themes of spiritual search and growth through graphic art, mosaic work, porcelain miniatures, installations, multimedia, paintings, and performances of live music. The exhibition was organized by the Bahá'ís of Russia's Office of Public Information, in association with WERLD, a youth art project which aims to assist in the development of young people, utilizing the arts and technology to promote humanitarian and cultural values.

The Seven Valleys was also the inspiration for Wendy and Marty Quinn, veteran stage performers from Lee, New Hampshire, USA. Their production, honed over eight years, combines around 80 percent of Bahá'u'lláh's text with song, innovative dance, drumming, and beautiful, versatile props such as colorful silk "doors" representing portals through which two lovers enter a valley on their spiritual search. The play toured many states, including Georgia and Tennessee, and then moved on to Québec, Canada.

A vibrant performance by American Kevin Locke provided a fitting end to the celebration of World Peace Day organized by the Bahá'í community in Malaysia. More than 300 people, comprising mostly youth, were dazzled by the 52-year-old Native American folk dancer's energetic hoop dance performance at the event in Kuala Lumpur. Mr. Locke also showed his musical talent by playing the Lakota tribe's Eagle song on the indigenous flute.

"Light Upon Light" was the theme of the UK National Bahá'í Festival held in Scarborough from 5 to 7 November 2005. More than 1,500 people attended the numerous presentations, workshops, performances, and art installations. Among the highlights were performances by the Lights of Unity group, the premiere of a new video documentary about Bahá'u'lláh's letters to the kings and rulers of His time, a physical theater group made up of Bahá'í youth from the west of England enacting episodes from the life of Bahá'u'lláh, and a mirrored installation space hung with fiber-optic light cables, giving the illusion of chains of light being endlessly reflected, as quotations from the Bahá'í sacred writings on the theme of light played on a recorded soundtrack.



*Earl Cameron, front, acts in the movie *The Interpreter* as president of an African country.*

Bahá'í filmmakers Suzanne Kay and Mark Bamford won a prestigious award for their feature-length theatrical film *Cape of Good Hope* from the Religion Communicators Council. The “Wilbur” award was presented on 1 April 2006 in a ceremony honoring work in the secular media that highlights moral or religious themes. Set in South Africa, *Cape of Good Hope* interweaves a number of story lines, all revolving around a Cape Town animal rescue shelter. It has won numerous other awards around the world, including a jury prize for best film from the Starz Denver Pan African film festival.

Veteran movie actor Earl Cameron—a Bahá'í since 1963—received high praise for his role in the political thriller *The Interpreter*, in which he appeared alongside Sean Penn and Nicole Kidman. Oscar-winning director Sydney Pollack cast Mr. Cameron as Edmund Zuwanie—the unsavory president of a fictional African country—in the story about a United Nations translator, played by Ms. Kidman, who overhears a plot to assassinate Mr. Zuwanie as he addresses the UN General Assembly. *The Interpreter* was the first film ever to be shot inside the United Nations building in New York. Critics unanimously praised Mr. Cameron's performance. *The Baltimore Sun* wrote, “Earl Cameron is magnificent as the slimy old fraud of

a dictator.” *Rolling Stone* described Mr. Cameron’s appearance as “subtle and menacing.”

Earl Cameron was also a guest of honor at the popular Bahá’í Academy for the Arts, held each summer at Sidcot School near Bristol in the United Kingdom. In August 2005, a record number of almost 300 participants chose from 18 courses on offer—ranging from Tiny Hands for 3–4 year olds, to numerous junior youth and adult courses, including photography, tribal drumming, ceramics, sculpture, and choral singing. Another special guest this year was the distinguished Canadian architect Mr. Hossein Amanat, who conducted discussion groups with students and practitioners of architecture, as well as lecturing on his design work at the Bahá’í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, and other projects around the world.

An international Bahá’í-inspired magazine exploring the relationship between art and spirituality was launched to widespread acclaim in the winter of 2005. *Tabula Rasa*’s first issue included features on American photographer Mark Sadan, Canadian painter Garry Berteig, an exploration of the use of music in the training institute process in Suriname, and original poetry and photography.

Media and public information

The deteriorating situation of the Bahá’í community in Iran dominated media coverage of the Bahá’í Faith in the past year. A *Reuters* news agency report on 19 December 2005, recounting the death of 59-year-old Mr. Dhabíhu’lláh Mahramí in his Yazd prison cell, was widely circulated and taken up by the world’s media. Articles appeared in such publications as *The Times of India*, *The Irish Times*, and *Busqueda* in Uruguay. On 23 December, the *Hindustan Times* reported the United States deputy State Department spokesman Adam Ereli’s comments that the Bahá’ís “are systematically denied the right to assemble, maintain administrative institutions, or worship freely.” Mr. Ereli’s statement was also reported on “Voice of America,” and in *The New York Times* on 24 December. *The Saipan Tribune* in Northern Mariana Islands, Micronesia, published an opinion piece about Mr. Mahramí’s death on 23 December 2005 which concluded, “Religious persecution of many faiths and of many forms continues in many places around the world. By shining a spotlight on such cases, we can let the perpetrators know that the world is watch-

ing them.” Two articles appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*. Under the heading “Bahá’í faithful honor martyr, sound alarm on Iran” on 8 January 2006, the *Tribune* interviewed Bahá’ís gathered at a memorial meeting for Mr. Mahramí held at the Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois.

The release in March 2006 by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, of a letter from Iran’s Supreme Leader calling for the identification and monitoring of Bahá’ís also resulted in significant press coverage. Ms. Jahangir’s concerns were reported in, among other newspapers, *El Heraldo* of Mexico, *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom, the *Samoa Observer*, *The Express* in South Africa, and *El Caribe* in the Dominican Republic. Seven eminent academics in human rights and international law from universities in England signed a letter published in *The Independent* newspaper on 14 April 2006. Their letter concluded, “Given the existing level of discrimination and persecution experienced by the Bahá’ís in Iran, we can only have considerable fear about what the new measure will mean in practice.”

Six prominent Brazilian journalists and three media organizations received “world citizenship awards” at a Bahá’í-sponsored event in Brasília. The awards for media coverage promoting human rights were presented at a ceremony at the Ministry of Justice on 13 December 2005. The award was for acknowledging the media that paid close attention to vulnerable sectors of society and highlighted the challenges facing civil society. Award winners were selected from among hundreds of candidates. In his acceptance speech, award recipient Marcelo Canellas of “tv Globa,” Brazil’s biggest broadcaster, said that receiving the award reinforced for him the importance of the humane side of journalism. “It confirms for me that journalism is a vocation,” Mr. Canellas said. Another winner, Gilberto Dimenstein, a columnist for the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, said that the award showed that the media’s role is much more than just reporting bad news. The nine-person jury comprised representatives of human rights and legal groups and two members of the Brazilian Bahá’í community.

Bahá’í media professionals won a total of 12 awards from the United States Religion Communicators Council for excellence and merit in the production of various informational materials. The awards for professional religion communicators were presented on



Janelle Gebadi (left) and Ina Aiputa present their weekly Bahá'í-inspired radio program.

30 March 2006 as part of the council's annual national convention. Known as the DeRose-Hinkhouse Memorial Awards, they are presented to members of the council who demonstrate excellence in religious communications and public relations, and are given in a wide variety of categories, from writing to Web site design. Bahá'í professional religion communicators won seven Awards of Excellence for the production of magazines, booklets, books, special issue publications, CD illustration, and Web site design. Mr. Brad Pokorny, the editor of *One Country*, the newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community, won two awards this year. He won an Award of Excellence in the category for "public relations materials, booklets" for *The Bahá'í Question*, a booklet about the human rights situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran, which was published by the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community. He also won a Certificate of Merit for an editorial in *One Country* titled "The Challenge of Extreme Poverty."

A weekly radio program aimed at providing a service to the Bahá'í communities scattered across more than 100 islands of the Torres Strait in the far north of Australia attracted participation by many of the majority Christian population. The program uses a talkback format and functions as an on-air "study circle." The program is

broadcast on the Thursday Island community radio station 4MW, which is listened to by some 85 percent of Torres Strait residents. Titled “Baha-Bi-Buiya,” which means “Light-Light-Light” in the two main dialects of the Torres Strait and in Arabic, the program has been broadcast for more than a year. The presenters read passages from the Bahá'í writings before the audience participates in often lively discussions.

More than 70 participants from 33 European countries took part in a Public Information Management Seminar in Sofia, Bulgaria, hosted by the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information in Paris and the National Spiritual Assembly of Bulgaria, 30 June to 3 July 2005. Workshops dealt with such themes as media relations, Web sites, and the role of the arts in public information activities. A reception organized for the second evening of the seminar gave the participants an opportunity to meet a range of invited Bulgarian personalities. A well-known group of young, hearing-impaired dancers, Jestim, performed a series of cultural dances at the reception.

The death of former member of the Universal House of Justice, Dr. David Ruhe, was reported on the obituaries page of *The Guardian* newspaper in the United Kingdom on 26 September 2005. Alongside a color photograph of Dr. Ruhe, the article reported his achievements as a medical filmmaker and his distinction as a “leading member of the Bahá'í Faith.”

A Bahá'í was interviewed on a popular Hungarian national television evening program, “Kulturhaz.” The 13-minute interview in December 2005 included a report on a socio-economic project with Roma mothers. Additionally, in January 2006, a devotional meeting at a Bahá'í home was filmed and broadcast on “Kulturhaz.” A Bahá'í new year event was also covered in the news section of a weekly national television program that discusses topical issues.

The auction of almost 1,000 items from the estate of the late jazz legend—and Bahá'í—Dizzy Gillespie was widely reported on Internet news sites. The items came from the house he shared with his wife of 53 years, Lorraine, who passed away in 2004. The sale in New Jersey, USA, lasted 13 hours, raised around US\$500,000, and included several rare Bahá'í books and memorabilia. One report mentioned



'Abdu'l-Bahá (front, center) on His visit to Germany in 1913, with Bahá'ís and guests.

how a “religious medallion that Gillespie wore around his neck to celebrate his allegiance to the Bahá'í Faith” sold for us\$3,500.

Bahá'í participation at the opening of the new Welsh Assembly in Cardiff was reported in the *Gwent Gazette* on 23 March 2006. Mrs. Christine Abbas of Blaina was quoted as saying, “In all religions the teachings are the same about how we should behave towards one another, our families and our creator. No teachings tell us to kill one another, that is something mankind adds in ignorance.”

Centenary of the founding of the Bahá'í community of Germany

More than 1,800 people gathered in Stuttgart on 10 September 2005, to celebrate the centenary of the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in Germany. Participants traveled from every region of the country and at least 25 other nations for the event at the Stuttgart Congress Center which commemorated a history both “dark” with crisis and “highlighted” by achievement.

Stuttgart was selected as the host city because German Bahá'í history had its beginning there. Dr. Edwin Fischer, a dentist, had emigrated in 1878 from Germany to New York, became a Bahá'í



Inside the Bahá'í House of Worship at Langenhain during the centenary celebrations of the Bahá'í community of Germany.



A local Bahá'í children's class from the Anna Koestlin Schule performs a dance routine at the jubilee.

there, and then returned to his home country to promote the Bahá'í teachings.

A series of presentations, highlighted with archival film clips and photographs, depicted historical events, including the arrival of Dr. Fischer in 1905, the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Germany eight years later, and the consecration of the first European Bahá'í House of Worship in Langenhain in 1964. The program also took note of the period when the Faith was banned under Nazism. A dramatic performance showed the interrogation of a Bahá'í at a police station by a Nazi official.

One of the speakers at the event was Mr. Ian Semple, a former member of the Universal House of Justice, who represented the Bahá'í Faith's international governing body at the occasion and read a message from it that referred to the arrival of the Bahá'í Faith in Germany and its subsequent expansion. "The spark lit in 1905," the message said, "has burgeoned into a conflagration." The Universal House of Justice added "this is a moment for reflection, profound reflection—one that recounts the highlights in contrast to the dark aspects punctuating the history of crisis and victory that depicts the evolution of the German [Bahá'í] community."

Mr. Semple also delivered two talks which quoted from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi about the destiny of the German Bahá'í community. He said that the central task for the German Bahá'í community today lies in its contribution to the "vital task" of building a new, just, and peaceful global society. "In this age all the specific destinies are linked in the one enormous task of unifying the world and attaining the maturity of human society," said Mr. Semple.

Another speaker, Stuttgart's deputy mayor for social affairs, Gabriele Mueller-Trimbusch, thanked Bahá'ís for their initiative in starting World Religion Day. "The respect you pay to other world religions, your openness for people who have different opinions, your message of peace for the world we live in, makes you a greatly appreciated partner for us," she said. "Stuttgart highly values the activities of the Bahá'í community, because it participates in the social life of our city in an exemplary manner."

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany also addressed the gathering, as did a guest, the chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, William E. Davis,

who emphasized the “chain of deep and abiding love that binds our two communities.”

After World War II, the American Bahá'ís sent money, food, and literature to German Bahá'ís, and helped them rebuild their community and administrative structures. A former US soldier stationed in occupied postwar Germany, Mr. John Eichenauer, who helped the German Bahá'í community at that time, was a featured guest. He spoke about his experiences during the first days of the reconvening of the German Bahá'í community.

The commemoration followed other events, held in April and May 2005, to celebrate Germany's Bahá'í centenary. On 22 April 2005, more than 150 specially invited guests attended a reception held at the national Bahá'í center in Hofheim-Langenhain. Among those attending were dignitaries representing the cities of Hofheim and of Wiesbaden, as well as representatives of the government of the federal state of Hesse, of the federal and the European Parliaments and of different political parties. Mr. Teuto Rocholl, the architect of the first European Bahá'í House of Worship, was also present. Professor Dr. Joachim-Felix Leonard, the state secretary from the Ministry for Science and Art, conveyed the greetings of the government and described the Bahá'í message as “cosmopolitan, global, and modern.” Following a reception, the guests were invited to attend a special devotional service in the House of Worship. Ms. Gisela Stang, the mayor of Hofheim, praised the Bahá'ís saying they “provide an important impulse for the city and for society. They enrich our city.”

NOTES

- ¹ Bahá'u'lláh, in *A Compilation on Bahá'í Education* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 2.
- ² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), section 106.1.
- ³ '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*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 76.
- ⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), pp. 52–53.
- ⁵ Shoghi Effendi, “The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh” in *World Order*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Winter 1972–73), p. 7.

New Translations of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings

*"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."*¹

Bahá'u'lláh's writings elucidate virtually every aspect of existence, including subjects as varied as science, philosophy, laws of human conduct, the spiritual nature of existence, and the future of humanity. These divinely inspired writings are the foundation of the Bahá'í Faith, but their intended application is universal. Bahá'u'lláh wrote not to a select group of followers, but to the whole of humanity. The texts are the charter for a new world, and no soul is beyond the rejuvenating influence of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.

In 2006, a volume of newly translated writings by Bahá'u'lláh, entitled *The Tabernacle of Unity*, was published in English. This latest volume from World Centre Publications contains five letters or "Tablets" written by Bahá'u'lláh to individuals of Zoroastrian background during the 1870s and 1880s. The volume provides important new insights into the fundamental Bahá'í principles of the unity of religion and the relativity of religious truth.

The two Tablets comprising the centerpiece of the volume were both revealed in answer to questions posed to Bahá'u'lláh by Mánikchí Şáhīb, an ambassador of Parsee background who became

well-known for his diplomatic and humanitarian work on behalf of the Persian Zoroastrian community. Mánikchí Šáhib, who had met Bahá'u'lláh in person and who was both a friend and admirer, posed a series of nine questions to Bahá'u'lláh covering topics as wide-ranging as the nature of the relationship between God and creation, the apparently irreconcilable differences between the religions of the world, and the role of reason in the formulation of religious law.

*“I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the Almighty.
I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird
and start it on its flight.”*

—BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, TABLET TO MÁNIKCHÍ ŠÁHIB

The translation of the volume was prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice on the basis of authentic manuscripts held in the International Bahá'í Archives. It is the result of the combined efforts of a number of translators and follows the style established by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and its authorized interpreter from 1921 until his death in 1957. Readers familiar with the writings of Bahá'u'lláh will recognize several well-known passages translated by Shoghi Effendi and appearing for the first time in their original setting, including the popular quotation “Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch.”

At the time of *The Tabernacle of Unity's* publication, Steven Phelps, a translator working in the Research Department, commented:

The nominal thread that unites these five Tablets is that they were all revealed over a century ago to individuals of Zoroastrian background. However, too much of a focus on this angle might make the volume seem backward looking and irrelevant when in fact its message is very much for the here and now. While restating some of the central tenets of the Faith, such as the organic unity of the human race, the progressive character of divine revelation, and the world-embracing nature of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic claim, the volume also opens new vistas to the Bahá'í teachings with its

discussion of the boundary between the absolute and the relative in religious truth. Perhaps most importantly of all, the volume speaks eloquently to the urgent need for religion to reclaim its place as a world-unifying, world-transforming force.

NOTES

- ¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2006), section 1.4.

*They that are endued with sincerity
and faithfulness should associate
with all the peoples and kindreds
of the earth with joy and radiance,
inasmuch as consorting with people
bath promoted and will continue
to promote unity and concord,
which in turn are conducive to the
maintenance of order in the world
and to the regeneration of nations.*

—Bahá'u'lláh



Bahá'í International Community

ACTIVITIES

Bahá'ís throughout the world are working for the establishment of a united, peaceful, global civilization, built on Bahá'u'lláh's vision of human oneness and collective security. The United Nations Office (UNO) of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) gives voice to the vision and concerns of the Bahá'í community at the United Nations. Within the context of the UN, the Bahá'í International Community is an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) with affiliates in more than 200 independent countries and dependent territories. As an international NGO, the Bahá'í International Community interacts and cooperates with the UN and its specialized agencies, with governments, as well as with intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, seeking to promote and apply Bahá'í principles to the resolution of challenges facing humanity. The work of the Bahá'í International Community predominately focuses on the promotion of a universal standard for human rights, the advancement of women, and the promotion of just and equitable means of global prosperity.

The Bahá'í International Community's engagement with the United Nations dates back to the founding of the UN in 1945, and prior to that, to its work with the League of Nations through the International Bahá'í Bureau. The BIC has special consultative

status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), as well as formal working relations with the World Health Organization (WHO).

The reputation for expertise and professionalism that the BIC UNO has developed over nearly six decades of consistent and principle-based contributions to UN fora continued to grow in the year under review. Not only was the BIC UNO represented at a number of high-level events, the Office also received an increasing number of requests from the UN and Permanent Missions for participation, input, and recommendations from Bahá'í International Community representatives. In a year marked by lengthy deliberations concerning widespread UN reforms, the BIC UNO directed its efforts towards enriching the deliberative process itself and through both concrete and conceptual recommendations in areas of socioeconomic development, the advancement of women, and human rights. Furthermore, the refurbishment and expansion of BIC UNO conference facilities enabled the Office to play a greater convening role in the UN and NGO community—over 300 UN officials, ambassadors, dignitaries, and NGO representatives were hosted by the Office throughout the year.

To support its growing body of work, the BIC UNO has increasingly called upon experts and volunteers in the worldwide Bahá'í community to assist in the representation, research, administrative, and technical needs of the Office. Bahá'í experts in relevant fields, alongside BIC UNO representatives, effectively represented the Bahá'í International Community at the World Summit on the Information Society; the UN Commissions on Social Development, Sustainable Development, and the Status of Women; the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII); the General Assembly interactive hearings; and the International Criminal Court Assembly of States Parties—thereby significantly increasing the contributions of the BIC UNO at the UN and generating a rich body of insights and recommendations for further action.

Reform agenda at the United Nations

The year was dominated by extensive debates about widespread and urgently needed reforms at the United Nations. Throughout his

two terms in office, Secretary-General Kofi Annan has spearheaded a reform agenda that encompassed areas of development, security, human rights, as well as management—in an effort to bring the agenda and the working methods of the UN in line with global challenges and conditions of the twenty-first century.

Much of the year was spent in preparation for the long-anticipated General Assembly 2005 World Summit that saw an unprecedented number of world leaders come together to make bold decisions in the areas of development, security, human rights, and UN management reform. The Summit agenda was based on a set of concrete proposals outlined in the Secretary-General's seminal report, titled "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security, and Human Rights for All." Its cross cutting theme reiterated the paradigm of interconnectedness and indivisibility of development, security, and human rights.

The proposals contained in the report were divided into four thematic areas which, in turn, defined the structure and content of deliberations at the World Summit. The first, "Freedom from Want," included proposals for breakthroughs in debt relief, trade liberalization, and increases in financial aid to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The section titled "Freedom from Fear" addressed security concerns and included proposals for initiatives to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the spread of terrorism, as well as proposals for the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission to support countries in transition from armed conflict. Thirdly, "Freedom to Live in Dignity" covered proposals to strengthen the UN human rights machinery, including strengthening the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the creation of the Human Rights Council to replace the Human Rights Commission, and a review of rules governing humanitarian intervention. The fourth section dealt with management proposals intended to streamline the internal operations of the UN in order to enable it to fulfill its goals in the areas of development, security, and human rights.

With such a comprehensive agenda before the international community, the deliberations leading up to the Summit were equally involved, providing many opportunities for NGOs to offer feedback and input to the proposals at hand. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), for example,

requested input from NGOs regarding means of strengthening the work of her Office. In its statement responding to the request of the High Commissioner, the Bahá'í International Community recommended, among other things, that the Office strengthen its field presence at the country level; that the work of special procedures (i.e. independent human rights experts) receive adequate budgetary and administrative support; that NGOs continue to be engaged in assisting the work of the Office; that the public information section of the Office be developed in order to allow the resolutions and observations of human rights bodies and mechanisms to be accorded greater prominence in the media. "We wish to see the Office of the High Commissioner," stated the Bahá'í International Community, "bolstered by the requisite moral, intellectual, and material resources—become the standard-bearer in the field of human rights," concluding that "the consciousness of a common humanity and the understanding that the suffering of one is the suffering of all underlie the spirit that can translate the proposals into reality."

The Bahá'í International Community also joined other NGOs in offering comments on proposals contained in the above-mentioned Secretary-General's report, titled "In Larger Freedom." While the Bahá'í International Community's comments addressed specific areas of the report, such as the Millennium Development Goals, terrorism, the Security Council, and means of strengthening democracy and human rights, it also included issues for consideration at the upcoming World Summit which had not been raised in the report. Most important perhaps was the Bahá'í International Community's emphasis on the freedom of religion or belief—a challenging issue shaping inter- and intra-state relations and yet one rarely addressed at the United Nations. It is interesting to note that the structure of the Secretary-General's report which centered on fundamental freedoms—echoing the "four freedoms" famously articulated by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his State of the Union Address in 1941—failed to include Roosevelt's second point, which was "Freedom of every person to worship God in his own way." In response to its comments, the Bahá'í International Community received a signed letter from the Secretary-General, expressing his "appreciation for the active and constructive involvement of the Bahá'í International Community in the [reform] process."



The Bahá'í International Community's principal representative to the United Nations, Bani Dugal, addresses the interfaith conference.

The lead-up to the September Summit offered two further seminal opportunities for NGO input to the Summit process. The first, spearheaded by the Missions of Indonesia, Pakistan, and the Philippines was a Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, in which a tripartite group consisting of governments, UN agencies, and NGOs worked together to convene this substantive interfaith event at the UN. Ms. Bani Dugal, Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, as one of three speakers from the NGO community invited to address the conference, stressed that the “essential unity of religion, across the tremendous diversity of history, culture, tradition, philosophy, and practice . . . should now become the operating principle of religious discourse.” The event was unique in that, rather than originating from the NGOs or even the UN, it was driven by the concerns of Member States which were themselves putting forward the idea that the most effective solution to religious extremism was the encouragement of dialogue between diverse constituencies and religions.

The second major opportunity for input was presented by the General Assembly's interactive hearings with NGOs, civil society

organizations and the private sector—marking the first time that the General Assembly as a body held a meeting solely for the purpose of hearing directly from civil society organizations on such a wide range of issues. Approximately 200 participants were selected from a wide pool of applicants to speak directly to one of the four issue areas in the Secretary-General's above-mentioned report. Representing the Bahá'í International Community, Mr. Roberto Eghrari from Brazil was one of five NGO speakers to comment on the theme of "Strengthening the United Nations" while Ms. Diane Ala'i, the Bahá'í International Community's Representative in Geneva, was invited to participate in the discussions on the theme of human rights. Although the hearings were criticized for occurring too late in the pre-Summit process to have sufficient impact on government negotiations, it was widely recognized that this new mode of government–civil society interaction was an important development for the UN as a whole.

2005 World Summit

The outcome of the General Assembly's World Summit—the culmination of months of intra- and intergovernmental debate on the most pressing global issues and means for addressing them through the United Nations—was met with mixed emotions. To great disappointment, Member States failed to reach agreement on the critical issues of disarmament and the proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as the ever-contentious questions of Security Council reform. Undeniably, however, progress on three fronts—the creation of the Human Rights Council, the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, and the adoption of the principle of the "responsibility to protect"—gave the global community reason to celebrate.

The decision to dissolve the discredited Human Rights Commission and to establish a Human Rights Council, now elevated to the status of a principal organ of the UN (described in more detail below) provided hope that the UN human rights machinery, which had given the world the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, would once again be invested with the legitimacy and authority to carry out its critical mandate. The adoption of a resolution to create a standing Peacebuilding Commission focused attention on the needs

of countries emerging from conflict or those at risk of relapsing into conflict. With the recognition that nearly half of all countries relapse into conflict after the signing of peace agreements, the purpose of the new body will be to bring together relevant actors to marshal resources, and advise and propose strategies for postconflict peace-building and recovery.

The World Summit, however, may be remembered most for taking the extraordinary step of endorsing the new international policy known as “responsibility to protect,” which some referred to as a “revolution in consciousness in international affairs.” While the United Nations was founded on the seemingly immutable principle of territorial sovereignty, i.e. every country’s right to manage affairs within its borders, the “responsibility to protect” redefines sovereignty in terms of the country’s responsibilities in the domestic as well as international arena. It states that in the event that a state is unwilling or unable to protect its citizens from gross violations of human rights, such as genocide, the international community has the responsibility to intervene. “The new security consensus,” commented Dr. Anne Marie Slaughter, Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs, “rests more on solidarity than on self-defense.” The adoption of the principle of “responsibility to protect” comes in the wake of the horrors of the genocides of the twentieth and the early twenty-first century and holds the promise of a more mature conception of sovereignty as a responsibility for the protection of human life within one’s jurisdiction and the obligation to protect it, in solidarity with other nations, outside of one’s borders as well.

Given the propitious moment represented by the World Summit and the world’s attention to the development, security, and human rights challenges of our time, the Bahá’í International Community—on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the United Nations—offered a Bahá’í perspective on these pressing questions. The statement titled *The Search for Values in an Age of Transition*,¹ distributed to government Missions at the UN as well as to National Spiritual Assemblies around the world, considers the state of current global challenges from an evolutionary perspective, raises the complex issue of the role of religion in the public sphere, and discusses the principle of the “oneness of humankind” as both the direction and the operating principle of the emerging global order. Rooted

in this vision, the second section of the statement presents concrete recommendations for improving the work of the United Nations in the areas of human rights and rule of law, development, democracy, and collective security.

Reforming the human rights machinery

One of the highlights of the intense reform negotiations at the United Nations involved the restructuring of the Organization's human rights mechanism, namely the Human Rights Commission. Over the years, the Commission's admission of gross human rights violators to its membership, its flagrant politicization, and its inability to address human rights violations around the globe promptly and effectively had irreparably discredited this important body, which in its early years gave the world the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In his recommendations to the General Assembly (contained in the aforementioned report, "In Larger Freedom"), the Secretary-General proposed the creation of a new Human Rights Council—with the status, function, membership, and working methods necessary for it to carry out its mandate.

Given the centrality of human rights to the work of the Bahá'í International Community, BIC representatives, both in New York and in Geneva, were particularly active in following the negotiations surrounding the proposed human rights body and giving their input to the process. In an ongoing series of meetings and telephone calls with NGO representatives of human rights organizations, Ms. Bani Dugal and Ms. Diane Ala'i discussed and coordinated positions and lobbying efforts related to the establishment of a strong Human Rights Council.

Throughout the year, Bahá'í International Community representatives met with UN officials from more than 20 countries to lobby for the implementation of the Council and to prepare for its establishment. The Bahá'í International Community's written input to the human rights reform negotiations included joint statements with other human rights NGOs outlining concrete recommendations for the structure and function of the proposed Council, as well as a statement, in response to an open request from the High Commissioner for Human Rights, outlining the BIC's recommendations for

strengthening the Office of the High Commissioner. At a meeting about the Human Rights Council, Mr. Luvuyo Ndimeni, First Secretary of the Mission of South Africa—speaking on behalf of the South African Ambassador who serves as Co-Chair of the Task Force for the Human Rights Council—publicly recognized the contributions made by the Bahá'ís to the human rights reform process.

On 15 March 2006, the General Assembly passed a resolution establishing the Human Rights Council. The new body has a significantly higher institutional standing, moving from its former position as an organ of the Economic and Social Council to one of the subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly, alongside the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, thereby facilitating the long-discussed goal of mainstreaming human rights in the UN system. To become members of the Council, Member States will now need 96 positive votes (representing an absolute majority of General Assembly members), replacing the former, less stringent, voting criteria. Also, the new Council will enable more timely interventions by establishing a year-round presence rather than the isolated six-week meeting period. Finally, each member of the Council will be subject to a universal periodic review of its human rights record by Council members, thereby introducing a much-needed measure of accountability and scrutiny.

Concluding its work with the former human rights body, the Bahá'í International Community was represented by Ms. Diane Ala'i at the 62nd and final session of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Other human rights work

One of the focal areas of human rights work for the Bahá'í International Community was the right to freedom of religion or belief—a right long denied to the Bahá'í community in Iran and to numerous religious minorities around the world. The release of the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) 2005 Human Development Report on the theme of “cultural liberty in today's diverse world” provided a unique opportunity for the Bahá'í International Community to engage with the UN on the subject of religious freedom. In its formal response to the UNDP's report, the Bahá'í International Community



The panel at the 2005 symposium on “Freedom to Believe: Upholding the Standard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” (Left to right) Asma Jahangir, Piet de Klerk, and Felice Gaer.

noted the report’s failure to adequately address the right to freedom of religion, stating that it represented one of the most contested and neglected human rights, and provided concrete recommendations to the UN for improving the status and implementation of this right. Given that this response represented the Bahá’í International Community’s first engagement of this kind, the Office was delighted to receive a formal letter from Mr. Kevin Watkins, Director of the UN’s Human Development Report Office, which noted “the very helpful recommendations in the [BIC’s] Response” and commended its “substantive depth” and “intellectual engagement.”

In an effort to stimulate greater awareness and promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief—as provided for in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—the Bahá’í International Community developed a formal position statement on this theme and used it as a basis for a symposium held in New York bearing the same title: “Freedom to Believe: Upholding the Standard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” Invited panelists—addressing the status of this right in international law—included His Excellency Piet de Klerk, Ambassador at Large for Human Rights at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ms. Asma Jahangir, United

Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief; and Ms. Felice Gaer, Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights. In his remarks, Ambassador de Klerk noted that, "the degree to which freedom of religion or belief is upheld reflects the general human rights situation in a particular country." Reinforcing the work of the New York Bahá'í International Community Office in this area, Ms. Diane Ala'i continued in her role as chair of the NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion, Conscience and Belief in Geneva.

In the arena of promoting the human rights of the Bahá'í community in Iran, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office expanded its diplomatic training seminars for External Affairs representatives and reaped the fruits of its hard-won labor. Alongside the 10th annual training seminar in Acuto, Italy, for selected National Spiritual Assemblies from Europe and other countries, the BIC UNO organized the first seminar for African National Spiritual Assemblies—held in English and French, and attracting 39 representatives from 31 National Spiritual Assemblies to seminars in Dakar, Senegal, and Johannesburg, South Africa. As a direct result of these seminars, including those for Latin American and Caribbean National Spiritual Assemblies in previous years, BIC UNO representatives noted a significant increase in the capacity of external affairs representatives to deal effectively with their governments and to respond promptly to BIC UNO requests and directives.

This year, extensive and coordinated lobbying by the BIC UNO, supported in New York by External Affairs representatives from Canada and the United States, and reinforced by national representatives acting domestically, assisted with the passage of a General Assembly resolution condemning the human rights situation in Iran. Not only did the resolution contain stronger language referring to the persecution of Bahá'ís than it had in previous years, it also passed with the largest margin since 1996, with 75 votes in favor, 50 against, and 43 abstentions.

In a year dominated by discussions about the failure of the international community to respond effectively to the most egregious human rights violations, including the genocide crisis in Darfur, Sudan, the Bahá'í International Community also continued its engagement with other NGOs in advocating for an effective and just

International Criminal Court. Mr. Jeffrey Huffines, Representative of the Bahá'ís of the United States to the UN, representing the Bahá'í International Community, was re-elected to the position of Co-Chair of the Faith and Ethics Network for the International Criminal Court—a coalition of religious and interfaith NGOs that examine the moral, ethical, and religious considerations surrounding the International Criminal Court. The Network worked to raise awareness about the Court at the grassroots level by disseminating information to numerous religious, ecumenical, and ethical communities.

In his capacity as Co-Chair, Mr. Huffines represented the Bahá'í International Community at the Fourth Session of the International Criminal Court Assembly of States Parties in the Hague. There, he moderated a lunch meeting featuring two senior Ugandan religious leaders to discuss the publication of a training manual on advancing justice and reconciliation in relation to the International Criminal Court for African faith-based communities. Mr. Huffines helped to organize a launch of the training manual at the United Nations, while the Network made plans to launch the training manual in Kampala, Uganda, in late April at an event to be attended by senior religious leaders of that country.

Advancement of women

The work of the Bahá'í International Community in the area of the advancement of women, one of its core programmatic areas, continued with full vigor. As Chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, one of the largest NGO Committees at the UN, Ms. Bani Dugal played a central role in organizing the participation of over 2,700 civil society representatives from several hundred NGOs at this year's Commission on the Status of Women. Ms. Dugal's role included organizing the annual NGO Consultation Day, preceding the Commission, as well as leading daily morning briefings for NGOs.

Marking its 60th year, this year's Commission considered the themes of women's participation in development as well as the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels. The latter was particularly significant, occurring in a year marked by the election of three women as heads of state: Ms. Angela Merkel as Germany's first woman Chancellor; Ms. Ellen

Johnson-Sirleaf as President of Liberia and Africa's first elected female head of state; and Dr. Michelle Bachelet as President of Chile and the first woman to hold the position in her country.

The Bahá'í International Community's delegation to the Commission included representatives from all five continents—representing National Spiritual Assemblies of Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Hawaii, Japan, Sweden, Togo, the United Kingdom, and the United States. During the Commission, Ms. Dugal convened and moderated a high-level roundtable discussion on the theme of “equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels.” Invited speakers included His Excellency E. Johan Løvald, Ambassador to the Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations; Anne Marie Goetz, the Chief Advisor on Governance, Peace and Security, UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); and Amrita Basu, a Professor in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies and Political Science, Amherst College. Ms. Zarin Hainsworth, a Bahá'í delegate from the United Kingdom, conducted three programs entitled “The Role Models of Women in Decision Making,” “Widows' Rights International” and, in conjunction with the (UK) National Alliance of Women's Organizations, “A Dramatic Presentation—Women in Decision Making in Trade Negotiations.”

The Commission on the Status of Women concluded its 60th session, having taken decisions concerning Palestinian women; women and girls in Afghanistan; the release of women and children taken hostage; women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS; and the advisability of a special rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women.

Ms. Dugal's expertise in the area of the advancement of women was increasingly recognized as both UN officials and permanent representatives sought her input on relevant matters. In preparation for Austria's assumption of the presidency of the European Union in January 2006, the First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations, Ms. Gerda Vogl, and the Head of the Human Rights Section of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Counselor Elisabeth Kögler, invited Ms. Dugal's recommendations regarding ways in which the European Union could strengthen the work of the Commission on the Status of Women. Ms. Dugal was also invited to attend a consultation regarding gender mainstreaming with Mr. Adnan Amin, Executive Director of the Secretary-General's

High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence; Mr. Koen Davidse, Head of Economic and Social Affairs at the Mission of the Netherlands to the UN; Ms. Zazie Schafer, the manager of the UN Task Force on Gender Mainstreaming; and Mr. Paulo Galli, from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. At the meeting, invited experts and NGO representatives raised concerns regarding the declining representation of women at the highest level of the UN system and the inadequacy of current mechanisms for promoting gender equality at the UN and nationally.

During the Commission, the Offices held a luncheon for Mrs. Zanele Mbeki, the First Lady of South Africa, organized an afternoon tea for the 20-member delegation of Taiwanese NGOs to the Commission on the Status of Women, and hosted a film festival titled "Snapshots of Change," featuring an international series of short films on women's rights, marking the 10th anniversary of the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women. The BIC also hosted a reception to honor Ms. Ruth Bamela Engo-Tjega on her retirement after 20 years of service at the UN, most recently as Senior Economic Affairs Officer in the Office of the Special Coordinator for African and the Least Developed Countries. Ms. Engo-Tjega had worked alongside Bahá'í International Community representatives for many years and, in her speech at the reception, described the atmosphere of the Bahá'í International Community affectionately as "her mother's hearth."

Social development

The Bahá'í International Community continued its active engagement with the functional commissions of the United Nations, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the World Summit on the Information Society.

This year's Commission on Social Development concluded the first UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997–2006) and examined progress made towards the goal of poverty eradication. The proposal for the Decade originated at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 with the aim of eradicating absolute poverty and substantially reducing overall poverty through

the full implementation of commitments and recommendations generated by the major UN conferences of the preceding decades.

While the Commission reiterated the need for a comprehensive vision of poverty and development—addressing economic and social exclusion and the denial of human rights—it was Ms. Clare Short, invited speaker and a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom, who issued a clarion call for action to the members and observers at the Commission. “We are at a major turning point in human history. For the first time ever, we are capable of removing abject poverty, illiteracy, and the diseases of poverty from the human condition,” she said, making explicit the connection between improvements in technology and communication and the emergence of a global ethic. “What this means,” she concluded, “is that within the next 30 to 100 years, we must create a new civilization. It will be a more moral and decent way to live. It is effectively what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for and has been the dream of religious leaders and moral philosophers throughout the ages.”

In its contribution to the debates about the eradication of poverty, the Bahá'í International Community prepared a statement titled *A New Framework for Global Prosperity*,² outlining the Bahá'í perspective on poverty and putting forward recommendations for the establishment of more equitable conditions within and between nations. The statement pointed out that “any definition of poverty and course for its elimination is shaped by prevailing notions about the nature and purpose of the development process,” and as such described the purpose of development as “contributing to the foundation for a new social and international order, capable of creating and sustaining conditions in which human beings can advance morally, culturally, and intellectually.” From this perspective, it defined poverty as “the absence of resources—physical, social, and ethical—necessary for the establishment of conditions which promote the moral, material, and creative capacities of individuals, communities, and institutions.”

One of the harbingers of the above-mentioned “turning point in human history” and catalyst of the “emerging global ethic” has undoubtedly been the phenomenal rise of Internet technology. In November 2005, nearly 20,000 participants representing governments, NGOs, media, and the private sector gathered in Tunis,

Tunisia, for the World Summit on the Information Society to articulate a set of principles for governing and providing equitable access to the benefits of the information age. Recognizing the ubiquity of the globalized Internet, many participants in the Summit process recognized that a preeminent role for any single government was no longer acceptable or sustainable. In response, the Tunis Summit committed to create a new "Internet Governance Forum" to be convened by the UN Secretary-General and to provide a much-needed forum for coordination and consultation on cross cutting Internet issues.

The Bahá'í International Community has closely followed the work of the Summit since its first meeting in Geneva in December 2003. This year, during the second of two phases of the Summit, Ms. Laina Raveendran Greene, an Internet entrepreneur representing the Bahá'í International Community, played an active role in the Values and Ethics Caucus, helping to draft a statement on behalf of the Caucus and coordinating an event addressing "The Role of the Information Society in Building a Culture of Peace." Ms. Greene's recommendations for further Bahá'í International Community work in this area included: contributing Bahá'í principles to the global dialogue on new forms of cooperation, engaging Bahá'í youth in related future events, and giving greater publicity to relevant Bahá'í socioeconomic development projects. The Summit's outcome document unequivocally recognized "that freedom of expression and the free flow of information, ideas, and knowledge, are essential for the Information Society and beneficial to development."

In order to expand its participation in UN fora, the Bahá'í International Community continued to call on experts within the worldwide Bahá'í community to represent it at various events. John Sargeant, a Canadian Aboriginal from the Six Nations, was invited to attend and observe the proceedings of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The 16-member Permanent Forum, established in 2000, is a unique advisory body and subsidiary organ of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health, and human rights. Given the history of Bahá'í involvement in community development work with indigenous populations, the annual meetings

of the PFII present an important opportunity to learn more about the central issues of concern from indigenous people themselves.

At this year's meetings of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, Mr. Peter Adriance, invited representative of the Bahá'í International Community, continued his work of previous years at the Commission, facilitating the involvement of faith communities in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014). The Decade, spearheaded by the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, grew out of the recognition that education is the foundation of sustainable development—specifically, education that emphasizes a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to developing the knowledge and skills required to ensure an environmentally and economically sustainable future. In collaboration with the Education Caucus, Mr. Adriance organized two side events at the Commission titled “The Role of Faith Communities in Education for Sustainable Development: Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements” and “Engaging Faith Communities in the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.”

BIC Representative Ms. Bahiyyih Chaffers continued to serve in her role as Secretary of the NGO Committee on Social Development, coordinating the administration of the 22-member Committee and managing relations with UN staff on behalf of the Committee. Ms. Chaffers also coordinated the Committee's drafting task force, which produced a response to the Secretary-General's report for the 2006 Session of the Commission for Social Development. The Bahá'í involvement in work on social development at the UN was also expanded through Ms. Chaffers's role as Vice-President of the NGO Committee Against Racism and Racial Discrimination.

With a view to supporting the increasing number of activities and roles of the BIC UNO, the Office undertook a major renovation project, which significantly expanded its conference room facilities. The completion of the renovation ahead of schedule in June 2005 was particularly timely as the UN, shortly thereafter, released its Capital Master Plan, in which the UN Secretariat building is scheduled to close for renovation in 2007 for a period of five to ten years, depending on the renovation budget and strategy yet to be approved. As the United Nations has absorbed the majority of remaining office space

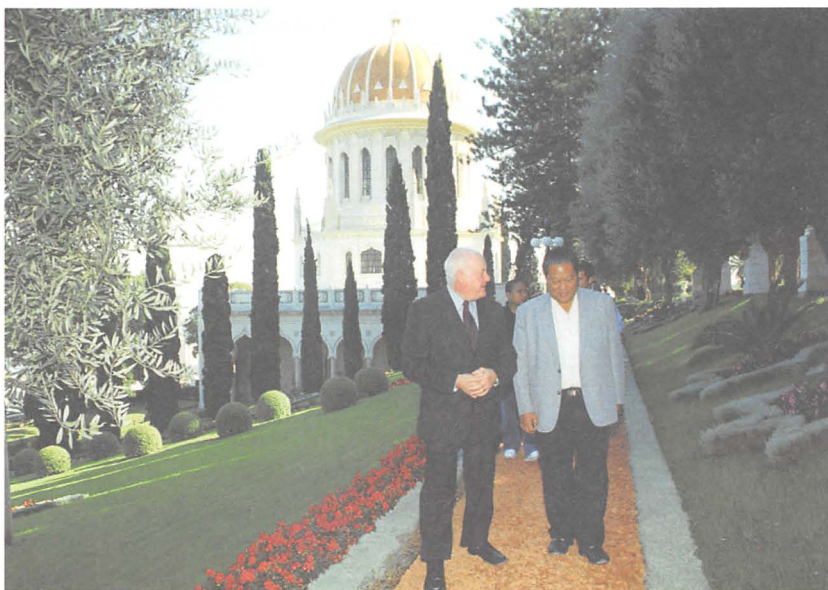
in the UN Plaza area to accommodate its transition needs, the BIC UNO is strategically well positioned to become one of the primary venues for UN and NGO program activities in the coming years.

Public information

Based at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, with a branch office in Paris, the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information (OPI) oversees and organizes public information activities throughout the worldwide Bahá'í community in conjunction with a network of National Public Information Officers (NPIOs) who carry out the external affairs and public information work of National Spiritual Assemblies.

The Haifa Office receives dignitaries and other important visitors to the Bahá'í World Centre. On 1 December 2005, the president of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Mr. Kessai Note, and his wife, Mrs. Mary Note, paid an official visit to the Bahá'í World Centre, while on a state visit to Israel. The president and first lady were welcomed by a member of the Universal House of Justice, Dr. Peter Khan, and his wife, Dr. Janet Khan. Among those in the presidential entourage were the minister of foreign affairs of the Marshall Islands, Mr. Gerald Zackios, Mrs. Zackios, Bikini Atoll senator Tomaki Juda, and Mrs. Juda. At a reception in the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, Dr. Khan discussed with President Note the history of the Bahá'í community in the Marshall Islands and the contributions the Bahá'ís have made to development in that country. President Note and his party then visited the Shrine of the Báb and its surrounding terraces. It was the second visit to the Bahá'í World Centre by a head of state of the Marshall Islands, the first being in 1990 by President Amata Kabua.

From 21 April 2005 to 20 April 2006, the Office arranged 327 special visits for some 3,576 dignitaries, leaders of thought, and prominent people from 70 countries. Visitors included diplomats, religious leaders, physicians, professors, parliamentarians, researchers, military officials, educators, students, journalists, tour guides, business people, and members of civil society and nongovernmental organizations.



President Kessai Note of the Marshall Islands, right, and the deputy secretary-general of the Bahá'í International Community, Murray Smith, near the Shrine of the Báb.

The Office received 11 ambassadors from 11 countries as well as other government ministers and officials, including those from Belgium, China, Eritrea, India, Israel, Japan, Tibet, Turkey, and Uzbekistan.

The Office of Public Information's Paris branch contributes to the work of the Bahá'í International Community by assisting with public information initiatives and training in Europe and the francophone world. The Office's ongoing efforts to support national Bahá'í communities in their public information efforts included organizing the 12th annual European Public Information Management Seminar in Sofia, Bulgaria, from 30 June to 3 July 2005. More than 70 participants representing 33 European countries heard presentations and took part in workshops on the principal themes of interreligious dialogue, media relations, and the role of the arts in public information activities.

The Office lent extensive support to the National Spiritual Assembly of France in all aspects of a campaign to raise awareness of the restrictions faced by Bahá'í students wishing to enter higher

education in Iran. It also oversaw the production and publication of the French edition of *One Country* magazine, as well as six issues of the *European Public Information Bulletin*. It collaborated with Librairie Bahá'íe of France on the translation of new texts and the new design for the upcoming revised French version of *The Bahá'ís* magazine. Ninety-five documents from the official Bahá'í Web site were translated and finalized by the Office and offered to the National Spiritual Assembly of France for insertion on the French national Web site. The Office was also represented at numerous press conferences at the Centre d'Accueil de la Presse Étrangère (Foreign Press Centre), conferences, and seminars at UNESCO-Paris. As part of its partnership with UNESCO for the International Decade for a Culture of Peace, the Office encouraged European National Spiritual Assemblies and Bahá'í-inspired associations to post their respective projects on the dedicated UNESCO Web site. Collaboration was also started between the Office and the European Centre for Peace and Development (ECPD) in Belgrade, Serbia, and with the Global Network of Religions for Children.

The Office of Public Information's publications, both in print and Web-based, are intended to provide news and information about the activities of the Bahá'í International Community. The official Web site of the Bahá'í International Community is the flagship site of the Bahá'í presence on the Web and receives an average of 51,000 visitors and 250,000 page views per month.³ The site contains excerpts from the Bahá'í writings, information about the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, and perspectives of the community on issues facing humanity. Links to Web sites of national Bahá'í communities are also available.

The other Web sites of the Bahá'í International Community, which include the Bahá'í World News Service, the Bahá'í Media Bank, the Bahá'í Reference Library, Bahá'í Topics, and the Bahá'í International Community Statement Library, receive approximately 100,000 visits and nearly 500,000 page views per month.⁴

The Bahá'í World News Service posted around 60 articles on its Web site during the year under review, including major breaking stories concerning the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran. Among the numerous communities whose activities were reported were Barbados, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cuba, Fiji, Scotland, Senegal, and Tanzania.

The Web site is increasingly being used as an accurate and reliable source of news about the Bahá'í community by journalists and media organizations around the world.

One Country, the official newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community, entered its 17th year of publication. Published quarterly in English, Chinese, French, German, Russian, and Spanish, it reached more than 50,000 readers in at least 180 countries. The English edition, in particular, had some 40,469 individuals on its mailing list at the year's end. During the year, *One Country* also maintained a presence on the World Wide Web.⁵

One Country won several awards for issues produced during 2005–2006. It won two APEX 2006 Awards for Publication Excellence. The first was for a perspective piece on “The Challenge of Extreme Poverty,” in issue 16.4. The other was for overall newsletter excellence for 17.1. *One Country* also won a Certificate of Merit award from the Religious Communicators Council (RCC) for the editorial on extreme poverty.

During the year, *One Country's* stories covered a wide range of topics. The July–September 2005 issue (17.2) featured an extended story on the Youth Can Move the World leadership training project in Guyana. The October–December 2005 (17.3) issue reported on how faith groups around the world are gearing up to promote Education for Sustainable Development, a UN initiative. During the year, it also carried book reviews of Thomas L. Friedman's *The World is Flat*, Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Restless Souls*, and Mark L. Perry's *The Last War*.

Throughout the year, *One Country* continued to report on the worsening situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. The July–September issue noted the increase in arbitrary arrests, the October–December issue reported on the prison death of Dhabíhu'lláh Mahramí, and the January–March 2006 (17.4) issue reported on the UN's discovery of a secret 29 October 2005 letter from the Iranian military command ordering the identification and monitoring of Bahá'ís.

Perspective editorials during the year discussed Bahá'í approaches to “Education for Sustainable Development” and “The Search for Values in an Age of Transition,” which was based on a Bahá'í International Community statement of the same title.

NOTES

- ¹ For the full text of this statement, see pp. 213–28 of this volume.
- ² For the full text of this statement, see pp. 229–34 of this volume.
- ³ The site can be found at <http://www.bahai.org/>.
- ⁴ A directory of official Bahá'í Web sites can be found on pp. 261–62 of this volume.
- ⁵ The site can be found at <http://www.onecountry.org/>.

Update on the Situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Egypt

Since the earliest years of their existence, Bahá'ís in Iran and Egypt have built for themselves a vibrant community life, excelling in the education of their co-religionists and others, eager to make a distinctive contribution to the spiritual, social, and material advancement of their nations. The outlook of the Bahá'ís in both countries has always been, and remains to this day, optimistic despite the fact that they are denied fundamental human rights.

The situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran

In Iran, Bahá'ís have endured persecution throughout the community's 162-year history, including executions, imprisonments, torture, confiscation of property, denial of the right to operate as a peaceful, law-abiding religious community, and violations of their rights.

While persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran dates back to the origins of the Faith in the 1840s, it was following the 1979 Islamic Revolution that Bahá'ís came under renewed attack, intimidation, and discrimination at the hands of fanatical elements in the clergy and the government, solely on account of their religious beliefs. They have repeatedly been offered relief from persecution if they

were prepared to recant their Faith. More than 200 Bahá'ís have been killed; 15 others have disappeared and are presumed dead. The extent and systematic nature of the persecution—and the fact that it constitutes deliberate government policy—have been documented in reports issued by United Nations Special Representatives. The civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights of Iranian Bahá'ís are systematically violated.

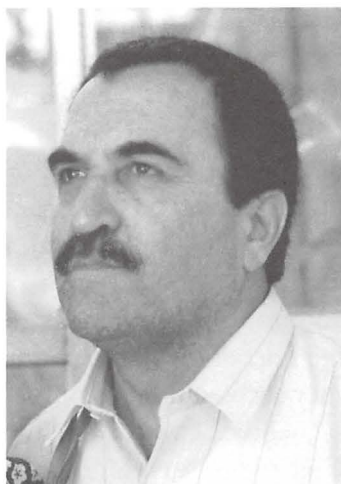
An Iranian government document, obtained and published by one of the Special Representatives of the Commission on Human Rights in 1993, has served as a blueprint for the gradual elimination of the Bahá'í community. Produced by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and approved by the Supreme Leader, this document sets down guidelines for dealing with "the Bahá'í question" so that Bahá'í "progress and development shall be blocked." The policy is clearly still in effect during the year under review.¹

The Bahá'í community in Iran is not aligned with any government, ideology, or opposition movement. It does not engage in any acts of sedition or threaten the authorities. The principles of the Faith require Bahá'ís to be obedient to the law of the land and to avoid partisan political involvement, subversive activity, and all forms of violence. Iranian Bahá'ís seek no special privileges but ask only for their rights under the International Bill of Human Rights (to which Iran is party), in particular the right to life, liberty, and security of person, the right to profess and practice their religion, and the right to education and work.

The Iranian Constitution has been crafted in such a way as to serve the ends of those fanatical elements that wish to eradicate the Bahá'í presence from their country. Article 13 of the constitution stipulates that Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities. The country's largest religious minority remains "unrecognized," and therefore some 300,000 Bahá'ís cannot benefit from government initiatives in favor of minorities. The Islamic regime refers to the Bahá'í Faith as a heresy and a conspiracy, and—classified as "unprotected infidels"—Iranian Bahá'ís have no legal recourse. The fact that the largest religious minority in the country is not recognized leads to laws that violate the social and civil rights of Bahá'ís. Violence against Bahá'ís and

the violation of their rights have become a fundamental element in the governance of Iran.

In addition, the recent rise in influence in Iranian governmental circles of the anti-Bahá'í society Hojjatieh, an organization committed to the destruction of the Bahá'í Faith, is now heightening the beleaguered community's fears. Founded in 1953 by a Shiite Muslim cleric, Hojjatieh actively pursued its objectives against the Bahá'í community prior to the 1979 Revolution. It has



Mr. Dhabíhu'lláh Mahramí

today re-emerged in Iran as an influential if secretive faction that has been linked in news articles and Web logs with the current Iranian administration.

During the year under review, the Bahá'ís in Iran have faced an increase in the number of arbitrary arrests and detentions in comparison to the preceding decade.

The death of Mr. Dhabíhu'lláh Mahramí

On 15 December 2005, the Bahá'í International Community was informed of the death of a 59-year-old Iranian Bahá'í, Mr. Dhabíhu'lláh Mahramí, in his prison cell in the city of Yazd. He had no known health concerns and the cause of his death is not known. During the 10 years that he had been arbitrarily incarcerated for his beliefs, Mr. Mahramí received numerous death threats and was forced to perform arduous physical labor.

Mr. Mahramí was first called before the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Yazd in 1995 and questioned about his adherence to the Bahá'í Faith. Several meetings were held in an effort to persuade him to renounce his beliefs, but he refused. Mr. Mahramí was among the countless number of Iranian Bahá'ís summarily fired from their jobs for no reason other than their adherence to the Bahá'í Faith. He had previously worked in the civil service but, at the time of his arrest, was earning a livelihood installing venetian blinds.

Despite assertions by Iranian officials that Mr. Mahramí had been convicted of spying for Israel, court records incontrovertibly indicate that he was tried and sentenced solely on the grounds of being an “apostate” for believing in the Bahá'í Faith. It should be noted that, in an unwise attempt to prevent Mr. Mahramí from losing his job in the civil service, a colleague—who was not a Bahá'í—had submitted Mr. Mahramí's photograph to a newspaper with a false announcement that he had recanted his faith. When it became clear to the authorities in later years that Mr. Mahramí was unquestionably a member of the Bahá'í community and had never recanted his beliefs, they accused him of converting from Islam to the Bahá'í Faith. Consequently, he was arrested and, on 2 January 1996, the Revolutionary Court sentenced him to death. Since his heirs are not Muslims but Bahá'ís, his properties and assets were confiscated.

After his lawyer had appealed to the Supreme Court, Iranian officials announced that the Court had rejected the verdict of the Revolutionary Court and referred the case to a civil court. However, in 1997 his relatives were informed orally that—despite urgent and diligent action around the world to protest through governments and thereby pressure the Iranian authorities to discharge Mr. Mahramí without penalty—the Supreme Court had confirmed his death sentence. The authorities never publicly bowed to international pressure calling for his release, but in December 1999, on the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, they declared an amnesty and commuted his sentence to life imprisonment.

About three years prior to Mr. Mahramí's death, the Public Prosecutor of Yazd at the time threatened him with death on a number of occasions. The last time Mr. Mahramí had received such a threat was two months before he died, when, in Yazd prison, a judge told him: “Even if you are released from prison, we will get rid of you in a [car] accident.”

Increased harassment of Bahá'ís in Iran

Throughout the period under review, Bahá'ís across Iran have experienced an escalation in acts of personal harassment against them, in comparison to the preceding decade. One tactic appears to have been the targeting of Bahá'í households, which began receiving notes, CDs, and tracts, all of which were aimed at refuting the claims

of the Bahá'í Faith. Some of these communications were in the form of documents allegedly written by Bahá'ís who had “recanted their Faith.” Many Bahá'ís have also begun to receive provocative SMS text messages on their cell phones.

Having executed or abducted scores of Bahá'í administrators in the years immediately following the 1979 Revolution, the Iranian government seems to be showing renewed determination to initiate summary arrests and imprisonments, without charge, of the few Bahá'ís who manage the affairs of the community in an ad hoc fashion at the national and local levels. This activity was ominously foretold by an agent of the Iranian intelligence service. While interrogating one of the Bahá'ís arrested in 2005, the agent stated, “We have learned how to confront [the Bahá'ís]. We no longer pursue ordinary [Bahá'ís]; we will paralyze your inner core.” Four of those engaged in administrative work in Tehran were summoned to meet with the authorities there on 7 November 2005 and subsequently released, following interrogation.

Six community members were arrested on 8 November 2005 in the city of Karaj or its environs. Some of them had been involved in managing the affairs of the community and others in supervising the training of Bahá'ís through systematic study of the basic tenets of the Faith. They were released a month later, on 7 December. Each of them was required to produce property valued at 10 million Iranian tumans (approximately US\$11,013) as collateral for release. It is not known whether any charges have been laid in these cases.

On the same day, officials searched two homes in Karaj belonging to Bahá'ís. Both men were ordered to report to the court on 10 November, where they were questioned but not detained. Six others, previously imprisoned, were released on bail. In all of these cases, the individuals concerned were required to use property as collateral for their release. It is not known whether any charges have been laid against them.

Another Bahá'í arrested in Babol Sar on 14 September was released on bail three days later with properties used as collateral. Two Bahá'ís from Sari were arrested in that city on 20 and 28 August 2005, respectively, and released on 19 September.

Mr. Behrooz Tavakkoli was imprisoned on 26 July 2005. He and a Bahá'í colleague had traveled by bus from Tehran to meet with Bahá'ís in Mashhad and attend to administrative business. Upon

arrival in Mashhad, they were arrested at the bus terminal. That same day in the evening, some 10 agents of the Iranian intelligence service went to Mr. Tavakkoli's home, searched his house, and confiscated books, notes, and other belongings. Mr. Tavakkoli has been doing Bahá'í administrative work at the national level and is very well known to the Iranian authorities. His traveling companion was a member of a coordinating group that supervises course work for Bahá'ís throughout the country who wish to engage in systematic study of the basic tenets of their Faith. She had previously been arrested on 25 May 2005 and released on bail on 28 June.

Mr Tavakkoli was finally released on 15 November. He was required to produce as collateral property valued at 50 million Iranian tumans (approximately US\$55,200). After having been arrested with a fellow Bahá'í in Mashhad, Mr. Tavakkoli was transferred to Tehran. First, the Bahá'ís were told that his release had been delayed because it had not been coordinated with the Ministry of Intelligence. Then, the authorities promised to release him on 10 November, but kept him in prison for five more days on the grounds that the activities of the Bahá'ís had increased in Isfahan and in other Iranian cities. His fellow Bahá'í also arrested at that time had been released on 19 September 2005.

Many more arrests were carried out during the first week of August 2005 in the city of Ghaem Shahr and in Mashhad. A number of Bahá'ís who had received training to promote the moral education of young Bahá'ís in Iran were arrested in Karaj. On 5 September, the court in Karaj sentenced four Bahá'ís to 10 months of imprisonment on the charge of opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran. This charge was verbally conveyed to them, and when they asked for a written document, the court refused to issue one.

Among numerous arrests carried out during the year under review, some 37 Bahá'ís were arrested and taken into custody between March and May 2005. Those imprisoned included prominent members of the community, residents of Tehran, whose houses were ransacked; the authorities filmed some of these searches and confiscated a large quantity of documents, printed materials, books, copying equipment, and other possessions. Six Bahá'ís in Shiraz were also arrested, nine more in the city of Semnan, and nine Bahá'í farmers whose homes and land had previously been confiscated in the village of Kata.

Statement of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

On 20 March 2006, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ms. Asma Jahangir, released a statement announcing that she was “highly concerned” about the following:

A confidential letter sent on 29 October 2005 by the Chairman of the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces in Iran to a number of governmental agencies has been brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur. The letter, which is addressed to the Ministry of Information, the Revolutionary Guard and the Police Force, states that the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, had instructed the Command Headquarters to identify persons who adhere to the Bahá'í Faith and monitor their activities. The letter goes on to request the recipients to, in a highly confidential manner, collect any and all information about members of the Bahá'í Faith.²

The Special Rapporteur further stated, “this latest development indicates that the situation with regard to religious minorities in Iran is, in fact, deteriorating” and called on “the Government of Iran to refrain from categorizing individuals according to their religion and to ensure that members of all religious minorities are free to hold and practice their religious beliefs, without discrimination or fear.”

In parallel to Ms. Jahangir's announcement, the Bahá'í International Community learned that the Iranian Association of Chambers of Commerce had been compiling a list of Bahá'ís in every type of trade and employment, and that problems were being created for members of the community in various trades throughout the country.

Attacks in the media

The distressing new measures were implemented concurrently with a campaign of media attacks on the Bahá'í Faith, which in the past have preceded government-instigated assaults on the Bahá'ís in Iran. The *Kayhan* newspaper, one of the official daily organs of the conservative hardliners in Iran, published more than three dozen

calumnious articles from October 2005 to March 2006. The articles engage in a deliberate distortion of history, make use of fake historical documents, and falsely describe Bahá'í moral principles in a manner that would be offensive to Muslims.

During the same period, Iranian radio and television broadcasts regularly condemned the Bahá'ís and their beliefs, as well. For example, in a series of weekly programs on Ma'arif, a national radio network.

One of the later articles in *Kayhan* demonstrated the depths to which the Iranian media are willing to go in efforts to inflame the public against the Bahá'ís. This article, published on 23 February 2006, said that Bahá'ís would gather on a Muslim holy day to “consume alcohol, dance, and sacrifice a Muslim child.” The same article recalls an incident when a number of people were to be executed after murdering a group of Bahá'ís and, to save these Muslims, Ayatollah Khomeini visited the shah and told him to free the murderers—an order which the shah obeyed.

Denial of the right to organize as a peaceful religious community

Since 1983, the Bahá'í community in Iran has been denied both the right to assemble officially and the right to maintain its institutions. In other countries, these democratically elected governing bodies organize and administer the religious activities of the community. The Bahá'í Faith has no clergy; its institutions perform many of the functions reserved to clergy in other religions and are the foundational element of Bahá'í community life, but in Iran they continue to be banned.

Already in 2004, the authorities had intensified their pressure on the community (in ways that included threatening individual believers) and had ordered the Bahá'ís to suspend all social, educational, and community-related activities—in other words, all activities that went beyond the individual observance of religious obligations. Moreover, the Bahá'ís were clearly informed that they would face the government's withdrawal of protection if they did not ban all collective activities. The officials stated that the most compassionate act of the Islamic Republic had been to establish laws that protect

the Bahá'ís from the people of Iran, who might otherwise take the law into their own hands and "follow the dictates of their Islamic sentiments." The implication was that the Bahá'ís could be subjected to mob attacks without protection from the government.

Denial of access to education

Documented evidence shows that, despite their claims to the contrary, the Iranian authorities once again blocked access to university for the Bahá'ís in the past year.

A large number of Bahá'í students passed the national university entrance examinations in June/July 2005, many with very high scores. It was not necessary to declare a religious affiliation in order to take the exam. However, when they received their results in August, they saw that they had been falsely recorded as Muslims on the official form. The students wrote back to the officials concerned, indicating that the registration form for the exam did not ask for a declaration of religious affiliation and therefore they did not understand why their religion was stated as Islam on the results form, when in fact they were Bahá'ís. They never received any reply.

Barring Bahá'í students from access to higher education has been a long-standing policy of the Islamic Republic. The 1991 memorandum from the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Council (published by the former UN Special Representative) stated, "They [Bahá'ís] must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís." A statement posted on Ayatollah Safi's official Web site in Iran also refers to this policy. In response to a question about registering Bahá'ís in educational institutions, the Ayatollah responded: "Their registration as Bahá'ís, which is an anti-Islamic intelligence organization, is not allowed and is contrary to the interests of Islam and the principles and values of the Islamic Revolution."

In the late 1980s, the Iranian Bahá'ís sought to mitigate the effects of the ban by establishing their own institution of higher education. Known as the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), the Institute offered classes in private homes throughout the country, augmented by a scattering of specialized classrooms, laboratories,

and libraries. By 1996, several hundred students were enrolled and 11 had graduated with the equivalent of a bachelor's degree.³

In the early morning hours of 15 August 2005, four intelligence agents entered an apartment where Mr. Sina Vahdati, the administrative head of the BIHE responsible for academic affairs, was residing. The agents confiscated certain institute documents, of which they appeared to have had prior knowledge, and left after having questioned him for a few hours. Later, Mr. Vahdati was directed to go to the local intelligence office in Tehran. When he arrived there on 16 August, he was dismissed and informed that he would need to return at a later date.

The Bahá'í Faith places a high value on education. Being denied access to university-level studies is demoralizing, and any erosion in educational levels inevitably leads to impoverishment. The Bahá'í International Community has placed particular emphasis on this point over the past few years, with strong support from the international community.

For several years, Iranian officials generated hope that Bahá'í students would finally be able to attend universities in their homeland without having to renounce their religion. Not only did this give the impression that the authorities were acting with new liberality, but allowing the students to pass the exam and then blocking their admission may also have served other purposes. Clearly, it demoralized the students, creating a frustration that officials may believe will induce Bahá'í youth to leave the country. Moreover, it achieved an objective that the authorities have long sought to attain: identifying by name the young Iranian Bahá'ís who demonstrate outstanding ability and may play a significant role in their community in the future.

Confiscation of properties belonging to individual Bahá'ís

Bahá'í homes continue to be searched and documents and possessions seized. On 5 September 2005, the homes of nine Bahá'ís in the city of Yazd were searched, and their Bahá'í and other literature confiscated, along with their computers, tapes, videos, and CDs.

The authorities also continue to act in accordance with their long-standing policy of confiscating Bahá'í homes.

Denial of employment, pensions, and other benefits

Confiscating homes and property is not the only means that the authorities use to weaken the economic base of the Bahá'í community. In the 1980s, over 10,000 Bahá'ís were dismissed from positions in governmental and educational institutions. Many remain unemployed and receive no unemployment benefits. The pensions of Bahá'ís dismissed on religious grounds were terminated. Some members of the community have even been required to return salaries paid to them before they were dismissed.

Denial of civil rights and liberties

Under Iranian law, Bahá'ís have no legal protection and thus their rights can be ignored with impunity. Harassment continues unabated. The application of some laws was modified, for example, measures taken by the government in 2000 enabled married Bahá'í couples to register as husband and wife and to register their children. But the relevant law was not changed, so Bahá'í marriages and divorces are still not legally recognized. The right of Bahá'ís to inherit is also denied.

United Nations expresses “serious concern”

For the 18th time since 1985, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution on 16 December 2005 expressing “serious concern” over the human rights situation in Iran. The resolution was put forward by Canada and co-sponsored by 46 countries including Australia, members of the European Union, and the United States. Among other things, it called on Iran to

eliminate, in law or in practice, all forms of discrimination based on religious, ethnic or linguistic grounds, and other human rights violations against minorities, including Arabs, Kurds, Baluchi, Christians, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and the Bahá'í. . . ,

and also to

implement the 1996 report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on religious intolerance, which recommended ways the Islamic Republic of Iran could emancipate the Bahá'í community.

The resolution specifically mentioned the upsurge in persecution against Iran's Bahá'í community, noting the

escalation and increased frequency of discrimination and other human rights violations against the Bahá'í, including cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, the denial of freedom of religion or of publicly carrying out communal affairs, the disregard of property rights, the destruction of sites of religious importance, the suspension of social, educational and community-related activities and the denial of access to higher education, employment, pensions, adequate housing and other benefits.

The resolution also encouraged various agencies of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to continue to work to improve the human rights situation in Iran and, at the same time, called upon the government of Iran to cooperate with these agencies. The Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, Ms. Bani Dugal, said, "It has been a year when human rights violations against Bahá'í[s] and other groups in Iran have strikingly worsened, and the scrutiny and support of the international community remains virtually the only tool for the protection of innocent people in Iran."

The current situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran reflects the nature of the persecution against the community and its historical context. Factions struggling for political ascendancy in Iran have repeatedly used the Bahá'ís as a scapegoat, based on hostility and prejudice generated by ecclesiastical propaganda. For more than 150 years, from the pulpit, press, radio, television, and even from scholarly publications, the Iranian public has received a grossly false image of the Bahá'ís and their beliefs that incites hatred and contempt. The Bahá'ís have never been allowed to communicate the facts that would expose the lies and calumnies, which have come from those to whom the people of Iran look for guidance in spiritual matters.

Nevertheless, the organized campaign to destroy the community has failed. The Iranian Bahá'ís have steadfastly refused to compromise their Faith. They are dedicated to building united, supportive communities characterized by an enthusiastic and optimistic outlook and are keen to offer their insights and skills to the progress and development of their country. The persecution against them has become an established issue in the ongoing indictment by the international community—the United Nations, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society—of the Iranian government for its violation of universally accepted standards in human rights.

The situation of the Bahá'ís in Egypt

Once among the most vibrant and active minority religious communities in the Middle East, the Bahá'ís of Egypt are now facing an upsurge of religious persecution and hatred from fanatical elements in the clergy and the government that aims to eradicate the community as a coherent entity. Of particular concern in the year under review was the implementation of a government decision to computerize the national identity card system in a way that excluded Bahá'ís.

More broadly, the Bahá'í community of Egypt has been deprived of virtually all rights as an organized religious community since 1960, when a sweeping presidential decree dismantled their religious institutions, banned Bahá'í activities, and enjoined the confiscation of all Bahá'í properties. No explanation for this official act was given. Since that time, the Bahá'í community of Egypt has been battered by periodic arrests, detentions, and imprisonments.

The identity card crisis

Egypt's national identity card system, which is in the process of being computerized, has been set up to exclude Bahá'ís, depriving them of valid ID cards, making them virtual noncitizens without access to employment, schooling, and all government services, including hospital care.

All Egyptian citizens must carry an ID card, which must be presented not only for any type of government service, such as

medical care in a public hospital or processing for a property title or deed, but also to obtain employment, education, banking services, and many other important private transactions. ID cards are also required to pass through police checkpoints, and individuals without such cards are accordingly deprived of freedom of movement.

In Egypt, applications for ID cards require the applicant to state his or her religious affiliation. Moreover, the system allows for one of only three recognized religions of Egypt—Islam, Christianity, or Judaism—to be entered. Bahá'ís have long refused, as a matter of principle, to falsely list themselves as Muslim, Christian, or Jew. Not only would such a step constitute committing fraud against the state, but such a denial of faith would effectively play into the hands of those who seek to eliminate the Bahá'ís in Egypt.

In the 1990s, the government announced it would be upgrading its identification card system by issuing computerized cards that would be less susceptible to forgery. This, the government indicated, would help to combat militant Islamic unrest, and improve data collection and access. The government indicated the shift to the new system would be gradual, but set January 2005 as the deadline for everyone to have a new card—a deadline which was extended to 2006.

As a result of modifications to the new computerized system, Bahá'ís found that only one of the three recognized religions can be entered. If the field is left blank, the computer refuses to issue the card. The Bahá'í community of Egypt has approached the government on numerous occasions to plead for a simple change in the programming, if not the law, so that they could be issued valid ID cards under the new system. Such pleas, however, have been met with rejection and refusal. Given the government's refusal to make what would be the simplest of programming changes, it can only be concluded that the ID card situation is in reality an attempt to further marginalize and eliminate the Bahá'í community of Egypt.

A number of Bahá'ís have had their old identification cards—on which the space for religion is either blank or correctly identifies them as Bahá'ís—confiscated by government officials. Individuals without proper ID face detention. Likewise, young people without ID cards are denied entrance and continuing enrolment in colleges and universities, as well as service in the armed forces.

At one point, government officials offered Bahá'ís the possibility of using passports in lieu of ID cards—a ploy that would set the Bahá'ís apart or even drive them from their homeland. There is concern, as well, that refusing to list Bahá'í in any kind of national identification database enables the government to officially proclaim that there are no Bahá'ís in the country.

On 4 April 2006, a lower administrative court ruled in favor of an Egyptian Bahá'í couple who sought not to have their religion falsely identified on government documents. Husam Izzat Musa and Ranya Enayat Rushdy had their identification cards and passports confiscated after they applied to have their daughters added to their passports, which listed the Bahá'í Faith as their religion. The court ruled that the government should issue identity cards and birth certificates that correctly stated their professed religion as members of the Bahá'í Faith. The ruling said that, even if the government did not recognize the Bahá'í Faith, adherents should still have their religious status properly stated on official documents. Elements of Egyptian society, particularly Al-Azhar University and the Muslim Brotherhood, raised an outcry in the wake of the decision, objecting to any kind of recognition of the Bahá'í Faith as a religious belief. The Egyptian government subsequently appealed the decision, taking it before the Supreme Administrative Court. The initial ruling and appeal attracted widespread media attention in Egypt and the Arab world.⁴

Excerpts from recent human rights reports

In spring 2005, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom reported how interlocutors visiting Egypt in 2004 cited “an increased tendency by Muslim clerics to view Bahá'ís as a heretical sect of Islam rather than an independent religious movement. When asked why in practice the right to freedom of religion of the Bahá'í community is not protected under the Egyptian constitution, government officials said that Islam recognizes only one Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Nevertheless, Egyptian officials claimed that Bahá'ís are free to practice their religion in private. Various Egyptian religious leaders and government officials made spurious claims to the Commission, without any evidence, that Bahá'ís have engaged in

political activity against the Egyptian government in the past and the community practices immoral acts, such as 'wife-swapping.' The absence of facts to support such authoritative denunciations apparently made no difference to the officials who made the slanderous statements."

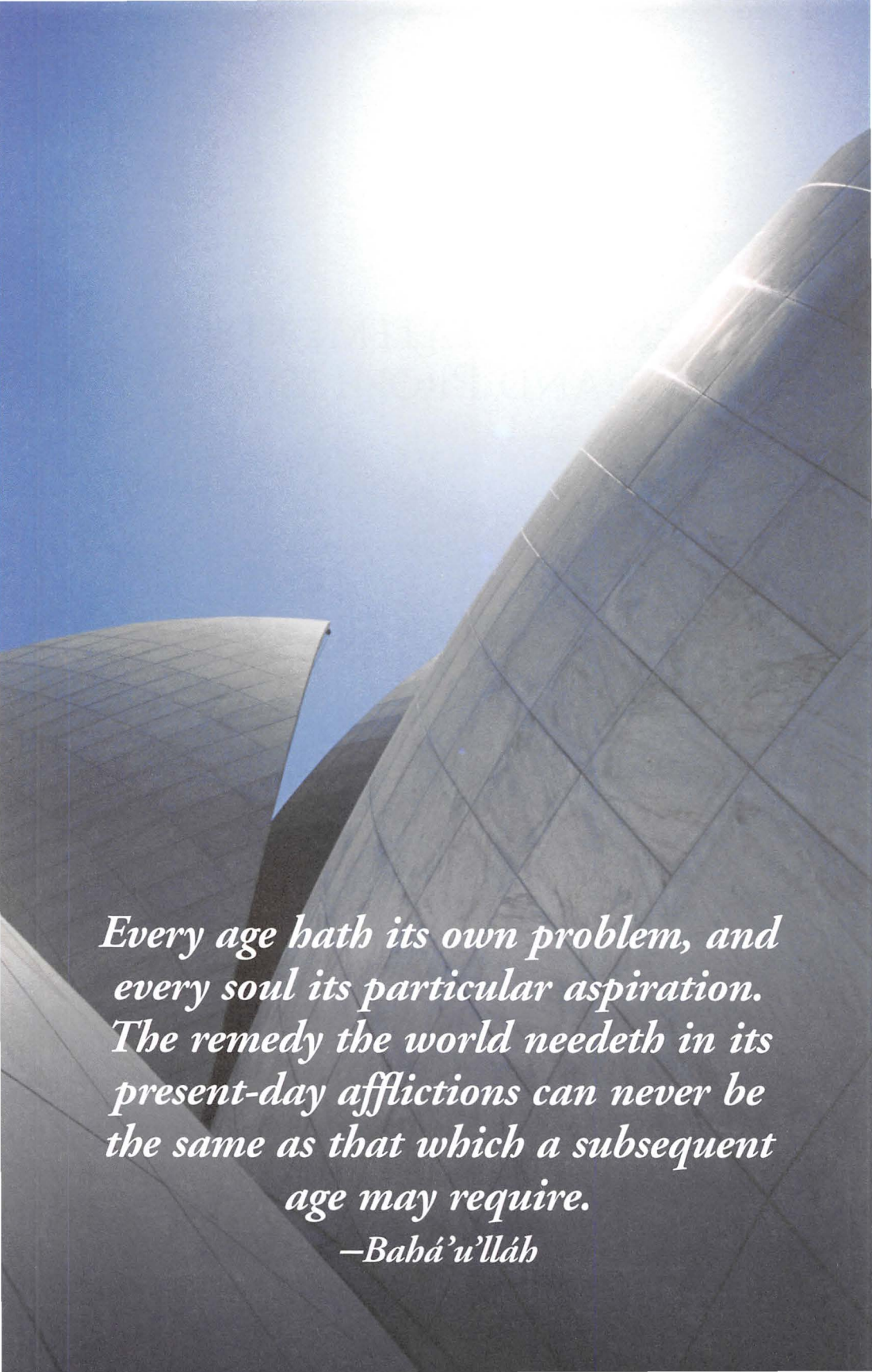
In her 2005 report, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, noted that, in Egypt, Bahá'ís were not allowed to indicate their religion on the birth certificates of their children. Moreover, she noted a *fatwa* issued by the Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy allegedly declared the Bahá'ís apostates. The Special Rapporteur encouraged the Egyptian government to take all necessary measures to ensure freedom of religion to all without discrimination.

The Bahá'í International Community hopes that international attention and diplomatic efforts can be mobilized to convince the Egyptian government to act in keeping with the various documents of international human rights law to which it is a party—and thereby to end the long history of unjust repression inflicted upon Egypt's Bahá'í community.

NOTES

- ¹ See Bahá'í International Community, *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran* (2005), pp. 16–21, for a more complete discussion of this document and its implications for the Bahá'ís in Iran, or visit <http://question.bahai.org/>.
- ² The full text of the 29 October letter from the chairman of the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces in Iran to a number of governmental agencies was released in July 2006. It states that the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces "has been given the mission to acquire a comprehensive and complete report of all the activities of these sects (including political, economic, social and cultural) for the purpose of identifying all the individuals of these misguided sects. Therefore we request that you convey to relevant authorities to, in a highly confidential manner, collect any and all information about the above-mentioned activities of these individuals and report it to this Command Headquarters."
- ³ For further information on the denial of education to the Bahá'ís in Iran, visit <http://denial.bahai.org/>.
- ⁴ Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court subsequently ruled against the right of Bahá'ís to be properly identified on government documents on 16 December 2006. For the latest developments, visit www.bahai.org/persecution/egypt.

ESSAYS, STATEMENTS,
AND PROFILES



*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.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

Western Liberal Democracy as New World Order?

In an age of increasing global interdependence, Dr. Michael Karlberg asks whether the Western model of democracy is the natural and inevitable way to organize free and enlightened societies.

The triumph of the Western social order was widely heralded in the closing decades of the twentieth century. "The end of ideology" was proclaimed and an age of global prosperity anticipated, driven by the twinned forces of global free-market capitalism and liberal democracy.¹ In the ensuing years, the vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with new tensions created by a perceived "clash of civilizations,"² has propelled advocates of free-market capitalism and Western liberal democracy to step up their efforts to export or impose these models around the world in former Communist states, Muslim nations, and elsewhere.

To date, the global free-market capitalism aspect of this project has been the subject of considerable critique in both the popular and academic press.³ It has also spawned a network of global justice organizations and activists who have become ever more visible and vocal through various strategies, including mass protests and Internet organizing. Concerns have been raised about the increasing global disparities of wealth and poverty, the absence of environmental and labor standards and enforcement mechanisms in the global marketplace, the devastating impacts of currency speculation and transnational capital flight, the rising and largely unregulated power

of multinational corporations, the undemocratic nature of global financial institutions and trade organizations, and a host of other issues.

Significantly, these critiques of the global free-market capitalism project have frequently come from authors and activists within the Western world itself. The same cannot be said, however, of the project to export liberal democracy. Throughout the West, it is still generally assumed that the Western democratic model is the natural and inevitable way to organize free and enlightened societies.

But there is an alternative perspective. Could it be said that Western liberal democracy—or what might more accurately be called *competitive democracy*—has become anachronistic, unjust, and unsustainable in an age of increasing global interdependence?⁴ “The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned,” wrote Bahá'u'lláh, “inasmuch as the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective.”⁵

Competitive democracy

Western liberal democracy, at its core, is based on the premise that democratic governance requires individuals and groups to compete for political power. The most recognizable form that this takes is the party system. Political competition also occurs without formal political parties in many local elections, and when independent candidates run in provincial (or state) and national elections. In all of these cases, however, the underlying competitive structure is the same, and it is this underlying structure that has become anachronistic, unjust, and unsustainable.

Granted, competitive democracy represents a significant and valuable historical accomplishment. It has proven a more just form of government than the aristocratic, authoritarian, or sacerdotal forms of governance it has generally replaced. It also represents a reasonable adaptation to the social and ecological conditions prevailing at the time of its emergence. But the theory and practice of political competition emerged in the earliest days of the West's industrial revolution, when human populations were still relatively small and isolated. It predates the invention of electricity, the internal combustion engine, air travel, broadcast media, computers, the Internet,

weapons of mass destruction, appetites of mass consumption, and global free-market capitalism. In the past three centuries, our success as a species has transformed the conditions of our existence in these and many other ways.

Competitive democracies, for reasons that will be discussed here, appear to be incapable of dealing with these new realities. Yet Western populations are, by and large, living in a state of denial regarding the anachronistic nature of competitive political systems. When concerns are raised about the condition of these systems, they tend to focus on surface expressions rather than underlying structural causes. For instance, in many Western countries it has become commonplace to bemoan the increased negativity of partisan political rhetoric. Political discourse, some commentators suggest, is suffering from a breakdown in civility and a rise of mean-spiritedness. As a result, politicians are mired in a gridlock and cannot address the complex issues that face them.⁶ Even many elected politicians have raised these concerns. In a collection of essays by retiring US senators at the close of the twentieth century, one was moved to "lament the increasing level of vituperation and partisanship that has permeated the atmosphere and debate in the Senate."⁷ One observed that "bipartisanship . . . has been abandoned for quick fixes, sound bites, and, most harmfully, the frequent demonization of those with whom we disagree."⁸ Another claimed that "there is much more partisanship than when I came to Washington two decades ago, and most of it serves the nation poorly."⁹ Yet another wrote that "our political process must be re-civilized" due to the "ever-increasing vicious polarization of the electorate, the us-against-them mentality" that "has all but swept aside the former preponderance of reasonable discussion."¹⁰

Statements such as these raise legitimate concerns about the state of partisan discourse, but they obscure the underlying problem of political competition. According to these views, political competition and political parties are the natural, normal, and inevitable way to organize democratic governance; the problem arises only when partisan rhetoric becomes too adversarial or mean-spirited. As the sociolinguist Deborah Tannen states, "A kind of agonistic inflation has set in whereby opposition has become more extreme, and the adversarial nature of the system is routinely being abused."¹¹

Tannen attributes this “more general atmosphere of contention,” or this “new mood” in partisan politics, to a wider combative culture that is corrupting the partisan system and socializing politicians into more conflictual patterns of interaction, resulting in gridlock, the spread of corruption, and the breakdown of unwritten rules of civility, cooperation, and compromise.¹²

The seeds of competitive democracy

The breakdown in civility, the rise of mean-spiritedness, the problem of gridlock, and the spread of political corruption—assuming these things have indeed deteriorated over time—are not abuses or corruptions of the partisan system. Such developments are the culmination—the “perfection”—of a system that political scientist Jane Mansbridge refers to as “adversary democracy.”¹³ They are the sour fruit inherent in the seeds of competitive democracy. “No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united,” wrote Bahá'u'lláh.¹⁴

These seeds, to be more precise, are the deepest assumptions about human nature and social order that underlie political competition. The first of these assumptions is that human nature is essentially selfish and competitive. The second assumption is that different groups of people will naturally develop different interests, needs, values, and desires, and these interests will invariably conflict. The third assumption is that, given a selfish human nature and the problem of conflicting interests, the fairest and most efficient way to govern a society is to harness these dynamics through an open process of interest-group competition.

Based on these assumptions, it should come as no surprise that the fruits of competitive democracy include the aforementioned breakdown in civility, rise of mean-spiritedness, problem of gridlock and spread of political corruption. These are to be expected if we accept, and enact, such assumptions. In fact, this is the reason why some competitive democracies have set up complex systems of checks and balances in an effort to limit the excessive accumulation of power in the hands of any given interest group. It is also why some competitive democracies have tried to cultivate, within their political systems, codes of civility and ethics intended to restrain the

basest expressions of political competition. And this is the reason that most competitive democracies struggle, to this day, to reign in the worst excesses of political competition by experimenting with term limits, campaign finance reforms, and other stopgap measures. Yet none of these efforts fundamentally changes the nature or the fruit of the system, because the fruit is inherent in the system's internal assumptions—its seeds.

To grasp this inherent relationship, consider the market metaphor that is often invoked as a model for political competition. Competitive democracy is generally conceived as a political marketplace within which political entrepreneurs and the parties they incorporate try to advance their interests through open competition.¹⁵ The “invisible hand” of the market allegedly works to direct this competition toward the maximum public benefit. As Lyon explains,

Supporters of party government argue that if one looks at the larger picture and sees the “political market” in which several parties, the media, interest groups, and individuals all interact, democratic needs are served in a kind of mysterious way . . . [as though] another “invisible hand” is at work.¹⁶

Within this market model, political parties incorporate around aggregated sets of interests in order to pool their political capital. Contests then determine leadership and control within and between parties—as politicians and parties organize to fight and win elections. The logic of competitive elections, however, ensures that the goal of winning trumps all other values. As Held explains,

Parties may aim to realize a programme of “ideal” political principles, but unless their activities are based on systematic strategies for achieving electoral success they will be doomed to insignificance. Accordingly, parties become transformed, above all else, into means for fighting and winning elections.¹⁷

Once political leadership and control is determined through electoral contests, processes of public decision making are structured in a similar manner. Decision making is organized as an oppositional process of debate. In theory, political debate functions as an open “marketplace of ideas” in which the best ideas prevail—again through the operation of some hypothetical invisible hand. In practice, the

logic of the competitive system transforms debate into a struggle over political capital. Victory results in a gain of political capital, defeat results in a loss. Debate thus becomes an extension of the electoral process itself, providing a stage for “permanent campaigns,” or neverending contests over political capital, in anticipation of the next round of elections.¹⁸

Much political decision making also occurs outside of formal public debates. Indeed, these debates often serve as little more than a dramatic veneer on complex behind-the-scenes processes of political bargaining and negotiation. Yet these behind-the-scenes processes tend to be characterized by similar competitive dynamics.¹⁹ These processes involve not only elected officials but also lobbyists, think tanks, media strategists, and numerous species of political action groups—all of which are vying with one another to pressure politicians, shape media coverage, and influence public opinion in ways that advance their own agendas and interests.

The fruit of competitive democracy

Interest-group competition has no necessary relationship to the goals of social justice and environmental sustainability. On the contrary, the track record of competitive democracy is clear. It is a record of growing disparities between rich and poor.²⁰ It is also a record of accelerating ecological destruction.²¹ Therefore, the problems of competitive democracy, a few of which are discussed here, go well beyond the breakdown of civility and the rise of mean-spiritedness.

THE CORRUPTING INFLUENCE OF MONEY

In theory, when there are excesses and deficiencies in the operation of the market economy, a democratic government should be able to regulate and remedy them. The practice of political competition, however, makes this virtually impossible. The reasons for this are not difficult to understand. Political competition is an expensive activity—and growing more expensive with every generation. Successful campaigns are waged by those who have the financial support, both direct and indirect, of the most affluent market actors (i.e. those who have profited the most from market excesses and deficiencies).

The problem of money in politics is widely recognized and it largely explains the cynicism and apathy reflected in low voter turnout at the polls. The underlying cause of this problem, however, is seldom examined and never seriously addressed. We hear occasional calls for campaign finance reform and similar regulatory measures. Yet the root of the problem is political competition itself. From the moment we structure elections as contests, which inevitably require money to win, we invert the proper relationship between government and the market. Rather than our market existing within the envelope of responsible government regulation, our government is held captive within the envelope of market regulation.

As long as governance is organized in a competitive manner, this relationship cannot be fully corrected. Any scheme to tweak the rules here and there will merely cause money to flow through new paths. This is what occurs, for instance, with attempts to reform campaign financing. New forms of contribution merely eclipse the old. Even if societies could eliminate campaign financing entirely, money would simply flow through other points of political influence such as the constantly evolving species of political action groups that exert strategic influences over media coverage of issues, public opinion formation, electoral outcomes, and many other political processes. In a competitive political system, where candidates are vying for favorable coverage, public opinion and votes, money will always flow to the most effective points of political influence just as water always flows to the point of lowest elevation. We can alter the path of that flow, but we cannot stop it.

This problem is a primary cause of the growing disparities of wealth and poverty that are now witnessed throughout the world, including within the Western world. The expanding income gap is not simply a result of the market economy itself. It is a result of the competitive political economy that is coupled with it. Through this political economy, the wealthiest market actors define the market framework within which they accumulate wealth. This framework comprises systems of property law, contract law, labor law, tax law, and all other forms of legislation, public infrastructure, and public subsidies that shape market outcomes. In competitive democracies, this framework is defined, over time, by the wealthiest market actors, owing to the influence of money on political competition. The result

is a political-economy feedback loop that serves the swelling interests of the wealthiest segments of society.

The subordination of governance to market forces also has implications for the environment. In unregulated markets, production and consumption decisions are based solely on the internal costs of manufacturing, which include labor, materials, manufacturing equipment, and energy. These internal costs determine the retail prices that consumers pay for products, which influences how much people consume. These costs do not, however, always reflect the true social or ecological costs of a product. Many industries generate external costs, or *externalities*, that are never factored into the price of a product because they are not actual production costs.²² For instance, industries that pollute the environment create substantial public health and environmental remediation costs that are seldom factored into the actual costs of production. Rather, these costs are borne by the entire society, by future generations, and even by other species. Because an unregulated market does not account for these external costs, the prices of products with high external costs are kept artificially low. These artificially low prices inflate consumption of the most socially and ecologically damaging products. For these reasons, market economies are ecologically unsustainable unless carefully regulated by governments that factor such costs back into the prices of goods through “green taxes” and other means.²³ As discussed above, however, markets are not responsibly regulated within a competitive political system because the system subordinates political decision making to market influences. Markets regulate competitive democracies rather than the other way around.

Finally, the social and environmental costs of political competition converge in the case of “environmental racism” and related environmental injustices.²⁴ The poor, ethnic minorities, and women tend to suffer the most from the effects of environmental deterioration because they are more likely to live or work in areas of increased environmental health risks and degradation. These segments of the population are least able to influence political decision making because of their economic disenfranchisement. As a result, environmental practices that are seldom tolerated in the backyards of more affluent groups are displaced onto groups that are politically and economically marginalized. These are the people who pay most of the costs of such environmental externalities.

PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSION AND ISSUE REDUCTION

In addition to the problem of money, political competition does not provide an effective way to understand and solve complex problems because it reduces the diversity of perspectives and voices in decision-making processes. There are a number of reasons for this. First, political competition yields an adversarial model of debate which generally defaults to the premise that if one perspective is right then another perspective must be wrong. In theory, the most enlightened or informed perspective prevails. This assumes that complex issues can be adequately understood from a single perspective. However, an adequate grasp of most complex issues requires consideration of multiple, often complementary, perspectives. Complex issues tend to be multifaceted—like many-sided objects that must be viewed from different angles in order to be fully seen and understood. Different perspectives therefore reveal different facets of complex issues. Maximum understanding emerges through the careful consideration of as many facets as possible.

Political competition militates against this process because it assumes the oppositional rather than the potentially complementary character of diverse views. One cannot gain political capital at the expense of one's opponent unless there is a winner and a loser. As a result, political competition reduces complex issues into binary oppositions in which only one perspective can prevail. This is what Blondel calls "the curse of oversimplification."²⁵

This problem is exacerbated by the hyper-commercialized media sectors that are emerging in most Western societies—products of the political economy discussed above. These are driven by the logic of manufacturing mass audiences in order to sell them to advertisers. The cheapest, and therefore most profitable, way to manufacture a mass audience is through the construction of spectacle—including partisan political spectacle. Political coverage is thus reduced to a formula of sound-bite politics in which emotionally charged sloganeering becomes the ticket into the public sphere. As a result, simplistic political mantras echo throughout the public sphere, distorting the complex nature of the issues at hand, constraining public perceptions, and aggravating partisan divisions. In such a climate, it is virtually impossible to solve complex, multidimensional social and environmental problems.

A closely related consequence of this competitive model is the exclusion and inhibition of diverse voices who avoid or withdraw from the arena of public service because of its simplistic and hostile atmosphere. Such an atmosphere does not attract individuals who, by nature or nurture or some combination of the two, are neither inclined toward, nor comfortable with, simplistic adversarial debate—even though they may have important contributions to offer. Partisan mudslinging aside, adversarial debate does not elicit the best reasoning even among the most confident individuals. Such conditions can entirely silence less confident and less aggressive—or simply more thoughtful and caring—individuals.

By extension, adversarial contests also tend to privilege males who, again by nature or nurture or some combination of the two, tend to be more aggressive than women and thus gain the advantage within an adversarial arena.²⁶ The resulting disadvantage experienced by many women may also be experienced by some minority groups which, in order to survive, have learned to adopt cautious and guarded postures in relation to dominant social groups. Moreover, women and minorities may be further disadvantaged because even though male or dominant-group expressions of aggression are often considered natural and appropriate, the same kinds of expressions, when employed by women or subordinated minorities, are often viewed as unnatural and inappropriate. Thus, the same rewards do not necessarily accrue to women and minorities for the same adversarial behaviors.²⁷ By inhibiting and excluding various social groups in these ways, political competition and adversarial debate tend to impoverish public discourse and undermine the resolution of complex problems.

THE TIME–SPACE PROBLEM

Partisan politics is also inherently incapable of addressing problems across time and space. Complex social and environmental issues generally require long-term planning and commitment. Competitive political systems, however, are inherently constrained by short-term planning horizons. In order to gain and maintain power, political entrepreneurs must cater to the immediate interests of their constituents so that visible results can be realized within relatively frequent election cycles. Even when long-term political commitments are made

out of principle by one candidate or party, continuity is often compromised by succeeding candidates or parties who dismantle or fail to enforce the programs of their predecessors in order to distance themselves from policies they were previously compelled to oppose on the campaign trail or as the voice of opposition. The focus of campaigns and political parties on constituencies-in-the-present therefore undermines commitment to the interests of future generations. Prominent among the interests of future generations is environmental sustainability. As we degrade our environment today, we impoverish future generations.

Many social problems, from poverty to crime to drug dependency to domestic abuse, also require long-term strategies and commitments. Sustained investments in education, the strengthening of families, the creation of economic opportunities, the cultivation of ethical codes and moral values, and other approaches that yield results across generations, are required. Yet the competitive pressure to demonstrate visible actions within frequent election cycles tends to lead instead toward investments in things like new prisons and detention centers to hide the growing social underclass in many countries, new mega-schools to warehouse increasingly alienated and anonymous children and youth, and new shopping malls to distract citizens with short-term material enticements.

Furthermore, just as competitive political systems are responsive to constituents-in-the-present to the exclusion of future generations, they are also responsive to the interests of constituents-within-electoral-boundaries to the exclusion of others. This is the problem of space—or territoriality—which is especially the case at the level of the nation state owing to the absence of an effective system of global governance. Again, this has significant social and ecological implications. The supranational nature of modern environmental issues—such as ozone depletion, global warming, acid rain, water pollution, and the management of migratory species—signals the need for unprecedented levels of global cooperation and coordination.²⁸ Competitive notions of national sovereignty, however, render the existing international system incapable of responding to these ecological imperatives. Today, cross-border coordination is sacrificed to the pursuit of national self-interests because political entrepreneurs have no choice but to cater to the interests of their own voting

citizens. The consequence is an anarchic system of nation states vying with one another in their rush to convert long-term ecological capital into short-term political capital.

The problem of territoriality is equally significant when it comes to social issues. Challenges such as poverty, crime, the exploitation of women and children, human trafficking, terrorism, ethnic conflict, illegal immigration, and refugee flows do not respect national boundaries any more than most ecological problems do. These problems cannot be solved by national governments alone. Yet political competition within nation states undermines effective commitment and coordination between them. Political competitors are responsive to the interests of voting constituents-within-electoral-boundaries to the exclusion of nonvoters outside of those boundaries. This creates an irresistible incentive for political competitors in wealthy nations to externalize the worst manifestations of these social problems on poorer nations. Consequently, in the long run all of these problems tend to fester and spread until they again threaten the interests of the wealthiest nations. Competitive politics is not about planning for the long term; it is about securing electoral victories in the short term. Hence, the problem of space is inseparable from the problem of time in competitive democracies.

THE SPIRITUAL PROBLEM

Other challenges associated with competitive politics are less tangible, but no less important. These are the spiritual costs of partisanship and political competition. Again, these problems stem directly from the assumptions that underlie the model: that human nature is essentially selfish and competitive; that different people tend to develop conflicting interests; and that the best way to organize democratic governance is therefore through a process of interest-group competition. By organizing human affairs according to these assumptions, we are institutionally cultivating our basest instincts. In the process, we become what we expect of ourselves. The Universal House of Justice has observed that “it is in the glorification of material pursuits, at once the progenitor and common feature of all such ideologies, that we find the roots which nourish the falsehood that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive. It is here that the ground must be cleared for the building of a new world fit for our descendants.”²⁹

These culturally formed expectations, however, have no solid basis in the social and behavioral sciences. In these fields, the emerging new consensus is that human beings have the developmental potential for both egoism and altruism, competition and cooperation—and which of these potentials is more fully realized is a function of our cultural environment.³⁰ This insight is also familiar to many of the world's philosophical and religious traditions. Metaphors that allude to humanity's "lower" and "higher" nature, or "material" and "spiritual" nature, convey this insight, as does the Eastern concept of "enlightenment." However, contrary to the theory and practice of political competition, the primary impulse behind these philosophical and religious traditions has been to cultivate these more cooperative and altruistic dimensions of human nature.

The uncivil nature of much partisan discourse, alluded to at the beginning of this essay, is an inevitable outgrowth of this inversion of material and spiritual priorities. When the pursuit of self-interest comes to be understood as a virtue, and selflessness is dismissed as naïve idealism, it is not surprising that politics becomes an uncivil arena. In this regard, the reality of partisan politics is better captured by war metaphors than by the market metaphors discussed earlier. A *campaign*, after all, is a military term, not a market term. Like military campaigns, political campaigns are expensive. Candidates amass "campaign war chests" as they prepare to "fight" election "battles." In an age of mass-media spectacle and sound-bite politics, this translates into an escalating cycle of negative advertising, insults, and mudslinging, as political campaigns and debates become a "war of words" conducted from "entrenched positions."

In the abstract, debate is about ideas rather than people. In practice, however, the competitive structure of the system erases the line between ideas and people, because if your ideas do not prevail, neither does your political career. Hence, political debate slides easily into the quagmire of egoism and incivility. On the sidelines, meanwhile, the public grows increasingly cynical and disaffected—yet another spiritual cost of this system.

Finally, competitive democracies exact high costs as they divide rather than unite susceptible segments of the public. Any process that routinely produces winners and losers within a population will be divisive. When governance is structured as a process of

interest-group competition, the pursuit of material interests becomes more important than the cultivation of mutualistic social relationships. Furthermore, the formation of political parties, which requires the arbitrary aggregation of distinct and widely varied interests, results in the artificial construction of oppositional identity camps that become increasingly entrenched—and reified—over time. Consider, for instance, the American two-party system with its “left vs. right” or “liberal vs. conservative” camps. In reality, American collective life is characterized by countless complex issues, each of which may be viewed from multiple perspectives. However, to construct a manageable political contest, the two dominant political parties reduce all possible issues to simple binary conflicts and then aggregate conflicting positions on every different issue into two opposing super-camps. Over time, this artificial aggregation has begun to appear natural to many people. Moreover, segments of the population that initially identified strongly with one or two salient positions in any given camp have begun to embrace other aggregated positions through simple association. The result is that diverse people, who do not naturally fall into simple oppositional camps, come over time to separate themselves into such camps—a process that can be accelerated by astute politicians who make emotionally charged “wedge issues” the centerpieces of their campaigns in an effort to create and enforce partisan loyalties. The social divisions that result are further spiritual costs of competitive democracy.

An alternative to political competition

Winston Churchill once stated that “democracy is the worst form of government—except for all the other forms that have been tried.”³¹ More accurately, this statement describes competitive democracy because this is the only form of democracy that has been tried, to date, as a model of state governance. In keeping with Churchill’s sentiment, apologists defend the prevailing system with the argument that it is the most rational alternative to political tyranny or anarchy. The problems inherent in the system of political competition are simply accepted as “necessary evils.” All systems of government are imperfect, the argument goes, and competitive democracy is the best we can do.

This argument is premised, however, on the faulty assumption that processes of social innovation have come to an end. According to this “end of history” thesis, the social experiments that have characterized so much of human history have finally played themselves out and Western liberal models have emerged as the only viable models of social organization.³² Yet this is an entirely unsupported thesis. Indeed, it would be more plausible to say that the history of humankind as a single, interdependent species, inhabiting a common homeland, is just beginning. Under conditions of increasing global interdependence, brought on by our reproductive and technological success as a species, we have barely begun to experiment with just and sustainable models of social organization.

Processes of social innovation have clearly not come to an end. The example of the international Bahá’í community suffices to illustrate this point. The Bahá’í community is a vast social laboratory within which a new model of social organization is emerging. With a current membership of over five million people, drawn from over 2,000 ethnic backgrounds and residing in virtually every nation on the planet, the community is a microcosm of the entire human race. This diverse community has constructed a unique system of democratically elected assemblies that govern Bahá’í affairs internationally, nationally, and locally in thousands of communities throughout the planet.³³ Significantly, in many parts of the world, the first exercises in democratic activity have occurred within these Bahá’í communities.

The Bahá’í electoral system is entirely nonpartisan and non-competitive. In brief, all adult community members are eligible for election and every member has the reciprocal duty to serve if elected. At the same time, nominations, campaigning, and all forms of solicitation are prohibited. Voters are guided only by their own conscience as they exercise real freedom of choice in voting for those they believe best embody the qualities of recognized ability, mature experience, and selfless service to others. Through a plurality count, the nine individuals who receive the most votes are called to serve as members of the governing assembly.³⁴

Because no one seeks election, elections are not a pathway to power and privilege. On the contrary, elections are a call to service and the elected sacrifice their time and energy, and often their

career aspirations, at the bidding of the community. As a matter of principle, and also because there is no incentive, no one calls attention to themselves or solicits votes in any way. In fact, Bahá'ís interpret solicitation of votes as an indicator of egoism and a lack of fitness to serve.

All decision making within these assemblies is, in turn, guided by consultative principles that enable decision making to be a unifying rather than a divisive process. These principles include striving to enter the process with no preconceived positions or platforms; regarding diversity as an asset, and soliciting the perspectives, concerns, and expertise of others; striving to transcend the limitations of one's own ego and perspective; striving to express oneself with care and moderation; striving to raise the context of decision making to the level of principle; and striving for consensus but settling for a majority when necessary.³⁵

Unlike competitive systems in which decision makers must continually negotiate the demands of constituents, campaign contributors, lobbyists, and activists, the Bahá'í system is shielded from external lobbying and other pressures to influence decisions. This is accomplished in two ways. First, as discussed above, those who are elected to assemblies do not seek election and they have no interest in re-election. Elected members are not political entrepreneurs seeking to build or retain political capital, and campaign financing opportunities do not exist because there are no campaigns. Second, elected members decide matters through the application of principle, according to the promptings of their own conscience (one of the primary qualities for which they were elected), and not according to the dictates or pressures of competing interest groups. In this regard, elected members are expected to weigh all of their decisions in a principled manner, even if this means forgoing immediate local or short-term benefits out of consideration for the welfare of distant peoples or future generations.³⁶

In all of these ways, the Bahá'í electoral system embodies neither a contest nor the pursuit of power. Since no one seeks election, there is no concept of "winning." At the same time, the electoral process remains eminently democratic. This model has been used for more than three-quarters of a century within the Bahá'í community, which, as it grows in capacity and prominence, is increasingly attracting the attention of outside observers.³⁷

Beyond the hegemony of political competition

As the example of the Bahá'í community illustrates, processes of social innovation have clearly not come to an end. Given the problems inherent in partisan systems, along with their rising social and ecological costs, why are democratic populations not actively searching for alternatives to political competition? To answer this question, some historical context is helpful. Current forms of competitive democracy arose from the thinking of emerging political classes at the dawn of the industrial revolution. These emerging political classes were trying to wrestle absolute power away from the aristocracy. Competitive democracy advanced the interests of these classes because it ended absolute rule while, at the same time, it continued to privilege those exercising wealth and power. This opened the arena of governance to merchants and lesser landowners and other people of means, while limiting the influence of the underclasses.

Although the transition to competitive democracy was marked by violent revolution and the threat of revolution in many countries, the force of ideas played a powerful role in fomenting these transitions, and an even more powerful role in buttressing and sustaining systems of political competition once they were established. This was possible because the same political classes who benefited most from the contest model were increasingly occupying positions of cultural leadership—as statesmen, writers, philosophers, educators, and so forth—through which, either consciously or unconsciously, they were able to cultivate and sustain assumptions regarding human nature and social organization that underlie the contest model.

The Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci described this form of cultural influence with remarkable insight in the first half of the twentieth century.³⁸ His concept of *hegemony* has since entered the lexicon of cultural theorists around the world and it provides a useful framework for understanding the emergence and perpetuation of these contest models. In brief, Gramsci borrowed the term *hegemony*, which traditionally referred to the geopolitical dominance of some states over others, and he reworked it to refer to the cultural dominance of some social classes over others. Gramsci pointed out that geopolitical hegemony, which is achieved and maintained largely by force, is an obvious focus of resistance by oppressed populations and is therefore relatively difficult to maintain over time. Cultural

hegemony, on the other hand, is achieved and maintained through the cultivation of “common sense” belief systems which are less visible and which therefore generate less resistance. In other words, if privileged social groups can naturalize the existing social order in the minds of subordinate groups, the latter will unconsciously consent to their own subordination.

An example of this can be seen in the traditional exclusion of women from many arenas of public life. This exclusion was reinforced by the cultivation of “common sense” notions regarding the “appropriate” role of women in society. Of course, not all women accepted these notions and many struggled against them. Yet, remarkably, many women did accept these notions, as demonstrated by women who organized in opposition to women’s suffrage movements on the “common sense” conviction (among others) that the moral purity of women would be compromised by their entrance into public life and that the entire social fabric would thereby be weakened.³⁹

The theory of cultural hegemony is also useful in explaining the widespread consent given to prevailing systems of competitive democracy. Consider again the assumptions that this system rests upon: that human nature is essentially selfish and competitive; that different people develop conflicting interests; and that the best way to organize democratic governance is through a process of interest-group competition. These cultivated “common sense” assumptions have become part of the popular worldview—even though they do not serve the interests of most people. These assumptions are cultivated in civics classes and political science courses within our educational systems; they are cultivated in our mass media systems; and they are cultivated through institutionalized forms of competitive behavior that structure activity in our political, legal, and economic systems. All of these systems, however, are cultural constructs that embody the values, interests, and beliefs of the privileged political classes which constructed them.

This is not to suggest a conscious conspiracy on the part of those who benefit from the existing social order. This order often appears natural and inevitable to those who benefit from it because people tend to have an unconscious affinity for ideas that promote their own interests.⁴⁰ When these people also happen to be from educated and affluent social groups who control the means of cultural production

(i.e. education, media, and other social institutions), it is quite natural that they end up cultivating, within the wider population, beliefs for which they themselves have a natural and unconscious affinity. Indeed, members of these influential social groups may be acting out of the most sincere motives while contributing to this process of cultivation, because they may have come to believe that the existing social order benefits everyone in the same way it benefits themselves. The result, whether intentional or not, is a powerful form of cultural hegemony.

How then does a population transcend the constraints of its culturally-structured consciousness? Furthermore, how can this occur in a manner that does not result in further conflict—which would only reinforce the assumptions about human nature and social order that underlie and buttress the prevailing system of political competition? The metaphor of a game can be helpful to answer these questions. Cultural institutions—like our system of competitive democracy—can be understood as “games” that operate according to specific sets of “rules.”⁴¹ The rules of competitive democracy ensure not only that there will be winners and losers, but that the most powerful players are most likely to win. When less powerful players agree to join in this game they are consenting to play by rules that tend to promote their own defeat. Adversarial strategies of social change are consistent with these competitive rules. They simultaneously legitimize the old game while they ensure that the most powerful players continue to prevail within it.⁴²

There is, however, another strategy. That strategy is to withdraw time and energy from the old game in order to construct a new one. The only thing perpetuating the old game is the fact that the majority of the people consent to the rules. If an alternative game becomes more attractive (i.e. it demonstrates increased social justice and environmental sustainability), then it will begin to draw increasing numbers of people to it (i.e. the majority of the people whose interests and values are not well served by the old game). If enough people stop playing by the old rules and start playing by new ones, the old game will come to an end not through protest and conflict, but through attrition.

This strategy is one of *construction*, *attraction*, and *attrition*. It is entirely nonadversarial and it reconciles the means of social change

with the ends of a peaceful, just, and sustainable social order. Social change does not require defeating oppressors or attacking those who profit most from the old rules. Rather, it requires that we recognize the hegemonic nature of the old game, withdraw our time and energy from it, and invest that time and energy in the construction of a new one.

Increasing numbers of people are beginning to intuitively recognize this. Nonpartisan electoral and decision-making models are beginning to emerge in many sectors, through constructive experiments with social change. Most of these experiments are still below the radar of many political observers because nongovernmental organizations, rather than states, have taken the lead in this regard. Yet these emerging models constitute important sociopolitical experiments.

Again, the example of the international Bahá'í community is instructive. Bahá'ís believe that partisan models of governance have become anachronistic and problematic in an age of increasing global interdependence. Yet Bahá'ís do not protest or attack existing partisan systems. On the contrary, Bahá'ís express loyalty and obedience to whatever governmental systems they live within and they may exercise their civic responsibilities to vote in those societies that afford the opportunity to do so. At the same time, Bahá'ís avoid active participation in partisan politics in order to focus their energy instead on the construction of an alternative system of governance which they offer as a model for others to study. Experiences such as these provide naturally occurring experiments that we would do well to monitor and learn from—if not participate in.

Conclusion

The prevailing system of competitive democracy is proving itself unjust and unsustainable in an age of increasing global interdependence. Yet this system is not repairable because its problems lie in its deepest internal assumptions. The corrupting influence of money, the exclusion of diverse perspectives, the inability to solve complex issues, the short-term planning horizons, the lack of cross-boundary coordination, the rise of incivility and mean-spiritedness, the aggravation of social divisions, the cultivation of public cynicism and disaffection,

and the generally corrosive effect on the human spirit—these are the culmination of this system, the sour fruit inherent in its seeds.

“How long will humanity persist in its waywardness?” asks Bahá’u’lláh. “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.”⁴³

Competitive democracy has now become a costly anachronism. How long will the populations who bear these costs continue to live in a state of denial? It is time to move on. History is just beginning.

NOTES

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- ⁴ This essay derives in part from the author’s previously published book, *Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2004). Permission has been granted, by the publisher, to extract and adapt sections of that book for the purpose of this essay.
- ⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2005), section CX.
- ⁶ Refer, for example, to Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture* (New York: Random House, 1998).
- ⁷ Norman Orstein, “Introduction,” in *Lessons and Legacies: Farewell Addresses from the Senate* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997), p. xi.
- ⁸ Howell Heflin, “Farewell Address,” in *Lessons and Legacies*, p. 79.
- ⁹ Paul Simon, “Farewell Address,” in *Lessons and Legacies*, p. 172.
- ¹⁰ James Exon, “Farewell Address,” in *Lessons and Legacies*, p. 57.
- ¹¹ Tannen, p. 96.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 96–100.

- ¹³ Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- ¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, section CXII.
- ¹⁵ Refer to discussions of this theme in Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1976) and Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).
- ¹⁶ Vaughan Lyon, "Green Politics: Parties, Elections, and Environmental Policy," *Canadian Environmental Policy: Ecosystems, Politics, and Process*, ed. Robert Boardman (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 129.
- ¹⁷ David Held, *Models of Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 170.
- ¹⁸ Sydney Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign* (Boston: Beacon, 1980).
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- ²⁵ Jean Blondel, *Political Parties: A Genuine Case for Discontent?* (London: Wildwood House, 1978), pp. 19–21.
- ²⁶ Janice Moulton, "A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka, eds., (Boston, MA: Kluwer Boston, 1983); Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).
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- ²⁹ The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985), p. 7.
- ³⁰ For a joint declaration of this consensus by an international assembly of social and behavioral scientists, refer to Seville "Statement on Violence, May 16, 1986," in *Medicine and War* 3 (1987). Refer also to discussions in Signe Howell and Roy Willis, "Introduction," in *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*, Signe Howell and Roy Willis, eds., (London: Routledge, 1989); Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *Origins: What New Discoveries Reveal About the Emergence of Our Species* (London: MacDonald & Jane's, 1977); Gary Becker, "Altruism, Egoism, and Genetic Fitness: Economics and Sociobiology," *Journal of Economic Literature* 14.3 (1976); Howard Margolis, *Selfishness, Altruism, and Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Stefano Zamagni, ed., *The Economics of Altruism* (Aldershot, England: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1995); Teresa Lunati, "On Altruism and Cooperation," in *Methodus* 4, (December 1992); Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Theodore Bergstrom and Oded Stark, "How Altruism Can Prevail in an Evolutionary Environment," in *American Economic Review, Papers, and Proceedings* 83.2 (1993); Steven Rose, R.C. Lewontin, and Leon Kamin, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1987); John Casti, "Cooperation: The Ghost in the Machinery of Evolution," in *Cooperation and Conflict in General Evolutionary Processes*, John Casti and Anders Karlqvist, eds., (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1994); Alfie Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature: Altruism and Empathy in Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).
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Climate Change and its Ethical Challenges

Dr. Arthur Lyon Dahl examines the science of climate change and the ethical and spiritual solutions required to combat global warming.

In recent decades, scientific and technological discoveries have rapidly accelerated the dissolution of the traditional obstacles that long separated the nations and peoples of the world. At the same time, with the erosion of cultural barriers, society is undergoing a spiritual transition. The impact of improved educational standards and information technologies is increasing global awareness, and the fundamental unity of the human race is becoming increasingly apparent.

Bahá'u'lláh clearly anticipated these changes and provided an ethical framework in which to address them, but this has largely been ignored until now. However, as climate change accelerates and its implications for the future of humanity become clearer, it may become a driving force for unity since a massive world undertaking is now necessary to mitigate further global warming and to adapt to the climate change that is already underway.

What, then, are the ethical concepts and spiritual principles that are now necessary to transform society in order to make solutions to global warming possible?

The science of climate change

For some time, science has predicted that the planet is vulnerable to global warming caused by rising levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Those that live in cold regions might feel that a little global warming would be desirable, but any significant change in our climate will result in losers as well as winners. The regions which may benefit often have few inhabitants while many heavily populated and highly developed areas will suffer. Some may become completely uninhabitable. Change on this scale will be extremely stressful and expensive.¹

The problem has its origins in the way life evolved on earth. The conditions necessary for life in the biosphere are the result of a complex set of delicately balanced systems which are still poorly understood. The atmospheric composition that permits life to exist was itself created in part by the action of the first living things. The earliest plants removed carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and added oxygen, making animal life possible. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, writing early in the twentieth century, referred to this interdependence of the vegetable and animal kingdoms: "Each of these two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other."² Dead plants, both the remains of marine plankton and terrestrial vegetation, were buried and their energy-containing carbon compounds fossilized to produce coal, oil, and gas, while their carbonate skeletons became layers of limestone, locking a significant part of the earth's carbon away in geological formations.

Carbon cycles through the biosphere, as plants take up carbon dioxide to make organic matter, while animals and decomposers oxidize organic compounds and return the carbon dioxide to the oceans and atmosphere. Today, the long-standing global balance between these processes has been upset by the extraction and combustion of fossil fuels—coal, oil, and gas—over the last 150 years, returning carbon to the atmosphere and oceans that has long been out of circulation.

The significance of this for the climate is that carbon dioxide, along with another carbon compound, methane, is among the most important greenhouse gases, trapping heat in the atmosphere in the

same way as the glass in a greenhouse lets in light but prevents heat from escaping.

The climate has changed in past geological epochs, with both ice ages and much warmer periods associated with rises and falls in plant cover and carbon dioxide levels. These changes over hundreds of millions of years were due, in part, to the earth's orientation with respect to the sun, and to the changing positions of the continents, which affect the way the linked ocean-atmosphere system redistributes heat around the world. With the present configuration of continents, a global "conveyor belt" of ocean currents sees cold, salty water flow along the bottom from the North Atlantic down to the Antarctic, looping through the Indian and Pacific Oceans and returning as a warm, shallow current to the North Atlantic, where the freezing of Arctic ice in winter turns it back to cold water. The sinking of this water draws up the warm current from the Caribbean known as the Gulf Stream, which maintains the relatively mild climate of northern Europe. Recent research has shown that these currents can alter quite quickly in correlation with abrupt changes between warm and cold climatic periods.

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution powered by fossil fuels, the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide has risen from 290 to 370 parts per million (ppm), and it could easily reach 550 ppm or more in mid-century. Every ton of fuel oil burned produces 2.9 tons of carbon dioxide (CO_2), while extracting the same energy from coal produces 3.8 tons of CO_2 . Deforestation and the loss of humus from degrading soils also release significant quantities of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, representing one-third of the increase.

While the rising levels of greenhouse gases will trap more heat and change the air circulation patterns and climate, the effects will be highly variable around the world and are not easy to predict. Using various computer models of the global climate system, more than a thousand scientists contributing to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have confirmed a significant human effect on the climate through global warming, and more is expected. While powerful political and economic interests have questioned the reality of any link between fossil fuel consumption and climate change, none of their arguments has withstood closer scientific scrutiny.

The evidence for accelerating global warming is accumulating rapidly. The global average surface temperature has risen markedly since the late 1970s. Nine of the ten warmest years on record have occurred since 1995. The models project an even faster rise in global temperature over the next century as greenhouse gas emissions continue. The greatest temperature changes are expected in polar areas. A rise of more than 2°C in the mean global temperature could trigger positive feedbacks that would make major climate change irreversible, and we could reach that point by 2035 if we continue business as usual, with a rise of up to 5°C possible by the end of the century. This is change at a speed and scale for which there is no planetary precedent.

The effects are already apparent. Many species in temperate areas are shifting their distributions, with cold-adapted forms retreating toward the poles, to be replaced by species from warmer climates. Similar shifts in altitude are occurring among mountain species. Arctic species, like polar bears, that are dependent on the ice are in great difficulty. Coral reefs around the world have bleached and died from unusually high water temperatures. The number of the most intense cyclones (hurricanes) has increased in all oceans over the last 30 years, driven by greater heat energy in tropical ocean waters.

Climate change on the predicted scale will profoundly affect the environment and human activity in many fundamental ways. Food insecurity will increase and many regions will experience water shortages as rainfall patterns shift and mountain glaciers disappear. Rich countries can probably afford to adapt their agriculture with changed crop varieties and new technology, but all scenarios show a severe decline in food production in developing countries. The greatest human impact of climate change will be on the poor, who are especially vulnerable to the predicted increase in extreme weather events such as floods, cyclones, and droughts—the latter particularly pertaining to Africa. Ocean fisheries will also be affected. Already, fish stocks in the North Sea are shifting to other areas. As populations are displaced there will be increasing flows of environmental refugees, possibly reaching tens or hundreds of millions, and the related social disintegration could lead to increasing anarchy and terrorism. Natural, economic, and social disasters will become more common and more severe.

Ecological systems and species will be severely impacted, greatly accelerating the loss of biodiversity. American scientists have calculated that climate change would cause conditions appropriate for the beech forests of the southeastern United States to move to north-eastern Canada. Thus, whole ecosystems will shift over long distances if they can move fast enough. In the past, such changes happened more gradually. Birds can fly, but trees cannot get up and move to find a better temperature, and human transformations have blocked migration paths. We may have to replant the forests ourselves.

One effect of global warming is a rise in sea level, due both to the thermal expansion of water and to the melting of glaciers and ice caps. Sea level rise will flood low-lying areas and islands, including many port cities, creating millions of refugees. The projections for Bangladesh show that a 1.5 meter rise will displace 17 million people from 16 percent of the country's area. If the Greenland ice sheet is destabilized—which now appears to be likely—it will raise the sea level by more than six meters. Already, some low-lying islands and coastal areas are being abandoned.

The costs of mitigation and adaptation will be enormous, but the cost of doing nothing is already very high and could rise astronomically. The insurance industry estimated a few years ago that the economic impact of natural disasters linked to global warming would reach an annual cost of US\$130 billion within 10 years, but hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the USA in 2005 alone caused damage reaching US\$204 billion. A recent report commissioned by the UK government estimated the annual cost of climate change if no action is taken at over US\$600 billion, or the equivalent of both World Wars and the Great Depression, while mitigating action would only amount to 1 percent of global GDP.³ Immediate action will be very cost effective, and any delay will raise the cost significantly.

The latest scientific evidence suggests that the worst predictions about climate change may be realized. The Gulf Stream has recently slowed by 30 percent. If the Gulf Stream stops, the temperature could decrease by seven degrees in northern Europe, limiting agriculture and raising energy consumption. Half of the permafrost in the Arctic is expected to melt by 2050 and 90 percent before 2100, releasing methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Major parts of the Arctic Ocean were ice-free in the summer of 2005 after 14 percent of the permanent

sea ice was lost in one year, and oil companies are already planning for the drilling they can do in an ice-free polar sea in the future. Greenland glaciers have doubled their rate of flow in the last three years. The rate of sea level rise had already doubled over the last 150 years to 2 mm per year, and melting of the West Antarctic ice sheet is now adding another 4 mm per year and Greenland 0.6 mm per year. We may be approaching a tipping point within a decade where runaway climate change would be catastrophic.

The energy challenge

Global warming is driven by the human race's exploitation of low-cost fossil energy. Industrial economies were built on cheap energy, mostly derived from fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas. The consumer lifestyle—involving transportation, communications, trade, agriculture, heating, and cooling—has increased the demand on shrinking energy sources. The energy challenge needs to be addressed urgently. But, given the enormous investment in the present infrastructure, adaptation will be extremely expensive—an estimated US\$7 trillion.

Some governments have decided to control greenhouse gases. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, signed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, established the framework for international action. The Kyoto Protocol on reduction of greenhouse gases set a first target to return emissions to 1990 levels by 2012, a limited reduction of 5 percent when at least 60–80 percent is necessary. However, CO₂ emissions rose 4.5 percent in 2004 to 27.5 billion tonnes, 26 percent higher than 1990. China and India have doubled CO₂ production since 1990, while the US has increased by 20 percent and Australia by 40 percent. The US released 5.8, China 4.5, Europe 3.3, and India 1.1 billion tons of CO₂ in 2004. Despite its good intentions, humanity is rapidly going in the wrong direction.

Fossil energy consumption is still growing. World oil use is rising at 1.1 percent per year, with Latin America increasing 2.8 percent, India 5.4 percent, and China 7.5 percent. From 2001–2020, world oil consumption is expected to rise 56 percent, with OPEC production doubling; non-OPEC production has already peaked. Oil provides 40 percent of the world's primary energy. Two-thirds of future energy demand will come from developing countries, where 1.6 billion

people have no electricity. Energy demand and global warming are on a collision course.

The end of the fossil fuel era is coming anyway. At present consumption rates, reserves of oil are estimated to last about 40 years, gas 67 years, and coal 164 years. Geologists estimate the recoverable oil reserve at 2,000 Bb (billion barrels). Past production over the last 100 years has already consumed 980 Bb, while the known reserves total 827 Bb and another 153 Bb have yet to be found, so almost half the expected reserve has already been consumed. Production peaks and starts to decline at half of the recoverable resource, because we use the most accessible oil first, and it becomes harder and harder to get the remainder. We could reach peak production within the next decade, after which production will fall at about 2.7 percent per year, dropping 75 percent in 30 years. The heavy oil/tar reserves in Canada and Venezuela (600 Bb) equal only 22 years of current consumption. Even without global warming, energy sources and consumption patterns must soon be changed.

Coal also has a significant impact on global warming. The major coal producing and consuming countries (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and the United States) formed the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate in July 2005. Together they have 45 percent of the world's population; they consume 45 percent of world energy and produce 52 percent of the CO₂, with both expected to double by 2025. They have agreed to develop and share clean and more efficient technologies, especially for carbon sequestration, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to provide secure energy supplies. However, these goals may appear contradictory when China is planning to build 560 new coal-fired power plants and India 213, although India's coal reserves are expected to be exhausted in 40 years. Today, one-quarter of global CO₂ emissions come from coal-fired power stations.

Some hopes have been placed on nuclear power but, at least with present technologies, it is not a long-term option. Uranium reserves are expected to be exhausted in about 40 years. Economically and ethically, the technology is also doubtful. The research costs and development of nuclear technology have been highly subsidized, particularly for military uses. There is a high energy input in nuclear plant construction and fuel fabrication, so it is not entirely carbon free. The risks of accidents are so high as to be

uninsurable. Decommissioning costs of old plants are not usually included in cost comparisons; decommissioning the Three Mile Island plant in the USA after a minor accident was estimated to cost US\$3–4 billion. The UK was unable to privatize its nuclear power industry, suggesting it is uneconomic without heavy government subsidies. No country has yet completed a safe long-term disposal site for high-level nuclear wastes, which must be secure for at least 10,000 years, so the high continuing waste disposal costs are being imposed on future generations, which is unethical. While research continues, generating electricity from nuclear fusion is still “40 years” away, as it has been for many years.

Our globalized world has become overly dependent on fossil fuels for road transport, shipping, aviation, tourism, and therefore global trade. The energy and raw materials for industrial production, including chemical feed-stocks, plastics, and synthetics, come largely from oil, gas, and coal. Most electricity generation for lighting, heating, and cooling is similarly dependent, as are modern cities and the suburban lifestyle. Fossil energy is behind our mechanized agriculture, fertilizers, and pesticides, and the whole system of food processing and distribution. What happens when these become much more expensive? The business community is so concerned that the Carbon Disclosure Project, representing more than half the world's invested assets, has invited 2,100 companies to disclose their greenhouse gas emissions.

More worrisome, the world's population has increased sixfold, exactly in parallel with oil production. Can we maintain such a high world population without the subsidy represented by cheap fossil energy? What will happen if we cannot?

There is also the question that energy planners never ask: even if we could exploit every fossil fuel reserve, can we really afford to cause so much global warming? Burning all extractable fossil fuels would raise CO₂ in the atmosphere to well over 750 ppm. The ethical challenges of this situation are profound. On the one hand, the selfish desire of a minority of the world population to maintain a materially excessive civilization despite the enormous damage it is causing and the threat this represents for future generations is contrary to basic principles of justice and equity. The poor have every right to demand the same standard of living as the rich, but the planet cannot

support present consumption, not to mention any increase. On the other hand, a reduction in fossil fuel availability and use causing food production and distribution to collapse or become unaffordable, pushing many to starvation, is equally unthinkable.

Energy is so fundamental to human welfare and civilization that we clearly cannot do without it, but there could be much more moderation and efficiency in its utilization. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote in 1936 that the world federal system anticipated in the Bahá'í teachings will, "consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations. . . . The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized." This system will exploit "all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet."⁴ It will clearly be an aim of such a civilization to develop forms of renewable energy, in environmentally appropriate ways. These energy sources are mostly low density and widely distributed, which would suggest that future communities will be smaller and more widespread, unlike the urban concentrations of today. Given the moral unacceptability of the alternatives, the only responsible approach to the energy challenge is to replace fossil fuels with alternative renewable energy sources as rapidly as is humanly possible. The United Kingdom's Meteorological Office has said that "the biggest obstacles to the take-up of technologies such as renewable sources of energy and 'clean coal' lie in vested interests, cultural barriers to change and simple lack of awareness."⁵

With the present size of the global population, the consequences of going back to the world as it was before fossil fuels are unacceptable. The urgent challenge is to rethink civilization in a new and more sustainable way, and to begin the transition as rapidly as possible. This is where the principles of the Bahá'í Faith can suggest some ways forward.

The ethical implications of climate change

The world's present institutions have failed to address adequately the threat of climate change. No politician has been willing to sacrifice the short-term economic welfare of his or her country, even while

agreeing that sustainability is essential in the long term. Furthermore, the deep social, economic, and political divisions within societies and between countries prevent united action in the common interest. Global warming is just one symptom of the fundamental imbalances in our world and of the failure of our systems of governance to resolve the most critical challenges of our age.

We must recognize the failure of our present economic system to address global long-term issues like global warming. Economic thinking is challenged by the environmental crisis—including global warming. The belief that there is no limit to nature's capacity to fulfill any demand made on it is demonstrably false. A culture which attaches absolute value to expansion, to acquisition, and to the satisfaction of people's wants must recognize that such goals are not, by themselves, realistic guides to policy. Economic decision-making tools cannot deal with the fact that most of the major challenges are global.⁶

Climate change is a consequence of the present self-centered materialism of our economic paradigm. The materialistic view became the dominant interpretation of reality in the early twentieth century. Through rational experimentation and discourse, humanity thought it had solved all issues related to human governance and development. Dogmatic materialism captured all significant centers of power and information at the global level, ensuring that no competing voices could challenge projects of worldwide economic exploitation. Yet not even the most idealistic motives can correct materialism's fundamental flaws. Since World War II, development has been our largest collective undertaking, with a humanitarian motivation matched by enormous material and technological investment. While it has brought impressive benefits, it has nevertheless failed to narrow the gap between the small segment of modern society and the vast populations of the poor. The gap has widened into an abyss.

Consumerism drives much of the emission of greenhouse gases. Materialism's gospel of human betterment has produced today's consumer culture in pursuit of ephemeral goals. For the small minority of people who can afford them, the benefits it offers are immediate, and the rationale unapologetic. The breakdown of traditional morality has led to the triumph of animal impulse, as

instinctive and blind as appetite. Selfishness has become a prized commercial resource; falsehood reinvents itself as public information; greed, lust, indolence, pride—even violence—acquire not merely broad acceptance but social and economic value. Yet material comforts and acquisitions have been drained of meaning. In the US, the indicators of human welfare and satisfaction have been diminishing since the 1960s. The economy may be richer, but people are not happier. This self-centered, hedonistic culture of the rich, now spreading around the world, refuses to acknowledge its primary responsibility for global warming. The challenge, then, is fundamentally a spiritual one, necessitating a change in the understanding of humanity's nature and purpose.

What role can religion play in the challenges of today, including global warming? We used to be relatively content living within the limited perspective of our own communities, but now we can closely observe developments all around the world. We know about the extreme differences and injustices and we can no longer tolerate them. This progressive globalizing of human experience increases the stresses of modern life. There is a loss of faith in the certainties of materialism as its negative impacts become apparent. At the same time, there is a lack of faith in traditional religion and a failure to find guidance within it for living with modernity. Yet, it would appear that it is an inherent characteristic of the human experience to understand the purpose of existence. This has led to an unexpected resurgence of religion, built upon a groundswell of anxiety and discontent with spiritual emptiness. People lacking in hope are readily attracted to radical, intolerant, fanatical movements. As a result, the world is in the grip of irreconcilable religious antipathies, a situation which paralyzes our ability to address global challenges, including climate change.

Humanity can choose to conduct "business as usual" in its materialistic way, ignoring the future. The consequences, however, will soon catch up with us. We can retreat into a fortress of old values, but the pressures of globalization will make this untenable. The alternative is to make the effort to transition towards a unified world civilization based on equity and sustainability, drawing on the complementary strengths of both science and religion. This is

the approach that the Bahá'í Faith has championed for more than a hundred years.

Unity is the essential prerequisite for action to remove the barriers to collaboration on global warming. In its 1995 statement, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, the Bahá'í International Community, United Nations, observed,

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. Deceptively simple in popular discourse, the concept that humanity constitutes a single people presents fundamental challenges to the way that most of the institutions of contemporary society carry out their functions. Whether in the form of the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, a glorification of the struggle between classes and other social groups, or the competitive spirit dominating so much of modern life, conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction. It represents yet another expression in social organization of the materialistic interpretation of life that has progressively consolidated itself over the past two centuries. . . . Only so fundamental a reorientation can protect them, too, from the age-old demons of ethnic and religious strife. Only through the dawning consciousness that they constitute a single people will the inhabitants of the planet be enabled to turn away from the patterns of conflict that have dominated social organization in the past and begin to learn the ways of collaboration and conciliation. "The well-being of mankind," Bahá'u'lláh writes, "its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."⁷

Only by agreeing that we are a single human race and live on one planet can we create the ethical and moral basis for addressing a challenge such as climate change.

Some governments have already agreed to this. They promote the concept of sustainable development as one that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.⁸ The nations of the world have

repeatedly accepted this as a goal and priority. This is precisely the challenge of climate change. With high fossil energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, we are precipitating damage to our planetary system that will compromise future generations. Governments have agreed they have to act but, faced with a paralysis of will, they do not.

Expressed by the Bahá'í International Community, sustainability is fundamentally an ethical concept. We, the human race, are trustees, or stewards, of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity. We must learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, both renewable and nonrenewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability and equity into the distant reaches of time. This requires full consideration of the potential environmental consequences of all development activities. We must temper our actions with moderation and humility, and recognize that the true value of nature cannot be expressed in economic terms. This requires a deep understanding of the natural world and its role in humanity's collective development, both material and spiritual. Sustainable environmental management is not a discretionary commitment we can weigh against other competing interests. It is a fundamental responsibility that must be shouldered, a prerequisite for spiritual development as well as for our physical survival.⁹

Sustainability requires the rethinking of economics. The present economic system is unsustainable and not meeting human needs or able to respond adequately to global warming. Fifty years of economic development, despite some progress, has failed to meet its objectives. The global economic system lacks the supranational governance necessary to address such global issues. It is not the mechanisms of economics that are at fault, but its values. Economics has ignored the broader context of humanity's social and spiritual existence, resulting in corrosive materialism in the world's more economically advantaged regions (driving global warming), and persistent conditions of deprivation among the masses of the world's peoples. Economics should serve people's needs; societies should not be expected to reformulate themselves to fit economic models. The ultimate function of economic systems should be to equip the peoples and institutions of the world with the means to achieve the

real purpose of development: that is, the cultivation of the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness.

What values do we need for an economic system able to accept responsibility for and address global warming? The goal of wealth creation should be to make *everyone* wealthy. Society needs new, value-based economic models that aim to create a dynamic, just, and thriving social order which should be strongly altruistic and cooperative in nature. It should provide meaningful employment and help to eradicate poverty in the world.

All religions teach the “Golden Rule,” namely, to do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Should a minority of high energy consumers have the right to cause such damage to others and to future generations? Many faith-based organizations are drawing increasing attention to the ethical implications of excessive consumerism and one of its impacts, climate change.

Justice and equity will be essential to achieve unity of action at the global level. It is unjust 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. 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. The same is true of action to reduce global warming.

Solidarity is another essential value in times of rapid change, when many will become victims of climate perturbations and natural disasters. The poor are the most vulnerable to climate change and the least able to protect themselves. We should consider every human being as a trust of the whole, and recognize that both governments and individuals share this responsibility. Voluntary giving is more meaningful and effective than forced redistribution.

Trustworthiness will also become increasingly important. Trust is the basis for all economic and social interaction. Public opinion surveys show little trust in politicians and business, key actors in this area. The repeated failure of governments to respect the commitments that they have made has not helped. Re-establishing trust will have to be part of the solution to global warming, a solution in which everyone will have to make sacrifices.

Conclusion

Since our extreme energy demands are the driving force for global warming, the human race now has to learn to moderate material civilization. Bahá'u'lláh wrote more than a century ago: "The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. . . . The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities."¹⁰ Global warming is a perfect illustration of this. To moderate our lifestyles, we need to cultivate human contentment. All faiths have taught the spiritual value of a simple life and detachment from material things: "Be content with little, and be freed from all inordinate desire."¹¹ This simple principle has fundamental implications for the consumer society and its energy consumption.

From a Bahá'í perspective, a motivating impulse for the human race must be the carrying forward of an ever-advancing civilization, based on unity in diversity—a unity that acknowledges the fundamental spiritual reality inherent in humanity. It should aim for a better balance of material and spiritual development, measuring progress not with economic measures—such as GDP—but through its capacity to develop, utilize and sustain all available human potential. Its sustainable environmental management, including stabilization of the climate, must ensure the welfare of the biosphere and its inhabitants into the distant reaches of time.

Recent scientific evidence of accelerating climate change, together with our growing understanding of its implications for human society, are creating pressures with the potential to force a significant transformation in the way governments collaborate. Faced with a common threat resulting from our own behavior, the human race must close ranks and work to combat it. The Bahá'í teachings call for a world federal system with the necessary institutions to regulate the life, satisfy the needs, and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. This would be a logical expression of the principles of cooperation and reciprocity which are essential properties of all natural and human systems. It would be a natural consequence of increasing globalization in all aspects of human affairs, not only providing the means to find solutions to global warming, but helping us to solve other major threats to our well-being and survival.

Climate change is also an issue on which all religions can find common ground. Each of them shares a common commitment to justice, solidarity, altruism, respect, trust, moderation, and service. Religion can strengthen the ethical framework for action on climate change. It can educate about values and global responsibility. It can create motivation for change, and encourage the necessary sacrifices to enact changes. Global warming and the resulting climate changes challenge our generation in fundamental ways. Science alone cannot solve the problem.

NOTES

- ¹ For a comprehensive resource on climate change and other environmental topics, the author recommends the World Resources Institute Web site at <http://www.wri.org/climate/>. Further information can be found at the Web site of the International Environment Forum, a Bahá'í-inspired organization addressing the environment and sustainable development, <http://www.bcca.org/ief/>.
- ² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from Persian, quoted in a memorandum on "Gaia and Nature," to the Universal House of Justice from its Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre, 8 June 1992.
- ³ Nicholas Stern, "The Economics of Climate Change," http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_report.cfm (2006).
- ⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), pp. 203–4.
- ⁵ See UK Meteorological Office, *Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change* (2005). Quoted in UNEP Finance Initiative Bulletin 47, (February 2006), <http://www.unepfi.org/ebulletin>.
- ⁶ See Bahá'í International Community, Office of Public Information, *The Prosperity of Humankind* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1995).
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.
- ⁸ See World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission), *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- ⁹ Bahá'í International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development: A Concept Paper Written for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue* (Lambeth Palace, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 18–19 February 1998).
- ¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), section CLXII.
- ¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003), pp. 178–79.

World Watch

As processes of change in the world accelerate, Matthew Weinberg asks what future “identity” has in defining individuals, groups, and communities in an increasingly global civilization.

At the heart of human experience lies an essential yearning for self-definition and self-understanding. Developing a conception of who we are, for what purpose we exist, and how we should live our lives is a basic impulse of human consciousness. This project—of defining the self and its place in the social order—expresses both a desire for meaning and an aspiration for belonging. It is a quest informed by ever-evolving and interacting narratives of identity.

Today, as the sheer intensity and velocity of change challenges our assumptions about the nature and structure of social reality, a set of vital questions confront us. These include: What is the source of our identity? Where should our attachments and loyalties lie? If our identity or identities so impel us, how—and with whom—should we come together? And what is the nature of the bonds that bring us together?

The organization and direction of human affairs are inextricably connected to the future evolution of our identity. For it is from our identity that intention, action, and social development flow. Identity determines how we see ourselves and conceive our position in the world, how others see or classify us, and how we choose to

engage with those around us. “Knowing who we are,” the sociologist Philip Selznick observes, “helps us to appreciate the reach as well as the limits of our attachments.”¹ Such attachments play a vital role in shaping our “authentic selves” and in determining our attitudes toward those within and outside the circle of our social relationships. Acting on the commitments implied by these attachments serves to amplify the powers of individuals in effecting societal well-being and advancement. Notions of personal and collective identity can thus exert considerable influence over the norms and practices of a rapidly integrating global community.

As we have many associational linkages, identity comes in a variety of forms. At times, we identify ourselves by our family, ethnicity, nationality, religion, mother tongue, race, gender, class, culture, or profession. At other times, our locale, the enterprises and institutions we work for, our loyalty to sports teams, affinity for certain types of music and cuisine, attachment to particular causes, and educational affiliations provide definitional aspects to who we are. The sources of identification which animate and ground human beings are immensely diverse. In short, there are multiple demands of loyalty placed upon us, and consequently, our identities, as Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has noted, are “inescapably plural.”²

But which identity or identities are most important? Can divergent identities be reconciled? And do these identities enhance or limit our understanding of, and engagement with, the world? Each of us on a daily basis, both consciously and unconsciously, draws upon, expresses, and mediates between our multiple senses of identity. And as our sphere of social interaction expands, we tend to subsume portions of how we define ourselves and seek to integrate into a wider domain of human experience. This often requires us to scrutinize and even resist particular interpretations of allegiance that may have a claim on us. We therefore tend to prioritize which identities matter most to us. As the theorist Iris Marion Young stresses, “Individuals are agents: we constitute our own identities, and each person’s identity is unique . . . A person’s identity is not some sum of her gender, racial, class, and national affinities. She is only her identity, which she herself has made by the way that she deals with and acts in relation to others.”³ The matrix of our associations surely influences how we understand and interpret the world, but cannot fully account for how we think, act, or what values we hold.

That a particular identity represents a wellspring of meaning to an individual need not diminish the significance of other attachments or eclipse our moral intuition or use of reason. Affirming affinity with a specific group as a component of one's personal identity should not limit how one views one's place in society or the possibilities of how one might live.

While it is undoubtedly simplistic to reduce human identity to specific contextual categories such as nationality or culture, such categories do provide a strong narrative contribution to an individual's sense of being. "Around the world," the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, "it matters to people that they can tell a story of their lives that meshes with larger narratives. This may involve rites of passage into womanhood and manhood; or a sense of national identity that fits into a larger saga. Such collective identification can also confer significance upon very individual achievements."⁴ Social, cultural, and other narratives directly impact who we are. They provide context and structure for our lives, allowing us to link what we wish to become to a wider human inheritance, thereby providing a basis for meaningful collective life. Various narratives of identity serve as vehicles of unity, bringing coherence and direction to the disparate experiences of individuals.

In the wake of extraordinary advances in human knowledge, which have deepened global interchange and contracted the planet, we now find ourselves defined by overlapping identities that encompass a complex array of social forces, relations, and networks. The same person, for instance, can be a Canadian citizen of African origin who descends from two major tribes, fluent in several languages, an engineer, an admirer of Italian opera, an alumnus of a major American university, a race-car enthusiast, a practitioner of yoga, an aficionado of oriental cuisine, a proponent of a conservative political philosophy, and an adherent of agnosticism who nevertheless draws on insights found in the spiritual traditions of his forebears. One can simultaneously be a committed participant in local community affairs such as improving elementary-level education and an ardent supporter of transnational causes like human rights and environmental stewardship. Such juxtapositions of identity illustrate how individuals increasingly belong to multiple "communities of fate" in which long-existing spatial boundaries are being entirely redrawn and reconceptualized.⁵ Modernity has transformed identity in such

a way that we must view ourselves as being not only in a condition of dependence or independence but also interdependence.

The recasting of long-standing narratives of identification and affiliation is giving rise to widespread anxiety, grievance, and perplexity. In the eyes of many, the circumstances of daily life lie beyond their control. In particular, “the nation-state . . . that preeminent validator of social identity—no longer assures well-being,” the anthropologist Charles Carnegie avers.⁶ Other established sources of social cohesion and expressions of collective intention are similarly diminished in their efficacy to ground the actions of populations around the planet, resulting in a sense of disconnection and alienation. The philosopher Charles Taylor attributes such disruption of customary social patterns to the “massive subjective turn of modern culture,” involving an overly atomistic and instrumental view of individual identity.⁷ This exaggerated individualism accompanies the dislocation from historic centers of collectivity that is a repercussion of the centrifugal stresses of globalization. Against this kaleidoscope of change, including the major migrations of peoples, the international nature of economic production, and the formation of communities of participation across territorial borders through the means of modern communications, the concept of citizenship, as membership in a confined geographic polity, is in need of reformulation.

Our connections to others now transcend traditional bounds of culture, nation, and community. The unprecedented nature of these connections is radically reshaping human organization and the scale and impact of human exchange. But globalization has been with us a long time; the movement of peoples, goods, and ideas is an inherent feature of human history and development. Virtually every culture is linked to others by myriad ties.⁸

Culture is neither static nor homogeneous. Anthropological and sociological research reveals that cultures cannot be seen as fixed, indivisible wholes. The various manifestations of “social belonging” exhibit a “constructed and pliable nature.”⁹ Cultural resiliency has much to do with heterogeneity, assimilation of outside ideas, and the capacity to adapt. “We should view human cultures as constant creations, recreations, and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between ‘we’ and the ‘other(s),’” the political scientist Seyla Benhabib emphasizes.¹⁰ The multifarious processes of integration now at

work are serving to accentuate and accelerate such social, economic, and cultural interchange. Under these conditions, Benhabib adds, presumed lines of cultural demarcation are increasingly “fluid, porous and contested.”¹¹ To perceive cultures, then, as objects of stasis, immune from the complex dialogues and interactions of human existence, is a fundamental epistemological and empirical error. As Appiah maintains, “Societies without change aren’t authentic; they’re just dead.”¹²

Often, the insistence that the essence of cultural distinctiveness is its putative immutability emerges from a sincere desire to preserve and honor the power of an existing collective narrative. What is at issue here is a legitimate fear that valued identities may be lost or overwhelmed by unfamiliar external forces. Although an advocate of cultural rights designed to prevent such unwanted change, the theorist Will Kymlicka notes that “most indigenous peoples understand that the nature of their cultural identity is dynamic.”¹³ From this vantage point, Kymlicka believes that globalization “provides new and valued options by which nations can promote their interests and identities.”¹⁴ This suggests that a balance must be sought between the requirements of self-determination and the possibility of defining an aspect of self-determination as participation in the construction of a broader collectivity. Participation of this kind by a diverse array of cultures and peoples offers the promise of enriching the entire fabric of civilized life.

Recognition of the reality of globalization, however, does not mean that the current inequities associated with the process—how resources, opportunities, and power are distributed—should go unchallenged. And perhaps more important, the exhausted ideologies and intellectual frameworks that allow such inequities to persist must also be directly confronted.¹⁵ It is here where the insights provided by diverse human traditions and value systems can engage with the constructive phenomena of contemporary change to open new frontiers of identity—frontiers offering a peaceful and just future.

In 1945, aware of the imminent test of the first atomic weapon, Franklin D. Roosevelt warned, “Today we are faced with the pre-eminent fact that, if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together in the same world, at peace.”¹⁶

Clearly, the perceptions that human beings hold of themselves and each other matter. In a world convulsed by contention and conflict, conceptions of identity that feed the forces of prejudice and mistrust must be closely examined. Assertions that certain populations can be neatly partitioned into oppositional categories of affiliation deserve particular scrutiny. The notion of civilizational identity as the predominant expression of human allegiance is one such problematic example.¹⁷ For Amartya Sen, such thinking leads to “conceptual disarray” that can undermine international stability.

To view the relationships between different human beings as mere reflections of the relations between civilizations is questionable on both logical and pragmatic grounds. First, civilizations themselves are not monolithic in character; indeed, their vast internal diversity is among their distinguishing features. Second, as we have seen, reducing personhood to a “singular affiliation” denies the essential variety and complexity of human experience.¹⁸ Of most concern, argues Sen, is the danger that assigning “one preeminent categorization” to human beings will exacerbate and harden conceptions of difference between peoples.¹⁹ This presumption of a “unique and choiceless identity,” that people are what they are because they have been born into a certain ethnic, cultural, or religious inheritance, is an “illusion” that underlies many of the “conflicts and barbarities in the world.”²⁰ “Reasoned choice,” Sen believes, must be used to examine the intrinsic merit of our antecedent associations as well as the broader social ramifications of identity.²¹

“A tenable global ethics,” Kwame Anthony Appiah concurs, “has to temper a respect for difference with a respect for the freedom of actual human beings to make their own choices.”²² For this reason, there exists an intimate relationship between cultural diversity and liberty. A sustainable and authentic expression of collective development must be a freely chosen path pursued by the members composing the group in question; current generations cannot impose their vision of what a desirable form of life is upon future generations. Existing mores, practices, and institutions can inform, validate, and even ennoble the human condition, but cannot or should not foreclose new moral or social directions for individuals and communities. Indeed, collective learning and adjustment are defining characteristics of social evolution. Because our perceptions

and experiences change, our understanding of reality necessarily undergoes change. So too, then, do our identities change. "The contours of identity are profoundly real," Appiah states, "and yet no more imperishable, unchanging, or transcendent than other things that men and women make."²³ At the same time, "if we create a society that our descendants will want to hold on to, our personal and political values will survive in them."²⁴

Significant portions of the world's peoples, we know though, are deprived of the autonomy necessary to develop a plan of life or a corresponding identity that can inspire and assist them to realize life goals. The widespread subordinate social position of women and minorities restricts the latitude of their self-determination; members of these groups are frequently denied, in a systematic way, the chance to fully explore their individual potential and to contribute to the processes of cultural, social, and moral advancement. Constructions of identity can therefore be quite tenuous for marginalized groups or individuals whose personal characteristics fall outside received categories of classification. This can be especially true for persons of mixed ethnic, racial, or religious descent. Concepts of race and nation can serve as powerful instruments and symbols of unity, but can also lead to the isolation, dispossession, and "symbolic dismemberment" of minorities.²⁵ In this regard, Charles Carnegie's call for a "new consciousness of belonging" seems vital.²⁶

The prevalent stance that identity is about difference is untenable. Perceiving identity through the relativistic lens of separation or cultural preservation ignores compelling evidence of our common humanity and can only aggravate the forces of discord and disagreement now so pervasive in the world. The only alternative to this path of fragmentation and disunity is to nurture effective relationships across lines of ethnicity, creed, territory, and color—relationships that can serve as the warp and woof of a new social framework of universal solidarity and mutual respect. A one-dimensional understanding of human beings must be rejected. As Amartya Sen underscores, "The hope of harmony in the contemporary world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity, and in the appreciation that they cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division."²⁷ This is an appeal for imagination in creating new ways of

being and living; for a new vision of human nature and society—one that recognizes the unmistakable shared destiny of all peoples. The resolution of the problems now engulfing the planet demands a more expansive sense of human identity. As articulated by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago: “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.”²⁸

The crucial need of the present hour is to determine the conceptual and practical steps that will lay the foundations of an equitable and harmonious global order. Effectively addressing the crises now disrupting human affairs will require new models of social transformation that recognize the deep interrelationships between the material, ethical, and transcendent dimensions of life. It is evident that such models can emerge only from a fundamental change in consciousness about who we are, how we regard others who enter our ambit—no matter how near or distant—and how we collectively design the structures and processes of social life, whether local or global.

Such observations lead to yet more questions. In a world of pluralistic identities and rapidly shifting cultural and moral boundaries, is a common understanding of human purpose and action possible? Can a genuine cosmopolitan ethic, one that fully embraces human diversity, emerge from the multiple experiences and perceptions of modernity?

A basis of an affirmative Bahá'í response to these questions can be found in Bahá'u'lláh's exhortations to the world's peoples to “[s]et your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you,” and to “let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self.” For Bahá'ís, though, such a perspective is not simply a matter of belief or hopeful aspiration, but is grounded in experience.²⁹

A conviction of the practicality of world unity and peace, coupled with an unwavering dedication to work toward this goal is, perhaps, the single most distinguishing characteristic of the Bahá'í community. That this community is now representative of the diversity of the entire human race, encompassing virtually every national, ethnic, and racial group on the planet, is an achievement that cannot be casually dismissed. The worldwide Bahá'í community, as an organic whole, eschews dichotomies prevalent in public discourse today, such as “North” and “South,” and “developed” and “underdeveloped.”

Bahá'ís everywhere, irrespective of the degree of material well-being of their nations, are striving to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the process of building unified patterns of collective life. In this undertaking, every member of the community is a valued participant. In this respect, the roots of Bahá'í motivation and the formation of Bahá'í identity have a long history.

In the early part of the twentieth century, 'Abdu'l-Bahá—Bahá'u'lláh's Son and appointed Successor—urged the some 160 Bahá'í inhabitants of a small village in a remote part of Iran who were experiencing persecution to “regard every ill-wisher as a well-wisher . . . That is, they must associate with a foe as befitteth a friend, and deal with an oppressor as beseemeth a kind companion. They should not gaze upon the faults and transgressions of their foes, nor pay heed to their enmity, inequity or oppression.”³⁰ And further, they should “show forth love and affection, wisdom and compassion, faithfulness and unity towards all, without any discrimination.”³¹ But apart from enjoining upon them an attitude of remarkable forbearance and amity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not address these followers as simple, rural people with narrow, parochial concerns. Rather, He affirmed their innate dignity by speaking to them as citizens of the world who had the capacity and the power to contribute to the advancement of civilization:

O ye beloved of the Lord! With the utmost joy and gladness, serve ye the human world, and love ye the human race. Turn your eyes away from limitations, and free yourselves from restrictions, for . . . freedom therefrom brings about divine blessings and bestowals. . . .

Therefore, so long as there be a trace of life in one's veins, one must strive and labor, and seek to lay a foundation that the passing of centuries and cycles may not undermine, and rear an edifice which the rolling of ages and aeons cannot overthrow—an edifice that shall prove eternal and everlasting, so that the sovereignty of heart and soul may be established and secure in both worlds.³²

In short, the perceptions, preferences, and assumptions of the denizens of this small, isolated village were radically transformed. Their identity had been remade. They no longer were concerned

just with local matters, and even though they were far removed from the mainstream of intellectual and cultural exchange, they regarded themselves as “servants” of the “entire human race,” and as protagonists in the building of a new way of life. They understood their “ultimate sphere of work as the globe itself.”³³ That the broader Iranian Bahá'í community achieved, over the course of three generations, levels of educational advancement and prosperity well beyond the general population, even under conditions of severe religious discrimination, underscores the capacities that can be released when the moral and spiritual dimensions of human consciousness are awakened and purposively channeled.³⁴ For those interested in apprehending the sources and mechanisms of individual and community empowerment, it would be difficult to find a more compelling example of social transformation than the case of the Iranian Bahá'ís.

In response to Bahá'u'lláh's call for the creation of a universal culture of collaboration and conciliation, Bahá'ís drawn from almost every cultural and religious tradition “have achieved a sense of identity as members of a single human race, an identity that shapes the purpose of their lives and that, clearly, is not the expression of any intrinsic moral superiority on their own part.”³⁵ It is an accomplishment “that can properly be described only as spiritual—capable of eliciting extraordinary feats of sacrifice and understanding from ordinary people of every background.”³⁶

So it is clear that, from a Bahá'í perspective, a universal identity is a vital precursor to action that is universal in its effects—to the “emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture.”³⁷ In emphasizing our global identity, Bahá'u'lláh presents a conception of life that insists upon a redefinition of all human relationships—between individuals, between human society and the natural world, between the individual and the community, and between individual citizens and their governing institutions.³⁸ Humanity has arrived at the dawn of its maturity, when its “innate excellence” and latent creative capacities can at last find complete expression.³⁹ Accordingly, new social forms and ethical precepts are enunciated in the Bahá'í teachings so that human consciousness can be freed from patterns of response set by tradition, and the foundations of a global society can be erected.

Bahá'u'lláh thus speaks to the reshaping and redirection of social reality. That all individual action and social arrangements must be informed by the principle of the oneness of human relationships, gives rise to a concept of moral and social order that safeguards personal dignity while deepening human solidarity. In recognition of this central insight, the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Bahá'í community, urges all to "embrace the implications of the oneness of humankind, not only as the inevitable next step in the advancement of civilization, but as the fulfilment of lesser identities of every kind that our race brings to this critical moment in our collective history."⁴⁰

From the basic principle of the unity of the world's peoples are derived virtually all notions concerning human welfare and liberty. If the human race is one, any assertion that a particular racial, ethnic, or national group is in some way superior to the rest of humanity must be dismissed; society must reorganize its life to give practical expression to the principle of equality for all its members regardless of race, creed, or gender;⁴¹ each and every person must be enabled to "look into all things with a searching eye" so that truth can be independently ascertained;⁴² and all individuals must be given the opportunity to realize their inherent capabilities and thereby foster "the elevation, the advancement, the education, the protection and the regeneration of the peoples of the earth."⁴³

In the Bahá'í view, social origin, position, or rank are of no account in the sight of God. As Bahá'u'lláh confirms, "man's glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, his wisdom, and not in his nationality or rank."⁴⁴ This emphatic declaration of the essential moral and spiritual worth of every human being is echoed in an epistle of Bahá'u'lláh's to a devoted follower: "Verily, before the one true God, they who are the rulers and lords of men and they that are their subjects and vassals are equal and the same. The ranks of all men are dependent on their potential and capacity. Witness unto this truth are the words, 'In truth, they are most honored before God who are most righteous.'"⁴⁵ Hence, embedded in the Bahá'í understanding of human identity is a fundamental expectation of justice and equality of opportunity, as well as an imperative of striving for greater moral awareness and responsibility.

It must be stressed that the “watchword” of the Bahá'í community is “unity in diversity.”⁴⁶ Oneness and diversity are complementary and inseparable: “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.”⁴⁷ Just as integration of the differentiated components of the human body makes possible the higher function of human consciousness, so too is global well-being dependent on the willing give and take, and ultimate collaboration, of humanity's diverse populations.⁴⁸ Acceptance of the concept of unity in diversity implies the development of a global consciousness, a sense of global citizenship, and a love for all of humanity. It induces every individual to realize that, “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” and has a responsibility to the whole.⁴⁹ It further suggests that if a peaceful international community is to emerge, then the complex and varied cultural expressions of humanity must be allowed to develop and flourish, as well as to interact with one another in ever-changing forms of civilization. “The diversity in the human family,” the Bahá'í writings emphasize, “should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord.”⁵⁰ More than creating a culture of tolerance, the notion of unity in diversity entails vanquishing corrosive divisions along lines of race, class, gender, nationality, and belief, and erecting a dynamic and cooperative social ethos that reflects the oneness of human nature.

The ideology of difference so ubiquitous in contemporary discourse militates against the possibility of social progress. It provides no basis whereby communities defined by specific backgrounds, customs, or creeds can bridge their divergent perspectives and resolve social tensions. The value of variety and difference cannot be minimized, and neither can the necessity for coexistence, order, and mutual effort. “The supreme need of humanity,” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá underscores, “is cooperation and reciprocity. The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness and accomplishment in all the planes of human activity.”⁵¹ Diversity by itself cannot be regarded as an “ultimate good.”⁵²

Unity, in contrast, “is a phenomenon of creative power.”⁵³ To foster a global identity, to affirm that we are members of one human family, is a deceptively simple but powerful idea. While traditional loyalties and identities must be appreciated and recognized, they are inadequate for addressing the predicament of modernity, and consequently, a higher loyalty, one that speaks to the common destiny of all the earth’s inhabitants, is necessary. And so, in our quest for solutions to the problems that collectively confront us, a first step must involve relinquishing our attachment to lesser loyalties. Yet, while Bahá’u’lláh is saying that at this moment in human social evolution a global identity is vital, an inherent aspect of such a universal identity is recognition of the spiritual reality that animates our inner selves.⁵⁴ To be sure, a global identity grounded in awareness of our common humanness marks a great step forward from where humanity has been, but a strictly secular or material formulation of global identity is unlikely to provide a sufficient motivational basis for overcoming historic prejudices and engendering universal moral action. Establishing a global milieu of peace, prosperity, and fairness is ultimately a matter of the heart; it involves a change in basic attitudes and values that can only come from recognizing the normative and spiritual nature of the challenges before us. This is especially so given that the vast majority of the world’s peoples do not view themselves simply as material beings responding to material exigencies and circumstances, but rather as beings endowed with spiritual sensibility and purpose.

In light of ongoing social turmoil and the upheavals of the last century, it is simply no longer possible to maintain the belief that human well-being can arise from a narrow, materialistic conception of life. The persistence of widespread human deprivation and despair speaks to the shortcomings of prevailing social theories and policies. Fresh approaches are required. A just social polity, Bahá’ís believe, will emerge only when human relations and social arrangements are infused with spiritual intent, an intent characterized by an all-embracing standard of equity, unconditional love, and an ethos of service to others. Addressing practical challenges through a spiritual lens is no easy task, but it is to this objective that Bahá’ís are firmly committed. Through recognition of the centrality of spiritual values and the deeds they inspire, “Minds, hearts and all human forces are reformed, perfections are quickened, sciences,

discoveries, and investigations are stimulated afresh, and everything appertaining to the virtues of the human world is revitalized.”⁵⁵ The power of a spiritually-actuated identity in furthering human betterment cannot be overestimated, for those “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.”⁵⁶

It is still regrettable that the identity of certain individuals or groups emerges from a shared experience of oppression—from being the victims of systematic discrimination or injustice. In addressing this dimension of human identity, Bahá’u’lláh speaks forcefully and repeatedly about the rights and dignity of all human beings, and the indispensability of creating mechanisms of social justice, but He also explains that spiritual oppression is the most serious of all: “What ‘oppression’ is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth . . . should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?”⁵⁷ From this standpoint, it is in the displacement of a transcendent understanding of life by an ascendant materialism that we find the source of the disaffection, anomie, and uncertainty that so pervades modern existence. All forms of oppression ultimately find their genesis in the denial of our essential spiritual identity. As Bahá’u’lláh earnestly counsels us: “Deny not My servant should he ask anything from thee, for his face is My face; be then abashed before Me.”⁵⁸

These words tell us that we must choose who we wish to be; we must “see” with our “own eyes and not through the eyes of others.”⁵⁹ We must create our own sense of self and belonging. To have such power of choice affirms human nobility and is a sign of divine grace. Our different senses of identity consequently become fully realized through the development of our spiritual identity; they each provide a means for achieving our basic existential purpose—the recognition and refinement of the spiritual capacities latent within us. Through the tangible expression of such capacities—compassion, trustworthiness, humility, courage, forbearance, and willingness to sacrifice for the common good—we define a path of spiritual growth. In the end, though, whether we have attained our spiritual potential is enshrouded in mystery: “The inner being, the underlying reality or intrinsic identity, is still beyond the ken and perception of our human powers.”⁶⁰

Connected with the idea of spiritual identity, then, is the inalienable sanctity of every human soul: that a unique destiny has been bestowed upon each of us by an all-loving Creator—a destiny which unfolds in accordance with the free exercise of our rational and moral powers. As Bahá'u'lláh indicates, "How lofty is the station which man, if he but choose to fulfill his high destiny, can attain!"⁶¹ This promise of new vistas of accomplishment for both the individual and society is, for Bahá'ís, a source of enduring confidence and optimism. The forces now buffeting and recasting human life, Bahá'u'lláh attests, will serve to release the "potentialities inherent in the station of man," thereby giving impetus to "an ever-advancing civilization."⁶²

The Bahá'í belief in the spiritual nature of reality, and its underlying unity, sheds new light on the question of religious identity. In stressing 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,"⁶³ Bahá'u'lláh is confirming a basic intuition that the truth underpinning the world's great religions is in essence one. This explicit rejection of exclusivity and superiority, which have so dominated religious thinking and behavior, and suppressed impulses to reconciliation and unity, clears the ground for a new ethos of mutual understanding. For indeed, to believe that one's system of belief is somehow superior or unique has only led humankind to misery, despair, and ruin. In warning His followers never to assume what their own spiritual end might be, Bahá'u'lláh plants the seeds of humility and spiritual maturity so necessary for the creation of a world of tolerance and tranquility. In recognizing the divine origin of the world's great religions, and that they have each served to unlock a wider range of capacities within human consciousness and society, the Bahá'í Faith does not and cannot make any claim of religious finality, but rather a claim of paramount relevance to humanity's current spiritual and social plight. Its role as a reconciler and unifier of religions is clearly anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh: "A different Cause . . . hath appeared in this day and a different discourse is required."⁶⁴

Bahá'u'lláh clarifies that a moral logic pervades the fabric of human life, and that it is through observance of spiritual principles that the individual can realize the divinely intended goal of his or her existence. As beings capable of spiritual and moral development,

our autonomy and welfare are not only determined by the laws and constraints of the natural world, but also by an objective spiritual world that is integrally related to it. To follow a moral path is not only to carry out the duties that we have to those around us, but is the only means for realizing true happiness and contentment. Our obligations to God, our inner selves, our family, and the wider community give definition to who we are and what our aims should be. For Bahá'ís, fulfillment of these obligations to the Divine will and to our fellow human beings ensures the emergence of a stable and progressive society. Moreover, by honoring such responsibilities, the nobility and rights of others are protected. In this sense, it is the requirement of individuals' being able to meet primary spiritual and moral obligations that safeguards human rights.⁶⁵

The Bahá'í teachings explain that moral insight is both transcendently and dialogically derived. The values and ideals that bind human beings together, and give tangible direction and meaning to life, find their origins in the guidance provided by the Founders of the world's great religious systems. At the same time, it is human action in response to such guidance that gives real shape to social reality. Bahá'u'lláh makes clear that all such action must be consultatively inspired and directed. Given that human life has a "fundamentally dialogical character," it is through interchange that individuals and the communities they compose are able to give definition to their identities and their long-term goals.⁶⁶ Consultation can lead to the creation of new social meanings and social forms that reflect what is reasonable and fair for society to achieve. But any such process of collective deliberation and decision making, the Bahá'í writings insist, must be devoid of adversarial posturing as well as dispassionate and fully participatory in spirit. It is through discourse which is inclusive and unifying that the religious impulse finds expression in the modern age.

Clearly, there can never be an absolutely objective or static understanding of what constitutes concepts such as social equity, human security, power, "the common good," democracy, or community. There is an evolutionary aspect to social development—a dynamic process of learning, dialogue, and praxis in which social challenges and solutions are constantly redefined and reassessed. There are always multiple understandings of particular social questions and these

diverse perspectives each typically contain some measure of validity. By building a broader framework of analysis that encompasses not only material and technical variables but the normative and spiritual dimensions of various social issues, new insights can emerge that enrich dialogues previously locked into narrow conceptual boundaries. A unifying sense of identity can obviously play an important role in facilitating and sustaining such a consultative path.

In many ways, the struggle to understand our identity is tied up with the question of meaning in modern life. Increasingly, calls are being made for rooting meaning and identity in community, but when the community is religiously, morally, and culturally pluralistic in character it is challenging for diverse voices to find common ground. It is here where the Bahá'í concepts of unity in diversity and non-adversarial dialogue and decision making can offer a potent alternative vision of social advancement. Engaging in a cooperative search for truth will no doubt lead to the discovery and implementation of shared perspectives and values. Such open moral dialogue within and among variegated communities can lead to a process of action, reflection, and adjustment resulting in genuine social learning and progress.⁶⁷ As Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes, "No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation."⁶⁸

Meaning emerges from an independent search for truth and a chosen freedom grounded in social experience and social participation—a participation that leads to the enlargement of the self. Participation creates new identities and new solidarities. In Bahá'í communities around the globe, patterns of fellowship, knowledge building, and collaboration among diverse peoples are giving rise to a new human culture. Bahá'ís have found that encouraging new modalities of association and participation is key to promoting meaningful social development and effective local governance that is democratic in spirit and method. Hence, Bahá'u'lláh's statement that fellowship and sincere association "are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations."⁶⁹

Human beings are social beings. The self, therefore, cannot evolve outside of human relationships. Indeed, the self develops principally through endeavors that are participatory in nature. Virtues such as generosity, loyalty, mercy, and self-abnegation cannot be manifested in isolation from others. The Bahá'í teachings affirm that the

essential arena of moral choice is the autonomous person. But this autonomy is exercised within a broader social context, as well as an all-encompassing spiritual reality that informs the nature of that social context. The Bahá'í teachings thus offer a social conception of human identity in which the inner aspirations of the self are aligned with the goals of a just and creative global polity. In this way, the Bahá'í community is able to reconcile “the right” with “the good.”⁷⁰

Individual well-being is intimately tied to the flourishing of the whole. It is a reciprocated benevolence, founded on the ideals of service and selflessness, rather than utilitarian self-interest, that underlies the Bahá'í idea of social life. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “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.”⁷¹ While preservation of “personal freedom and initiative” is considered essential, so too must the relational aspect of human existence be recognized.⁷² The “maintenance of civilized life,” the Universal House of Justice explains, “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.”⁷³

Given the social matrix of human reality, the quest for true self-determination and true identity involves finding one’s place within a moral order, not outside it. But in the Bahá'í view, such “ordered liberty” concerns the awakening of the soul to the capacities of integrity, kindness, and sincerity that lie within it. And spiritual growth of this kind must be fostered by the community in which the individual is embedded. Any conception of “the good”—an equitable society promoting the development of individual potential—must recognize the necessity of imbuing the concept of duty into society’s members. In this respect, laws and ethical standards are intended not to constrain but to liberate human consciousness so that a moral ethos can come into being. To a great degree, then, the emergence of the citizen devoted to a moral praxis results from the collective voice of the community. Although a path of social virtue and service must be freely chosen, the community must strive to cultivate and

empower this voice.⁷⁴ The ultimate expression of this spiritually motivated moral voice is a culture where action flows not from externally imposed duties and rights but from the spontaneous love that each member of the community has for one another. From our shared recognition that we are all sheltered under the love of the same God, comes both humility and the means for true social cohesion.

This spiritually based conception of social life goes beyond notions of mutual advantage and prudence associated with the idea of the social contract. While the principle of self-interested, rational exchange implied by the social contract indisputably represents an advance over coercion as a basis for social existence, there surely exists a step beyond exchange. As the philosopher Martha Nussbaum states, the pursuit of "individual ends" must "include shared ends."⁷⁵ Social cooperation, as manifested through a "global society of peoples," she argues, cannot be based on seeking mutual advantage, but can only result from recognizing that "a central part of our good is to live in a world that is morally decent, a world in which all human beings have what they need to live a life with dignity."⁷⁶ Yet Nussbaum's thoughtful critique of current social forms falls short in outlining a pathway for mediating among divergent identities and value systems so that unity on a global scale becomes a realistic possibility. For without a genuine, transcending love emanating from the heart of human consciousness and motivation, it is unlikely that contending peoples and cultures can come together to form a harmonious and interdependent whole. Under the pluralism of the social contract, however enlightened that pluralism may be, disunity reigns.⁷⁷

Bahá'u'lláh instead offers a covenant of universal fellowship, a spiritually empowered ethic of deep and abiding commitment, as the basis for collective life. As a result of this covenant of oneness, in the deprivation and suffering of others we see ourselves. Such a frame of reference opens the door to critical reflection and real social transformation. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life."⁷⁸

The Bahá'í concept of an inhering human diversity leading to higher forms of unity suggests that we can and must move beyond a liberal construction of pluralism that is unable to provide an overarching vision of human development. But rather than engaging in a quixotic quest to overcome the innumerable evils at work in society,

or right the “countless wrongs afflicting a desperate age,” Bahá’ís are devoting their energy to building the world anew.⁷⁹ As we have seen, recognizing the essential spiritual character of our identity is a defining feature of this project. Further, at this moment in our collective evolution, the appropriate locus for action is the globe in its entirety, where all members of the human family are joined together in a common enterprise of promoting justice and social integration. Here, it should be noted that the Bahá’í teachings envision social and political development unfolding in two directions: upward beyond the nation-state and downward to the grassroots of society. Both are vital and interlinked. In this regard, the Bahá’í community offers its own unique system of governance as a model for study.⁸⁰

Bahá’u’lláh provides us with a potent new moral grammar that allows us to appreciate and nurture human diversity while expanding our horizons beyond the parochial to a solidarity encompassing the boundaries of the planet itself. By extending human identity outward to embrace the totality of human experience, Bahá’u’lláh offers a vision of a comprehensive good that recognizes and values the particular while promoting an integrating framework of global learning and cooperation. His summons to unity articulates an entirely new set of ethics and way of life—one that flows from a spiritual understanding of human history, purpose, and development. He also gives us new tools that allow us to negotiate among our diverse perceptions and construct unified modes of living without resorting to adversarial means and the culture of protest that heretofore have characterized even the most advanced democratic polities. He exhorts us to “flee” from “dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy.”⁸¹

By redefining human identity, the Bahá’í teachings anticipate the moral reconstruction of all human practices—a process that involves the remaking of individual behavior and the reformulation of institutional structures. It entails the internalization of spiritual concepts so that the theory, assessment, and reformation of social affairs reflect the ideals of altruism, moderation, reciprocity, and justice. When society draws upon the spiritual mainspring of human identity and purpose, truly constructive avenues of social change can be pursued. “Among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirms, “will be that the human world will

adapt itself to a new social form . . . and human equality will be universally established.”⁸²

In our very longing for a world free from violence and injustice lie the seeds of hope. But such hope can only be sustained by the certitude conferred by faith. As the Universal House of Justice assures us: “The turmoil and crises of our time underlie a momentous transition in human affairs. . . . That our Earth has contracted into a neighborhood, no one can seriously deny. The world is being made new. Death pangs are yielding to birth pangs. The pain shall pass when members of the human race act upon the common recognition of their essential oneness. There is a light at the end of this tunnel of change beckoning humanity to the goal destined for it according to the testimonies recorded in all the Holy Books.”⁸³

NOTES

- ¹ Philip Selznick, “Civility and Piety as Foundations of Community,” in *The Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, vol. 14, March–June 2004. Also see Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 388–89.
- ² Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence—The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), p. XIII.
- ³ Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 101–2.
- ⁴ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 68.
- ⁵ David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 91.
- ⁶ Charles Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured: Caribbean Borderlands* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 1.
- ⁷ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 26.
- ⁸ For example, many important concepts in modern science and mathematics find their genesis in the work of Chinese and Indian thinkers, some of which were later elaborated and transmitted to the West by Muslim innovators. Asian culture and architecture were greatly influenced by the movements of the Mughals and Mongols. The Bantu migrations spread ironworking and new agricultural methods across Africa. The great distances covered across oceans by the Vikings and the Polynesians, the movements and engineering achievements of indigenous societies in the Americas, the existence of Ming china in Swahili graves, and the spread of the tomato and the chili from

the Americas to Europe and Asia illustrate the extent of human migration and interchange throughout the ages.

- ⁹ Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured*, p. 9.
- ¹⁰ Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 8.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- ¹² Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Case for Contamination," in *The New York Times Magazine* (1 January 2006).
- ¹³ Will Kymlicka, cited in Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, p. 132.
- ¹⁴ Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 323.
- ¹⁵ For an in-depth exploration of this point, see the Bahá'í International Community statements, *The Prosperity of Humankind* (1995), and *Who Is Writing the Future?* (1999).
- ¹⁶ These were among the last words penned by Roosevelt which, due to his death, were not delivered. See <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1945/450413b.html>
- ¹⁷ Samuel Huntington, in his seminal article "The Clash of Civilizations?," posits that global stability will be determined by the interactions among what he calls Western, Hindu, Islamic, Sinic, African, Latin American, Buddhist, and Orthodox Christian civilizations. Huntington writes, "The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future." See Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," in *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993).
- ¹⁸ Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 20.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xv.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ²² Appiah, "The Case for Contamination."
- ²³ Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, p. 113.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- ²⁵ Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured*, p. 17.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ²⁷ Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. xiv.
- ²⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), section CXVII.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, sections CXI and XLIII.
- ³⁰ cited in *Century of Light*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2001), p. 9.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ³² *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- ³⁴ Through adherence to, and active implementation of, spiritual precepts, the Iranian Bahá'í community effectively eliminated poverty and achieved universal literacy over the span of six to seven decades. Commitment to the principles of human equality and nobility, moral rectitude, collaborative

decision making, education—particularly of girls—of the exalted station of work, cleanliness and good hygiene, and respect for scientific knowledge as applied to agriculture, commerce and other avenues of human endeavor constituted the basis of a spiritually inspired process of social advancement. For additional perspective on the Bahá'í approach to social and economic progress see Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World* (2002); and *In Service to the Common Good: The American Bahá'í Community's Commitment to Social Change*, (Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2004).

³⁵ *One Common Faith*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2005), p. 44.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 163.

³⁸ Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind* (1995).

³⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, section CLXII.

⁴⁰ Universal House of Justice, *To the World's Religious Leaders*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), p. 5.

⁴¹ Bahá'u'lláh emphatically states that “women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God.” He insists upon the emancipation of women from long-entrenched patterns of subordination and calls for the full participation of women in the social, economic, and political realms of civilized life. *Women: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice* (Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1986), no. 54. Concerning racial equality, Bahá'u'lláh counsels, “Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness,” cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 37.

⁴² Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988) p. 157.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68. It should be noted, however, that the Bahá'í teachings recognize the need for authority and rank for the purpose of ensuring various functions in the pursuit of community goals. In this regard, all decision-making authority in the Bahá'í administrative system rests not with individuals but with elected corporate bodies. A distinction is thus made between the moral and spiritual equality of all human beings and the differentiation that may exist in how individuals serve society.

⁴⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, provisional translation, courtesy of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.

⁴⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 42.

⁴⁷ Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ The sociologist Emile Durkheim referred to such coordinated interaction among society's diverse elements as “organic solidarity”—a solidarity governed by the “law of cooperation.” See Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth*, pp. 142–43.

- 49 Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, p. 7.
- 50 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), p. 53.
- 51 '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*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 338.
- 52 Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, p. 153.
- 53 Universal House of Justice, *Century of Light*, p. 41.
- 54 It should be noted that for one who does not arrive at a spiritual understanding of existence, Bahá'u'lláh urges that individual to "at least conduct himself with reason and justice." Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), p. 168.
- 55 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 278.
- 56 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 197–98.
- 57 Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003), p. 29.
- 58 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 30 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985).
- 59 Ibid., Arabic no. 2.
- 60 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 421.
- 61 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 206.
- 62 Ibid., pp. 340 and 215.
- 63 Ibid., p. 217.
- 64 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2006), para. 2.II.
- 65 This is not to suggest that duties prevail over or precede rights, but that the recognition and exercise of such duties provide the very framework for actualizing human rights. There is a complementary relationship between rights and duties. That individuals have specific entitlements or needs, informs us of particular duties that attach to other individuals or the broader society.
- 66 Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 33.
- 67 The evolving international human rights discourse is one significant example of such cross-cultural moral exchange.
- 68 Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *Consultation: A Compilation* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 3.
- 69 Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 36.
- 70 In the vocabulary of moral philosophy, "the good" refers to a vision of happiness, human well-being, or a specific way of life. Thus, many conceptions of "the good" are possible. "The right" refers to types of principled or just action—binding duties, codes, and standards that regulate and guide how individuals pursue their particular notions of "the good." Modern liberal thought, going back to Immanuel Kant, places emphasis on "the right" over "the good." Communitarians have critiqued this view, arguing that it has led to the exaggerated individualism of Western society.
- 71 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 2.

- ⁷² Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203.
- ⁷³ Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989), p. 20.
- ⁷⁴ For more on this point, see Amitai Etzioni, *The Monochrome Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 221–45.
- ⁷⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap and Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 90–95.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ To acknowledge the limitations of pluralism, however, is not to deny the centrality of individual and group autonomy, civil rights, and democratic values to human well-being. What is being critiqued here is a pluralism that is unable to foster a definite vision of the common good.
- ⁷⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 76.
- ⁷⁹ Universal House of Justice, letter dated 24 May 2001.
- ⁸⁰ Bahá'ís attach great importance to cooperative decision making and assign organizational responsibility for community affairs to freely elected governing councils at the local, national, and international levels. Bahá'u'lláh designated these governing councils “Houses of Justice.” This administrative system devolves decision making to the lowest practicable level—thereby instituting a unique vehicle for grassroots participation in governance—while at the same time providing a level of coordination and authority that makes possible collaboration and unity on a global scale. A unique feature of the Bahá'í electoral process is the maximum freedom of choice given to the electorate through the prohibition of nominations, candidature, and solicitation. Election to Bahá'í administrative bodies is based not on personal ambition but rather on recognized ability, mature experience, and a commitment to service. Because the Bahá'í system does not allow the imposition of the arbitrary will or leadership of individuals, it cannot be used as a pathway to power. Decision-making authority rests only with the elected bodies themselves. All members of the Bahá'í community, no matter what position they may temporarily occupy in the administrative structure, are expected to regard themselves as involved in a learning process, as they strive to understand and implement the laws and principles of their Faith. Significantly, in many parts of the world, the first exercises in democratic activity have occurred within the Bahá'í community. Bahá'ís believe that this consultatively based administrative system offers a useful example of the institutional structures necessary for global community life. For more on the underlying principles of the Bahá'í Administrative Order see Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 143–57.
- ⁸¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, section v.
- ⁸² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 132.
- ⁸³ Universal House of Justice, *On the Occasion of the Official Opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb* (22 May 2001).

*Be anxiously concerned with the
needs of the age ye live in, and center
your deliberations on its exigencies
and requirements.*

—Bahá'u'lláh



PROFILE:

CORDE and UniED, Cambodia

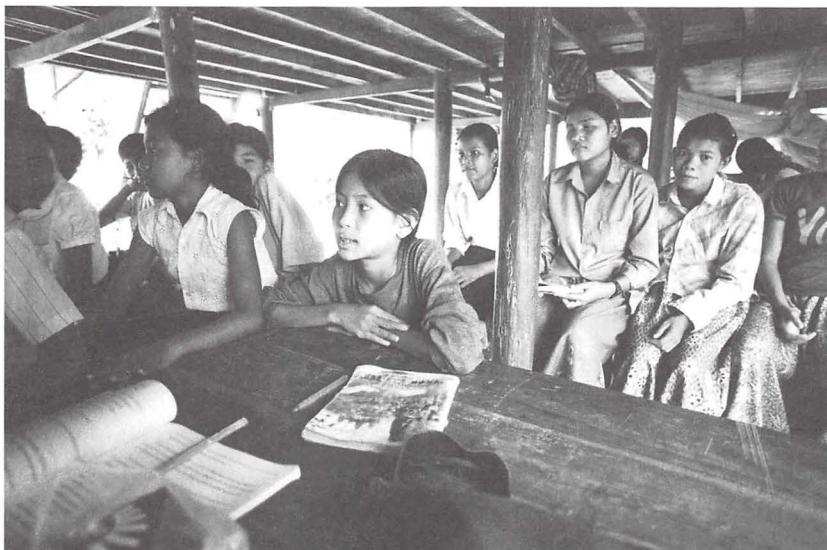
The fundamental Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humanity implies the development of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life. Enshrined in the Bahá'í teachings is the goal of reconstructing society through the application of spiritual values. "[I]s there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good?" asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow creatures?"¹ In recognition of His own efforts to avert a famine in Palestine during the years of World War I, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was awarded a knighthood by the British government. More recently, in many countries and regions ravaged by war and instability, Bahá'ís are endeavoring to carry out programs designed to alleviate people's suffering and assist them to contribute to the rebuilding of their societies through the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

In 1993, after decades of turbulence in Cambodia, elections were held and a multi-party, free-market democracy under a constitutional monarchy established. The new constitution guaranteed the right to freedom of religious belief and practice and, in October of that year, the Bahá'í Faith was officially registered with the Ministry of

Religion. The history of the Bahá'í community in Cambodia dates back to the mid-1950s but, as was the case with many other religious communities, Bahá'ís were scattered during the political upheavals of the 1970s. Many Cambodians, while living in refugee camps in Thailand, came into contact with Bahá'í development workers and encountered principles that they believed would help their nation rebuild itself. In April 1994, the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Cambodia was elected in Phnom Penh.

The most pressing concern in the mid-1990s was the lot of Cambodia's young people, many of whom were unable to attend school because of poverty and an education system in need of major reform. At that time, it was recognized that more than half of the country's population was under the age of 15. Access to health care—particularly oral hygiene—was woefully inadequate. The war had also stripped Cambodia's landscape of its vegetation. Mines had destroyed the fertility of its soil and made cultivation dangerous. People, unconvinced they would live long enough to see their own harvests, had lost the motivation to cultivate the land. This pitiful situation led a number of Bahá'ís to propose solutions whereby they could apply their Faith's principles and their own skills to the redevelopment of the country.

Around the time that the United Nations Transitional Authority arrived in Cambodia to oversee its move towards democracy, a Bahá'í educational initiative got underway in Phnom Penh. Stamford College's main objective was to contribute towards Cambodia's reconstruction through training its students to gain the confidence and practical ability to contribute to social and material progress. Numerous Bahá'ís from outside of Cambodia offered their skills to the education of these young people and built strong mentoring relationships with them. Two years later, three Bahá'ís—one from Thailand and two from the Philippines—settled in the Battambang province in the northwestern part of Cambodia, where they opened a branch of Stamford College—the Stamford Learning Center—which subsequently evolved into the University for Education and Development (UNIED). The province, which comprises more than 300 villages scattered around 3,188 square kilometers, has a population of almost half a million people. The principal town of Battambang



The influence of CORDE's educational programs on young women is particularly notable.

is the seat of provincial government departments, schools, centers of learning, and the offices of many nongovernmental organizations.

A further group of seven Bahá'ís launched another development agency in Cambodia in 1994—the Cambodian Organization for Research, Development, and Education (CORDE). Under this program, they committed themselves to further utilizing knowledge they had acquired at refugee camps along the Cambodian–Thai border. In its original mission statement, CORDE was described as “a private, non-profit, and non-political voluntary development organization involved in the process of social and economic transformation and of upraising the quality of human life and well-being of individuals, families and communities, upholding the principles of human honor and dignity through the provision of viable and sustainable projects that will enhance their capacities and capabilities, thereby increasing the level of participation resulting in empowerment for a long-term sustained impact.” CORDE's stated aim was to assist Cambodia to evolve into a creative, productive, and confident society. CORDE was registered with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Community Development and became the first local NGO to be registered with the Ministry of Health.

In its initial years, the activities of CORDE were largely focused on building wells in villages and promoting oral and dental health education for children, drawing on the resources of three of its founding members who were dental aides trained by the UN at a refugee camp. In 1994, there were only nine dental clinics for a population of nine million people in the whole country. Authorities were able to present dental health as part of hygiene education in schools but had no means to provide toothbrushes for children or youth. Visiting Bahá'í dentists complemented the resources provided by government dentists.

Efforts to assist Cambodia's agricultural regeneration were also initiated. A small nursery was developed where young people were trained to grow seedlings. Some 500 saplings of fruit trees were distributed to villagers as a gift from the Bahá'í community, with the understanding that the villagers would grow these trees and their fruit would be fed to their children to improve their nutrition. As the trees grew, previously dispirited individuals saw their sense of hope for a peaceful future increase.

It soon became apparent, however, that these populations needed access to additional provision for education. Decades of warfare had left in their wake increasing suspicion, lawlessness, and crime. Family solidarity and moral behavior had been weakened. CORDE began to introduce moral concepts into its educational programs, as well as literacy and language training. One of CORDE's founders organized a pool of teachers to offer informal classes in rural areas, with particular attention being paid to women and early-teenage youth. Occasional educational activity soon evolved into more formal tutorial classes, each day offering two hours of supplementary and complementary education. For a large percentage of the children from poor families, the classes given by CORDE were the only education they were receiving.

CORDE recognized that more tutorial schools could be started throughout the country if assistance for materials, books, and blackboards could be provided and extensions built onto the houses of teachers and students who were willing to open their homes for children in their neighborhoods to come and study. Owing to the smallness of these homes, classes were held in extension buildings built into the yard, or even beneath those houses constructed on stilts. It was also noted that, while literacy and basic education was

the most fundamental need, delivering it required an approach that went beyond reading and writing. Participants had to learn to express their own ideas with clarity. Using the resources of Stamford College, seminars and modular courses were arranged on teacher-training methodology and educational principles. Teenage high school students were recruited and trained to offer literacy classes in their own communities. By 1995, there were some 20 classes with volunteer teachers receiving financial assistance for transport, oil for lamps, and stationery for students. Two years later, the number of classes had increased to 35, with more than 500 children participating in Battambang province alone. Another group of weekly classes, in the Saang region, multiplied and evolved into a daily fixture. By 2004, CORDE's tutorial classes were reaching some 1,000 students in Battambang.

Many tutorial classes continued to be held under trees and in the homes of teachers, lighted mostly with a candle or lamp. They lacked chairs and tables suitable for the different ages of children. To overcome the difficulties posed by the lack of proper facilities, CORDE embarked on a plan to build Centers of Community Learning (CCLs). By 2005, there were five such facilities: three in Battambang, one in Poipet and one in Stung Meanchey. While a tutorial class with a teacher can cater to only 20 students, well-scheduled programs coordinated by a director of a CCL can serve the needs of well over 200 children and junior youth. The young students at CCLs study moral education and English. Among the principal materials they use is a junior youth spiritual empowerment program developed by Bahá'í-inspired agencies in various parts of the world. Other classes for adults include family health and basic agriculture. In addition, as more youth and adults are systematically helped through educational programs training them to contribute to the development of their communities, CCLs offer the needed space for them to volunteer their services.

Students' testimonials bear witness to the profound impact these programs have on their participants: "Before studying, my attitude was so childish," said one 15 year old, "but now I am more mature and I help in doing house work." A 17 year old decided, "I want to be a teacher because I can impart good values to children." A participant who originally went to the CORDE CCL only to learn English found her ideas changing: "When I learned many stories from the



"I am trying my best to educate children and youth because they will become leaders in the future. They will be good human resources for a better society."

—MOEURNG CHANTHA, TEACHER





"This training brings us love, friendship, respect, and service. It also shows a way of life."

—PONLUK SIDEN, STUDENT



Moral Teaching Text Book 1–3, my motivation changed. Now I am teaching CORDE class in my house and I sometimes help to teach small kids at the CCL.”

The influence on young women has been especially notable. “The effect on the girls who were participating was great,” reported one participant, “They changed from shy, quiet people to bright, excited, dynamic ones who had so much to say and long to travel and serve.” Rong Molyka, a young woman who has been trained by CORDE and is now teaching for the organization, says, “Since I joined CORDE, I have improved my knowledge and my English skills. I used to be quick-tempered. Now I am more patient and more conscious of my conduct.” Her mother soon noticed changes in her daughter’s attitude: “She is now more respectful. I am very happy that my daughter is teaching in CORDE and I hope all my children will join and become good teachers for the community’s development in the future.”

In 1997, Stamford College relocated from Phnom Penh to Battambang to contribute to development in the province. While it functioned mainly as a language center, the content of Stamford College’s courses imbued its students with a desire to contribute to the community’s development. After five years of active involvement in the growth and development in Battambang, the college’s Board of Directors was convinced that it should provide a coherent framework for development to collaborate with the population and organizations working in the region. It decided to offer higher-level courses to build individual and institutional capacity with the objective that specific populations of Battambang would learn about their own path of development. The learning could then be applied to the rest of Cambodia, especially semi-urban and rural areas. Efforts began in 2002 to re-engineer Stamford into a University. In February 2003, Cambodia’s Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth upgraded Stamford College to become the University for Education and Development (UNIED), a nonprofit learning organization dedicated to the generation and application of knowledge to build capacities in individuals, institutions, and communities to take responsibility for the material, social, and spiritual well-being of society, based on Bahá’í concepts of the oneness and nobility of humanity.

UNIED began to offer an undergraduate program in education and development subjects in 2002. In its first intake, there were



UnIED courses include environmental education, agriculture, and agribusiness.

35 students, most of whom were already serving with CORDE. In order to take responsibility for their own learning, the whole UNIED student community was divided into four “families”—Helping Family, Compassionate Family, Justice Family, and Friendship Family. These families were created to promote understanding of core values within the student community and help the weaker members in their studies, practicing Bahá’í principles of consultation and decision making.

UNIED has now devoted several years to developing curricula for each of the four years of its undergraduate program. Faculty members, considering the characteristic situations of the region, identified educational needs, consulted on them, developed the content, and introduced practical applications for fieldwork. Courses have evolved to include economics, financial management, and community banking, the management of CCLs, environmental education, agriculture and agribusiness. As part of the community banking program, students operate a practice bank which provides loans for income-generating projects. The loans are repaid and some profit is made. By December 2004, participants were thought to have gained

enough experience to start banking activities in the villages in which CCLs had been established by CORDE. The participants gained skills as well as insights into the qualities necessary to generate material wealth on a personal and collective level.

UNIED's faculty and staff collaborate closely with CORDE. Some CORDE teachers become trained at UNIED. In addition, students at UNIED take an administrative class and it is expected that some of the qualified graduates will go on to become directors of CCLs. UNIED graduates are encouraged to use their newly acquired skills at the local level to carry out community-building activities. Each of the 13 first intake students, who completed their undergraduate coursework moved back to develop their home communities, not only in various parts of Battambang but as far afield as the Saang region and Sabah, Malaysia.

Central to the activities of both CORDE and UNIED has been a vision of service to the needs of wider society. In one noteworthy example, the acting director of the Vocational Training Center (VTC) in Battambang noted that of his 200 students, most were from very poor, landless, and guardianless families. Consequently, most of these students had been excluded or dropped out from secondary schools. The initiative of a Bahá'í teacher offering a Literacy and Empowerment Course for second-year students at the VTC led to CORDE creating a formal relationship with the Center. UNIED third-year students taught a program focusing on raising awareness of the importance of moral education in students' lives, improving their powers of expression, teaching the virtues of work and the application of values to their daily lives. As a result, 90 percent of students felt the program had helped them increase their power of expression. All students felt they had more awareness of the importance of moral education and 75 percent of them expressed a wish to continue with moral education courses if offered.

By 2005, the first two contingents of UNIED students had completed their studies, the syllabus had been developed further, and a positive reputation of UNIED's programs was spreading. CORDE, meanwhile, had established 47 tutorial classes reaching more than 1,200 children and youth in Battambang by March 2005. A graduate from UNIED in Saang began three classes with 85 children and junior youth around the community. CORDE began providing basic english for children age 4–6, moral education for 6–11 year olds, and a Junior

Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program in the Khmer language for 12–14 year olds. CORDE's teacher training programs now extend to CCLs in new areas, including Poipet and Phnom Penh.

Miss Moeurng Chantha, a CORDE graduate, began a class with a small number of children in her neighborhood and moved on to establish many classes. "I am teaching children and junior youth, hoping that when they grow up they will become good leaders for society," she says. She is now director of the second CORDE Center of Learning in Autok. Some of her junior youth class participants have also become CORDE teachers.

UNIED's aims continue to include strengthening and improving its academic programs and the community service components of its courses. Its commitment to diversity involves providing admissions to students from neighboring areas and countries, as well as welcoming volunteer teachers and staff from abroad. Stronger collaboration is constantly being built between CORDE and its CCLs around the wider region. UNIED now offers a six-month certificate, a one-year diploma, an associate degree, and undergraduate degree programs in Education for Development, Community Development, and Human Resource Development. The Education for Development Program is designed to put into practice educational curricula for preschool, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. The Community Development Program is directed towards encouraging and training the participants to discover systematically their culture, traditions, and economy, as well as developing spiritual and political knowledge. The Human Resource Development Program aims to train professionals in moral leadership as well as the concept of selfless service.

Critical factors in the success in Battambang have included the organizations' understanding of the vital role of basic education for poverty reduction and the strength of its grassroots commitment to expanding access to education. Its influence is also being felt farther afield. In the Reangkesay locality, for example, a public school principal requested CORDE to conduct morals classes for the students once a week, which soon grew into two days a week. In another locality, a UNIED student began a children's class. Because of his service, religious leaders requested to start a class and decided to build a grass-roofed school. Through the Bahá'í-inspired curricula offered in classes and the dedication of the teachers, the attitudes



UniED graduates gain the confidence and practical skills needed to contribute to the material and social progress of Cambodia.

of the children clearly change and parents and community leaders request CORDE to open more classes.

Cambodia has enthusiastically embarked on a process of growth and development with great determination, assisted by numerous governments and organizations. With as much as 39 percent of the population living below the poverty line, the government's highest priority has been to promote economic progress and social development. While there are many NGOs working in the area of micro-credit, for example, current developments are largely driven by the conviction that economic activities are central to human well-being. The role of CORDE and UniED in Battambang has been crucial to developing the capacity of individuals and communities to commit themselves not only to economic but to educational and moral progress. One of Cambodia's principal challenges has been to find a committed group of young workers who are willing to stay in their home districts to serve the needs of their fellow human beings, and not migrate to work in major cities. Through the training given by CORDE and UniED, and the provision of a small allowance, these

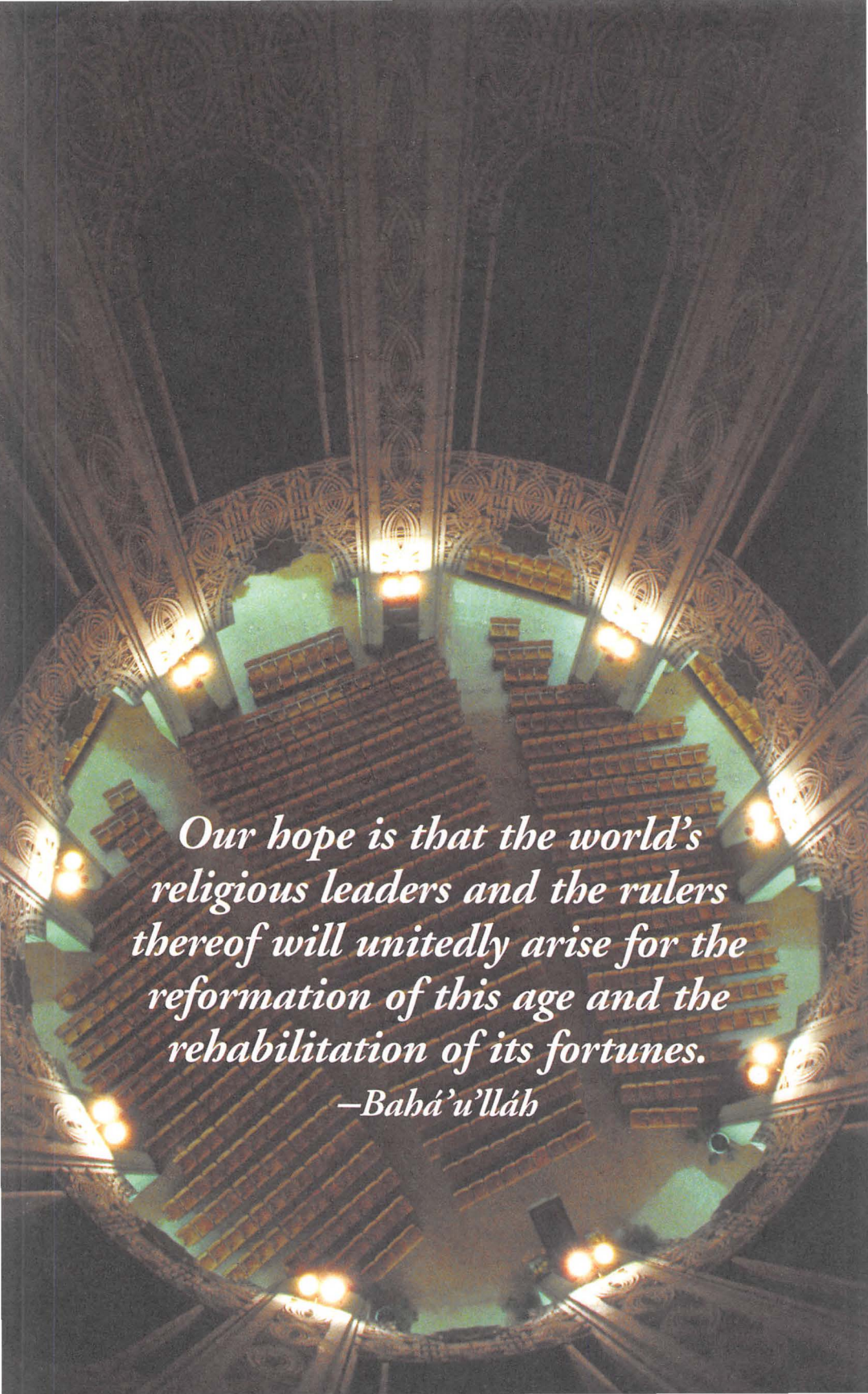
workers have stayed and formed a core group dedicated to serving the needs of the community.

A remarkable feature has been that individuals who are themselves living in poverty are being motivated to give generously of their time and skills to uplift the lives of their countrymen. At the time of writing, CORDE and UNIED between them have engaged more than 6,500 individuals in processes of education that empower them to further enhance the development of their communities. The Bahá'ís in Cambodia have evolved a development process that is sustainable. Over the years, CORDE's informal classes have grown from 2 to more than 50 reaching around 1,000 students. Volunteer teachers are now serving more than another 1,000 through the CCLS.

Battambang—a vital center of the country—has yet to gain a significant share of the development efforts accorded to other parts of Cambodia. The creation of wealth and its equitable distribution are indispensable to “integral development,” meaning the necessary development of all participants in the society to play their part in influencing its material and social prosperity. UNIED and CORDE have discovered that central to this conceptual framework of integral development is the involvement of the local population in discovering their own process of development. They have also learned, however, that it is necessary to add to this involvement the recognition of the fundamental nobility of a human being and a respect for human honor. These agencies are attempting to apply the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith to building the necessary capacities in individuals, institutions and communities so that they can effectively participate in an integral process of material and social prosperity. Their challenge has been to shift the inclination of participants who previously were driven solely by material motivations. As such, they offer themselves as a social laboratory for learning, engaging the people of Battambang in the generation and application of knowledge for education and development. Through these means, it is now being seen that their community can progress both materially and socially.

NOTES

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 103.



*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.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

The Search for Values in an Age of Transition

*A statement of the Bahá'í International Community
on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the United
Nations, October 2005.*

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

In the collective effort to find answers to these questions, a new paradigm is taking hold—that of the interconnected nature of our challenges and our prosperity. Whether the issue is poverty, the proliferation of weapons, the role of women, HIV/AIDS, global trade, religion, environmental sustainability, the well-being of children, corruption, or the rights of minority populations, it is clear that

none of the problems facing humanity can be adequately addressed in isolation from one another. The blurring of national boundaries in the face of global crises has shown, beyond a doubt, that the body of humankind represents one organic whole.¹ The practical implications of this emergent paradigm for the reform of the United Nations are the focus of the Bahá'í International Community's contribution on the 60th anniversary of this august body.²

The processes of United Nations reform must be understood as part of a broader evolutionary course, starting with early forms of international cooperation such as the League of Nations and leading to increasing levels of coherence in the administration of human affairs, facilitated by the creation of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the growing body of international law, the emergence and integration of newly independent states, and mechanisms for regional and global cooperation. The last 15 years alone have seen the establishment of the World Trade Organization, the International Criminal Court, the African Union, the significant expansion of the European Union, the global coordination of civil society campaigns, and the articulation of the Millennium Development Goals—an unprecedented global development framework aimed at the eradication of poverty worldwide. In the course of these developments, the definition of state sovereignty—a cornerstone of the modern system of international relations and a foundational principle of the United Nations Charter—has itself emerged as the object of vigorous debate: What are the limits of traditional notions of sovereignty? What responsibilities do states have towards their citizens and towards each other? How should such responsibilities be enforced?³ Although uneven and fraught with setbacks, the emergent institutions, movements, and discourse evidence an increasing drive towards unity in world affairs and constitute one of the pervasive features of social organization at the end of the twentieth century and in the first years of the new millennium.

Why, then, given the dramatic increase of mechanisms and fora for cooperation is the world so deeply divided against itself? Why the universal affliction, which assails relations between those of different cultures, creeds, religions, political affiliations, economic status, and gender? To answer these questions, we must examine dispassionately the legal standards, political and economic theories, values and

religious formulae, which have ceased to promote the welfare of humankind. The advancement of men and boys at the expense of women and girls has sorely limited the creative and material capacities of communities to develop and address their problems; the neglect of cultural and religious minorities has intensified ancient prejudices setting peoples and nations against one another; an unbridled nationalism has trampled the rights and opportunities of citizens in other nations; weak states have erupted in conflict, lawlessness, and massive refugee flows; narrow economic agendas exalting material prosperity have often suffocated the social and moral development required for the equitable and beneficent use of wealth. Such crises have laid bare the limits of traditional approaches to governance and put before the United Nations the inescapable question of values: Which values are capable of guiding the nations and peoples of the world out of the chaos of competing interests and ideologies towards a world community capable of inculcating the principles of justice and equity at all levels of human society?

The question of values and their inextricable link to systems of religion and belief has emerged on the world stage as a subject of consuming global importance, which the United Nations cannot afford to ignore. While the General Assembly has passed a number of resolutions addressing the role of religion in the promotion of peace and calling for the elimination of religious intolerance,⁴ it struggles to grasp fully both the constructive role that religion can play in creating a peaceful global order and the destructive impact that religious fanaticism can have on the stability and progress of the world. A growing number of leaders and deliberative bodies acknowledge that such considerations must move from the periphery to the center of debate—recognizing that the full impact of religion-related variables⁵ on governance, diplomacy, human rights, development, notions of justice, and collective security must be better understood.⁶ Neither political leaders nor academics foresaw such a widespread re-emergence of religion in the public sphere, nor did the practice of international relations develop the conceptual tools to address religion in a meaningful way.⁷ Our inherited notions of religion as an irrelevant and obstructionist voice in the international public sphere offer no help in resolving the complex problems before the leaders

of the world's nations. In fact, the appropriate role of religion in the public sphere is one of the most pressing issues of our time.

That religions have been manipulated and used for the accomplishment of narrow ends cannot be denied. Yet, a careful historical analysis reveals that the periods of greatest advancement in human civilization have been those where both faith and reason were permitted to work together, drawing on the resources of the totality of human insight and experience. For example, during the height of Muslim civilization, sciences, philosophy, and the arts flourished; a vibrant culture of learning propelled the human imagination to new heights, providing, among others, the mathematical basis for many of today's technological innovations. Among humanity's diverse civilizations, religion has provided the framework for new moral codes and legal standards, which have transformed vast regions of the globe from brutish and often anarchical systems to more sophisticated forms of governance. The existing debate about religion in the public sphere, however, has been driven by the voices and actions of extreme proponents on both sides—those who impose their religious ideology by force, whose most visible expression is terrorism—and those who deny any place for expressions of faith or belief in the public sphere. Yet, neither extreme is representative of the majority of humankind and neither promotes a sustainable peace.

At this juncture of our evolution as a global community, the search for shared values—beyond the clash of extremes—is paramount for effective action. A concern with exclusively material considerations will fail to appreciate the degree to which religious, ideological, and cultural variables shape diplomacy and decision-making. In an effort to move beyond a community of nations bound by primarily economic relationships to one with shared responsibilities for one another's well-being and security, the question of values must take a central place in deliberations, be articulated, and made explicit. While the United Nations has repeatedly emphasized the need for multilateralism, such efforts alone, while a step in the right direction, will not provide a sufficient basis for community building between nations; collaboration alone does not confer legitimacy or ensure benevolent outcomes for the greater good. In order to fulfill the promises of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties and resolutions, we

can no longer be content with a passive tolerance of each other's world views; what is required is an active search for those common values and moral principles which will lift up the condition of every woman, man, and child, regardless of race, class, religion, or political opinion.

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

From the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, we offer the following vision, in the realization of which the members of the worldwide Bahá'í community across 191 nations are engaged:

A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labor definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law—the product of the considered judgment of the world's federated representatives—shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenships.⁸

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

Human rights and the rule of law

No effective and peaceful international order can be founded and sustained unless it is firmly grounded in the principles of justice and the rule of law. An adherence to such principles provides the requisite stability and legitimacy required to gain the support of peoples and nations that the system aims to serve. We offer the following recommendations:

- The grave threats posed by religious extremism, intolerance, and discrimination require the United Nations to address this issue openly and earnestly. We call on the United Nations to affirm unequivocally an individual's right to change his or her religion under international law. The General Assembly may request the International Court of Justice, under Article 96 of the United Nations Charter, to issue an advisory opinion on the issue of freedom of religion or belief. Specifically, the Court could be asked whether the principle of freedom of religion or belief has attained the status of *jus cogens*, customary international law, or is merely left to the interpretation of each state. Such a clarification would help to remove fallacious interpretations of this right and lend moral force to the condemnation of policies and practices that violate the principle of non-discrimination in matters of religion or belief.⁹
- Beyond the ongoing structural and functional reforms of the United Nations human rights machinery, the legitimacy of this machinery must be restored through its consistent adherence to the highest principles of justice, including those elaborated in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights. Only in this way, will it secure the legitimacy and trust of Member States and their citizens required for it to exercise its mandate.

- The General Assembly should consider setting a timeline for the universal ratification of international human rights treaties.
- The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, bolstered by the requisite moral, intellectual, and material resources, must now become the standard-bearer in the field of human rights and an effective tool in alleviating the suffering of individuals and groups whose rights are denied.
- As one of the most effective instruments for the protection of human rights, Special Procedures should receive adequate budgetary and administrative support. Government cooperation with Special Procedures should not only be limited to access to the country in question but, equally important, should include full consideration of subsequent recommendations. These should be reflected in the interactive dialogues between the Rapporteur and Member States.
- The Public Information section of the Office of the High Commissioner should be developed in order to allow resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights/Human Rights Council, recommendations of the Special Procedures, and concluding observations of the treaty monitoring bodies to be accorded more prominence in the media. This could include, for example, the translation of documents into relevant national languages in order to generate more publicity.
- The Office of the High Commissioner, along with the Council, should continue its productive engagement with nongovernmental organizations, which, since its inception, has contributed positively both to the work of the Office and to the development of nongovernmental organizations' capacity to interact meaningfully in this context.

Development

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

- The capacity of people to participate in the generation and application of knowledge is an essential component of human development. As such, priority must be given to the education of girls and boys, women and men in order to enable them to set the path of their own development and to apply their knowledge in the service of the greater community. The United Nations should consider that in terms of economic investment, the education of girls may well yield the highest return of all investments available in developing countries considering both private benefits, as well as returns to family members and the greater community.¹⁰
- We submit for the consideration of the United Nations five spiritual principles, which may serve as a basis for the creation of indicators of human development, to be used alongside existing measures of development. These principles include: unity in diversity, equity and justice, equality of the sexes, trustworthiness and moral leadership, and the freedom of conscience, thought, and religion.¹¹
- The rich countries of the world have a moral obligation to remove export and trade-distorting measures that bar the entry of countries struggling to participate in the global market. The Monterrey Consensus, which recognizes the importance of creating a “more open, rule-based, non-discriminatory and equitable” system of trade is a step in the right direction.¹²

- Alongside reform in systems of trade, countries must facilitate the flow of labor and address the dehumanizing impact of trafficking in persons, which leads to widespread economic and sexual exploitation of people seeking a better life.

Democracy

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

Beyond the administration of material affairs, governance is a moral exercise. It is the expression of a trusteeship—a responsibility to protect and to serve the members of the social polity. Indeed, the exercise of democracy will succeed to the extent that it is governed by the moral principles that are in harmony with the evolving interests of a rapidly maturing human race. These include: trustworthiness and integrity needed to win the respect and support of the governed; transparency; consultation with those affected by decisions being arrived at; objective assessment of needs and aspirations of communities being served; and the appropriate use of scientific and moral resources.¹³ We offer the following recommendations:

- To secure the legitimacy, confidence, and support needed for the realization of its goals, the United Nations needs to address the democratic deficits in its own agencies and deliberations.
- Thorough deliberation of the pressing issues of the day requires the United Nations to develop modes for constructive and

systematic engagement with organizations of civil society (including businesses and religious organizations) as well as members of national parliaments. The relationship between civil society organizations, parliamentarians and the traditional diplomatic processes of the United Nations need not be one of competition but rather complementarity, rooted in the recognition that the relative strengths of all three constituencies are necessary for effective decision-making and subsequent implementation.¹⁴ We urge the United Nations to give serious consideration to the proposals put forth in the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relationships.¹⁵

- A healthy democracy must be founded on the principle of the equality of men and women and equal recognition of their contribution to the establishment of a just society. In its efforts to promote democracy, the Member States of the United Nations must vigilantly work for the inclusion of women in all facets of governance in their respective countries. This is not a privilege but a practical necessity for the achievement of the high-minded and complex goals before the Organization today.
- The meaningful integration of minority groups in democratic processes is of critical importance—both to shield minorities from the abuses of the past and to encourage their participation and responsibility for the well-being of society. We urge Member States, in their work to promote democracy, to strive for the full inclusion of minorities—belonging to any faith, race, or class—in the processes of goal-setting and deliberation. As the cultural make-up of states becomes increasingly fluid and diverse, no one cultural or religious group can lay claim to an adequate definition of the national interest.

Collective security

We welcome the United Nations' efforts to articulate a more comprehensive vision of collective security, based on the understanding that in our interconnected world, a threat to one is a threat to all. The Bahá'í Faith envisions a system of collective security within a framework of a global federation, a federation in which national borders

have been conclusively defined, and in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded all rights to maintain armaments except for purposes of maintaining internal order.¹⁶ While cognizant of the grave shortfalls of the current system of collective security, we commend the Security Council for its landmark Resolution on “Women, Peace, and Security,”¹⁷ recognizing for the first time in its history the needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations¹⁸ and their enduring role in the promotion of peace. We offer the following recommendations:

- To address the democracy deficit and relentless politicization of the Security Council, the United Nations must in due course move towards adopting a procedure for eventually eliminating permanent membership and veto power.¹⁹ Alongside procedural reforms, a critical change in attitude and conduct are needed. Member States must recognize that in holding seats on the Security Council, and as signatories to the Charter of the United Nations, they have a solemn moral and legal obligation to act as trustees for the entire community of nations, not as advocates of their national interests.²⁰
- A definition of terrorism must be adopted. We agree with the Secretary-General’s characterization of terrorism as any action, “intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or noncombatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act.” Moreover, it is imperative that problems such as terrorism be consistently addressed within the context of other issues that disrupt and destabilize society.²¹
- We urge the United Nations to take the necessary steps to increase the participation of women at all levels of decision-making in conflict resolution and peace processes, locally, nationally, and internationally, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

We believe the task of establishing a peaceful world is now in the hands of the leaders of the nations of the world, by virtue of the tremendous responsibilities with which they have been entrusted. Their challenge now is to restore the trust and confidence of their

citizens in themselves, their government, and the institutions of the international order through a record of personal integrity, sincerity of purpose, and unwavering commitment to the highest principles of justice and the imperatives of a world hungering for unity. The great peace long envisioned by the peoples and nations of the world is well within our grasp.²²

NOTES

- ¹ While the United Nations has begun to formally recognize the interdependence of human rights, development, and collective security, such a holistic perspective has been echoed throughout the contributions of civil society organizations to the work of the United Nations, as, for example, at the global United Nations conferences including the Conference on Environment and Development (1992), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), the World Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the World Summit for Social Development (1995), and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (1996).
- ² The Bahá'í International Community, in its capacity as an international, nongovernmental organization, has been actively involved with the United Nations since its founding conference in 1945. On the occasion of the United Nations' 10th anniversary, the Bahá'í International Community submitted its proposals for Charter Revision to the Secretary-General based on the recognition that "real sovereignty is no longer vested in the institutions of the national state because the nations have become interdependent; that the existing crisis is moral and spiritual as well as political; and that the existing crisis can only be surmounted by the achievement of a world order representative of the peoples as well as the nations of mankind." (Bahá'í International Community, "Proposals for Charter Revision Submitted to the United Nations by the Bahá'í International Community [1955]," *The Bahá'í World 1954–1963* (Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., Binghamton, New York, 1970). In 1995, the Bahá'í International Community released a statement on the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, which highlighted the trend toward the ever-increasing interdependence of humanity and presented proposals for the resuscitation of the General Assembly, development of the executive function, strengthening the world court, promoting economic and moral development, human rights and the advancement of women (Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point for All Nations*, Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office, New York, 1995.) Throughout its history of association with the United Nations, the Bahá'í International Community has contributed its vision and experience through submissions

dealing with the advancement of women, human rights, the environment, global prosperity, and economic development, among others.

- ³ In 2000, in response to the alarming failure of the international community to intervene, or to intervene effectively, in massive crises such as Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda, the Canadian government established a commission to address questions about the legal, moral, operational, and political dimensions of humanitarian intervention. The resulting International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty released its findings and central principles in a 2001 report titled, *Responsibility to Protect*. Repeated failure to intervene effectively in the crisis in Darfur, Sudan, has lent even greater urgency to the definition of legal standards and operational norms for intervention.
- ⁴ For example, "Promotion of interreligious dialogue" (A/RES/59/23), the "Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation" (A/RES/59/142), the "Global Agenda for Dialogue Among Civilizations" (A/RES/56/6), the "Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance" (A/RES/59/199), and the UNESCO Director-General's report (A/59/201) to the 59th Session of the UN General Assembly "Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation" (A/RES/58/128).
- ⁵ These include, among others, religious teachings and interpretation, followers of religions, religious leaders, and institutions.
- ⁶ While a detailed description is beyond the scope of this statement, examples of the resurgence of religion as a matter of urgent political importance include: widespread violence in the name of religion; spread of religious fundamentalism and its impact on political regimes; increasing tension between religion and States' policies; challenges in the design of national and regional governing structures capable of satisfying demands for fair representation from different religious groups; social, political, and economic integration of religious minorities; clashes between religious and civil law; impact of religion in international policy forums (i.e. International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994; Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995); and violation of human rights in the name of religion including the right to change one's religion. Such developments are set against the increased efforts at interfaith dialogue and cooperation between religious leaders and their communities; the impressive global networks of religiously inspired charitable and humanitarian organizations and movements calling attention to the ethical dimensions of global economic integration; the intellectual and moral legacy of religions in the articulation of moral principles (e.g. just war ethic); the capacity of religions to move individuals and groups towards selflessness, nonviolence, and reconciliation.
- ⁷ Several factors have contributed to the near complete rejection of religion in concepts of international relations. First, the social sciences were based

upon the work of those who believed that religion was giving way to rational and scientific modes of thought which would crush what they saw as the ignorance and superstition caused by religion, thereby ushering in a period of modernity. Second, “not only was international relations theory (like other social sciences) founded upon the belief that religion was receding from the world as an important factor, it can be argued that the modern context for the relations between states was founded on intentionally secular principles. The modern concept for the territorial state, the basis for modern international relations, was articulated by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648,” which, “was designed to end the Thirty Years’ War between Protestant and Catholic States. In doing so, it developed a format for relations between states which did not include religion.” (Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler (2005), “The Question of Religion and World Politics,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 17: 296–98).

- ⁸ Shoghi Effendi, “The Goal of a New World Order” [1931], *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991).
- ⁹ Bahá'í International Community, *Freedom to Believe* (Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office, New York, 2005).
- ¹⁰ According to the World Bank, in addition to being more productive in market work, educated women have smaller families, fewer of their children die in infancy, and the children who survive are healthier and better educated. Educated women are also better equipped to enter the paid labor force, which is critical to the survival of the many female-headed households in developing countries. Nations with higher levels of female school enrollment show higher levels of economic productivity, lower fertility, lower infant and maternal mortality, and longer life expectancy than countries that have not achieved as high enrollment levels for girls. (World Bank, “The Benefits of Education for Women” (1993), www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/hnp/hddflash/hcnote/hrno02.html).
- ¹¹ For a detailed discussion see: Bahá'í International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*, a concept paper written for the World Faiths Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998).
- ¹² The Monterrey Consensus (A/CONF.198/11).
- ¹³ In the 1980s and 1990s the world made dramatic progress in opening up political systems and expanding political freedoms. Over 80 countries took significant steps towards democracy, and today 140 of the world's nearly 200 countries hold multiparty elections—more than ever before. Despite these positive developments, Gallup International's Millennium Survey (1999) found that of the 50,000 people surveyed in 60 countries, less than a third felt that their country was governed by the will of the people. Only

1 in 10 respondents said that their government responded to the people's will.

- ¹⁴ Over the last five years, the United Nations has generated numerous examples of innovative governance: In 2000, the United Nations Economic and Social Council established a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to serve as an advisory body to the Council on indigenous issues relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, and health and human rights, culminating a decades-long struggle of indigenous peoples to regain standing within the global community; in June 2005, the General Assembly—for the first time—held interactive hearings with civil society and the private sector, in which some 200 non-governmental organizations presented their views on United Nations reform for consideration by Member States in preparation for the 2005 United Nations World Summit; also in June 2005, a tripartite convening group composed of a core group of Member States (Argentina, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Gambia, Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Spain, Thailand, and Tunisia), civil society, the United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized a conference titled “Interfaith Cooperation for Peace,” which aimed to provide input to the 2005 World Summit regarding strategies to promote interfaith cooperation for peace. It was the first time that a Member-State-initiated conference had been co-organized and led by Member States, civil society, and United Nations agencies working alongside on another. Given the challenging nature of the subject matter, the organizational approach provided a useful template for similar endeavors in the future. Also worthy of note is that, in 2002, the International Parliamentary Union was granted permanent observer status in the General Assembly of the United Nations, setting in motion new forms of cooperation.

- ¹⁵ Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relationships, *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the UN and Global Governance* (United Nations: New York, 2004).

- ¹⁶ For the system to be successful, unity, strength, elasticity, and public opinion are essential: unity of thought and purpose among the permanent members, strength involving the use of adequate force to ensure the efficacy of the system, elasticity to enable the system to meet the legitimate needs of its afflicted upholders, and universal public opinion—that of women and men—to secure collective action.

- ¹⁷ Security Council Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 (2000)).

- ¹⁸ Typically wars and conflicts have drawn little distinction between militants and civilians, and between adults and children. Yet armed conflicts affect women and girls differently from men and boys. For example, rape and sexual violence perpetrated by the armed forces, whether governmental or

other actors, including peacekeeping personnel, increase the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Most of the HIV/AIDS victims in developing countries are women and girls. That disease leaves millions of orphans who, in most cases, are cared for by older women.

- ¹⁹ While the veto has often served as an important safeguard against the oppressive majoritarianism, it has also obstructed effective action against countries that pose a threat to their neighbors. An interim measure may include not using veto power when voting on questions of genocide or other gross threats to international peace and security.
- ²⁰ The United Nations Charter states that, "In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf," (Article 24).
- ²¹ Such disruptive and destabilizing factors include, among others: governments' failure to meaningfully integrate religious and ethnic minorities; increased access to weapons; the destabilization and collapse of governments; and a general sense of social, political, economic, cultural crisis—all of which combine to create an environment that could invite violent radical ideologies to take hold and flourish.
- ²² This requires the implementation of the Secretary-General's strategic plan of action (A/49/587), which calls for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes. Member States need to follow through with their commitments under international law including the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

A New Framework for Global Prosperity

The Bahá'í International Community's submission to the 2006 Commission on Social Development on the review of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, January 2006.

Any definition of poverty and course for its elimination is shaped by prevailing notions about the nature and purpose of the development process. The combined efforts of the United Nations and civil society have significantly expanded the understanding of poverty and development. The recognition of the interrelatedness of development, human rights, and human security; the increased awareness of the interactions between the market and the legal, social, cultural, and physical environment in which it operates;¹ the acknowledgement of human well-being as the goal of development; efforts to introduce more equity into systems of global trade and finance; and the emphasis on human solidarity as the basis for sustainable development—these have generated a worldwide momentum in the drive to find enduring solutions to the scourge of poverty.

Despite these advances, however, the underlying materialistic assumptions driving poverty eradication efforts remain virtually unchallenged: it is generally accepted that an increase in material resources will eradicate this condition from human life. The Millennium Development Goals, while effective in catalyzing poverty alleviation efforts, have also framed development primarily in terms

of the improvement of material conditions.² Yet the most persistent ills obstructing the peaceful development of peoples and nations—the marginalization of girls and women, failing states, the lack of political freedoms, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the proliferation of weapons and violent conflict, inter-ethnic and racial tensions, religious intolerance and extremism, lawlessness, and growing unemployment—cannot be alleviated by material means alone. These social ills evidence a different kind of poverty—one rooted in the values and attitudes that shape relationships between individuals, communities, and nations, as well as between the governors and the governed.

The Bahá'í International Community views the purpose of development as contributing to the foundation for a new social and international order, capable of creating and sustaining conditions in which human beings can advance morally, culturally, and intellectually.³ This purpose is rooted in the understanding that the transformation of society will involve profound changes in the individual as well as the deliberate and systematic re-creation of social structures. From this perspective, *poverty can be defined as the absence of resources—physical, social, and ethical—necessary for the establishment of conditions which promote the moral, material, and creative capacities of individuals, communities, and institutions.* Guided by this definition and the belief in the inherent goodness and essential spiritual nature of every human being, we submit the following recommendations to the United Nations on the occasion of its review of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

Overcome the limitations of particularistic mindsets

The eradication of poverty will require a fundamental paradigm shift on the part of nations and individuals. Our particularistic frames of reference—defined by ethnic or religious community, nation, “North” and “South,” “developed” and “developing,” or regional alliances—must gradually give way to an emerging sense of global solidarity and responsibility. Facilitated by efforts to integrate human rights into development and security frameworks, initiatives to create more just systems of trade and finance, evolving concepts

of sovereignty, a growing body of international law, and a dramatic increase in travel and communication technology, such a shift is already well underway. We must now strive to enlarge our notions of responsibility and citizenship until we come to understand the struggles and progress of other peoples and nations as our own. Such a paradigm shift represents a practical response to the recognition that peace and prosperity are indivisible and that no sustainable benefit can be conferred on a nation or community if the welfare of the nations as a whole is ignored or neglected.

Enhance local deliberative and problem-solving capacity

Often the target populations of poverty eradication projects are perceived as masses of undernourished people, overwhelmed by their circumstances and needs rather than capable agents of change in their communities. The challenge for development efforts is to find methods that allow individuals and communities to solve their own problems; the ability of a community to take on more complex social issues is a key indicator of progress. One of the essential skills involved is that of group decision-making—bringing together diverse views, searching for the best solution, and generating commitment and solidarity to carry the decision through.

Implement gender-based budgeting

Many studies confirm that female poverty cannot be conceptualized the same way as male poverty, given that women's social and cultural roles and their relationship to systems of power and authority differ from those of men.⁴ These differences, however, are rarely reflected in official poverty statistics and, consequently, do not inform resource allocation at local, national, and regional levels.⁵ In order for governments to fulfill their commitments to gender equality, public expenditures must include a gender analysis—involving women in budget decision-making and assessing the impact of fiscal measures on the status of women in the community.

As women hold approximately 15 percent of elected parliamentary seats globally, the power to legislate and effect change at the

national and global levels rests primarily with men. It is equally their responsibility to push for the unconditional ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women by member states and to put in place accountability mechanisms when commitments are not followed through. The extension of opportunities to women and the emergence of new forms of partnership between men and women have the potential to revolutionize every institution of society from the family to the government—creating the very conditions that make progress and prosperity possible.

Create rural centers of technology training and research

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

Expand development indicators to assess ethical and moral capacities

The measures and indicators used to assess poverty and human development, such as the gross national product and the Human Development Index, largely determine what is valued and, as such, shape development policy and priorities. The progress of communities and nations requires not only material inputs and legal measures to secure order, but the development of moral capabilities to govern behavior and decision-making by individuals and institutions.

In an effort to advance the methods for assessing development at the community level from a moral perspective, the Bahá'í

International Community has proposed the following set of principles as a basis for the construction of ethically based development indicators: unity in diversity (the extent to which all members of a community are integrated into community life); equity and justice (to ensure that opportunity and access to material and social resources are fairly distributed); gender equality; trustworthiness; and freedom of thought, conscience and belief.⁶ These principles could be applied in the areas of economic development, education, environmental stewardship, and governance, for example, to generate development goals and construct new indicators to measure progress towards these goals.

Eliminate extremes of wealth

Extremes of poverty are linked to extremes of wealth. Given the interconnectedness of the global economic system, one extreme cannot be abolished while the other is allowed to exist. In this regard, efforts to eradicate poverty must include an earnest re-evaluation of global systems and processes—including governance, trade, and private transactions—that perpetuate the growing extremes of wealth and poverty. Greater corporate accountability should not be restricted to the environment and labor standards but also take into account the full panoply of human rights. The legitimacy and social benefit of one's material resources depend on the means by which they are acquired and the end to which they are used.

While the Millennium Development Goals have focused the world's development agenda for the next 10 years, the United Nations must not limit its attention to this relatively short span of time—which confines it to a primarily reactive mode. Alongside short-term goals, the United Nations, with academia and civil society, needs to consider longer-term scenarios and desired outcomes. Such an orientation would allow it to examine a wider range of policy and programmatic options and to cultivate a diversity of intellectual contributions, thereby enriching the visioning process. Let us not be content with minimum standards, narrow material goals, and compromise positions but rather cast a vision of prosperity that can inspire the masses of humanity to work towards its realization in a deliberate act of global solidarity.

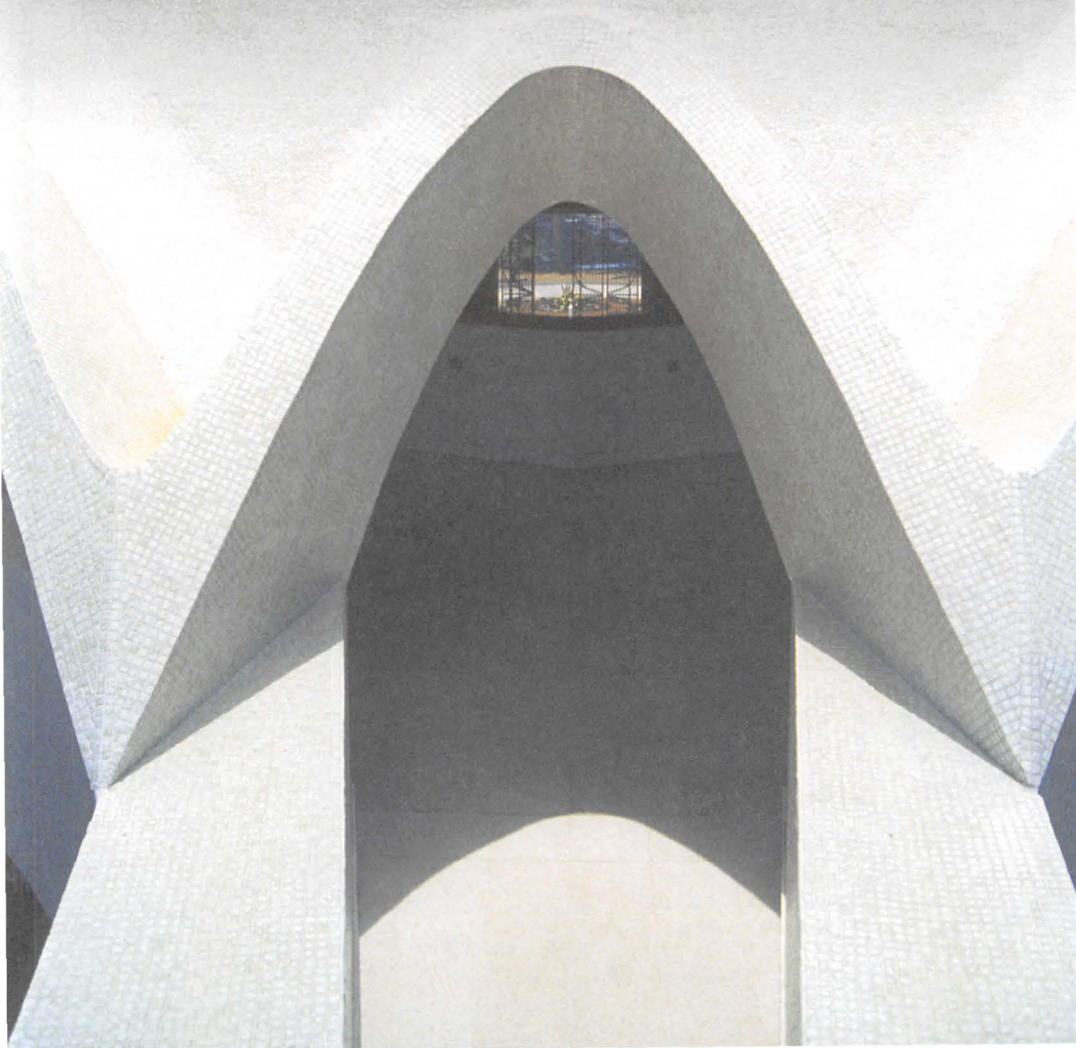
NOTES

- ¹ Jeffrey Sachs, "Clinical Economics," in *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005).
- ² While the Millennium Development Goals set out to promote gender equality, education, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability, they focus primarily on people's material needs, including income poverty, hunger, disease, and provision of shelter.
- ³ This is consistent with Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that, "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized."
- ⁴ *Social Watch Report 2005: Roars and Whispers: Gender and Poverty, Promises vs. Action*, <http://www.socialwatch.org/en/informeImpreso/informe2005.htm>.
- ⁵ Karen Judd, ed., *Gender Budget Initiatives: Strategies, Concepts, and Experiences* (New York: The United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2002).
- ⁶ Bahá'í International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*, a concept paper written for the World Faiths Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998).

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

*Know thou, of a truth, that if the soul
of man hath walked in the ways of
God, it will, assuredly, return and be
gathered to the glory of the Beloved.
By the righteousness of God! It shall
attain a station such as no pen can
depict, or tongue describe.*

—Bahá'u'lláh



Obituaries

DAVID S. RUHE

On 6 September 2005, in Newburgh, New York, USA.

David S. Ruhe, born on 3 January 1913, was a medical doctor, an accomplished filmmaker, a Bahá'í administrator, a painter, and an author. A Bahá'í for more than six decades, he served on the Faith's supreme governing body—the Universal House of Justice—for 25 years.

After graduating from the Temple University School of Medicine in 1941, Dr. Ruhe began his medical career during World War II as a malaria researcher with the United States Public Health Service. In 1954, he was named the first professor of Medical Communications at the University of Kansas Medical School. Among the innovations he introduced at the university were the use of optical fibers for endoscopic cinematography, the projection of high-definition images in surgical theaters, and the videotaping of psychiatric sessions for peer review. He made scores of medical films, winning the Golden Reel award, the Venice Film Festival award, and the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain award for his productions. In the course of his work in medical education, he was appointed director of the Medical Film Institute for the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Dr. Ruhe enthusiastically embraced the Bahá'í Faith in Philadelphia in 1941 and developed an extensive and profound knowledge of its writings and teachings. He served on numerous Local Spiritual Assemblies and national committees. Elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the

United States in 1959, he served as its secretary from 1963 until 1968, when he was elected to the Universal House of Justice, on which he served for five terms of five years each, until 1993.

A prolific writer, Dr. Ruhe authored many papers and two books on aspects of medicine and medical audiovisual communication. Gifted with a capacity to nurture dedication in others, Dr. Ruhe also contributed to the educational work of medical institutions in Haifa during his years at the Bahá'í World Centre.



Dr. David Ruhe

While serving on the Universal House of Justice, Dr. Ruhe developed a passionate interest in the history and archaeology of the Holy Land and wrote *Door of Hope*, a detailed history of Bahá'í holy places in Israel, published in 1983. Later, he authored *Robe of Light*, an historical account of Bahá'u'lláh's early years, published in 1994. During their vacations, he and his wife Margaret enjoyed visiting and supporting fledgling Bahá'í schools, universities, and radio stations around the world—from Thailand to Chile. Upon his 1993 retirement from the Universal House of Justice, Dr. Ruhe and his wife returned to New York State, where he produced a series of documentary TV programs about the Bahá'í Faith.

The Universal House of Justice wrote that Dr. Ruhe's passing deprived the world community of a "steadfast, tireless, long standing servant." It praised his "humanitarian spirit and strength of will" and called for memorial gatherings to be held everywhere, including commemorative services in his honor in all the Bahá'í Houses of Worship.

JOYCE DAHL

On 16 March 2006, in Monterey, California, USA.

Born Joyce Lyon in Burlingame, California, on 14 August 1908, Joyce Dahl first heard of the Bahá'í Faith while studying at Stanford University and joined the Bahá'í community in 1931 after a year in which she attended meetings in Paris, France. From the late 1930s through the 1950s, she served the United States Bahá'í community as a member of various committees. She was

also a founding member of the Local Spiritual Assemblies of Palo Alto and Monterey Carmel Judicial District. She married Arthur Ludwig Dahl in 1936 and raised four sons. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States described Mrs. Dahl as "one of the most knowledgeable, capable, faithful and persevering Bahá'ís of her generation or any other." She was an enthusiastic international traveling teacher who made numerous journeys to, among other places, Barbados, the Falkland Islands, the Windward Islands, St. Lucia, the French Antilles, Haiti, French Guiana, and Hawaii. She served as an Auxiliary Board member in California from 1977 to 1986. Articles written by Mrs. Dahl were published in *Bahá'í Magazine* and previous volumes of *The Bahá'í World*.

MOHAMMAD-ALI DJALALI

On 22 April 2006, in Fuengirola, Spain.

Mohammad-Ali Djalali, born in the early years of the twentieth century, was serving as a Muslim cleric in Iran when a Bahá'í, after hearing one of Mr. Djalali's sermons criticizing the Bahá'í Faith, invited him to his house. Examining a book of Bahá'u'lláh's writings in his host's home led Mr. Djalali to further investigation and eventual acceptance of the Faith. Possessed of an intrepid and independent spirit, Mr. Djalali dedicated himself to promoting the Bahá'í teachings in Iran, and further afield in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Responding to the 1953 call of Shoghi Effendi for the Faith to be taken to many countries of the world where it had not yet been established, Mr. Djalali was among the first Bahá'ís to reside in Morocco, for which Shoghi Effendi gave him the title "Knight of Bahá'u'lláh." From Morocco, Mr. Djalali moved on to Algeria, the Canary Islands, and settled finally in Spain, from where he continued to travel widely throughout the African continent, visiting Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Nigeria, and Mauritania. In the early 1990s, as opportunities for teaching the Bahá'í Faith opened in the republics of the former Soviet Union, Mr. Djalali traveled under arduous conditions, and despite his advanced age, to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Universal House of Justice praised his "dedicated and selfless spirit as evinced in his tireless and historic teaching activities on several continents."

MERE FOX

On 17 July 2005, in Whangerei, New Zealand.

Born in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, on 25 November 1907, Mere Fox hailed from a distinguished tribal ancestry. After becoming a Bahá'í, she served on the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Taupo, formed in the early 1970s, and continued this service for many years. She was also appointed an assistant to the Auxiliary Board member. "Auntie Mere," as she

was affectionately known, devoted several decades to teaching the Bahá'í Faith among the Maori people, promoting its teachings at *marae* (tribal gathering places) around the country. In the mid-1980s, at the request of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand, she was part of an *ope* (traveling team) that visited prominent Maori dignitaries and government departments. She became well known throughout the Bahá'í world when she appeared, at the age of 85, on a satellite television broadcast, performing with other Bahá'ís from New Zealand at the Second Bahá'í World Congress in New York City in 1992. The Universal House of Justice described her as “a staunch and devoted maidservant of Bahá'u'lláh for several decades, known for her dedication to the promotion of His Cause.”

WILLIAM S. HATCHER

On 27 November 2005, in Stratford, Ontario, Canada.

William S. Hatcher was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA, on 20 September 1935. He received his BA and MA degrees from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and his doctorate in mathematical logic from the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland. After serving three years as associate professor of mathematics at the University of Toledo, Ohio, Dr. Hatcher settled with his wife, Judith, in Canada in 1968, where he worked as a professor of mathematics at the Université Laval in Québec City until 1995. Dr. Hatcher was preparing to enter the Christian ministry after undergraduate school when he encountered the Bahá'í Faith in a comparative religions course. He joined the Bahá'í community in 1957, forgoing a scholarship to Yale Divinity School.

Throughout his life as a Bahá'í, Dr. Hatcher served on numerous administrative bodies at the local and national levels. He was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Switzerland (1962–65), the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada (1983–91), and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Russian Federation (1996). He played a vital role in promoting the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith through helping to found the Association for Bahá'í Studies of North America.

Dr. Hatcher's specializations included mathematical logic, philosophy, and the philosophical interpretation of science, religion, and ethics. He wrote more than 50 articles, books, and monographs, infused with a characteristic clarity of expression, humor, and warmth. These included *Logic and Logos: Essays on Science, Religion and Philosophy* (1990) and *Love, Power, and Justice: The Dynamics of Authentic Morality* (1998). *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (1985), co-authored with Douglas Martin, was named by Encyclopedia Britannica in 1986 as book of the year in religion. On learning of Dr. Hatcher's passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote that the “Bahá'í

world has lost one of its brightest minds, one of its most prolific pens,” and that he would long be remembered for his “stalwart faith, forceful exposition, and penetrating insights which characterized nearly half a century of ceaseless services.”

LAGILAGI SEREVI KEAN

On 28 September 2005, in Nasinu, Fiji.

Lagilagi Serevi Kean was born on 27 December 1963, the eldest child in a Bahá'í family. Her parents served the Faith with distinction in Fiji before moving to the Marshall Islands. One of Fiji's first well-educated Bahá'í women, Mrs. Kean was devoted to education, assisting in the development of kindergartens and encouraging youth to become well educated. She served as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Fiji. As chief officer for external affairs, she was actively engaged with the dissemination to the prominent people of Fiji of *The Promise of World Peace*, a statement by the Universal House of Justice prepared for the United Nations International Year of Peace in 1985. In March 2002, she spearheaded a public event for the release of the National Spiritual Assembly's document *Multicultural Harmony in Fiji: Pathway to a Prosperous and Peaceful Future*. She was the chief translator of documents from the Universal House of Justice and served as a representative for the Institution of Ḥuququ'lláh. In recent years, she was an active and enthusiastic supporter of the training institute process.

Professionally, Mrs. Kean worked in the finance section of the Ministry of Education, handling sensitive financial matters. Shortly before her passing, she had been promoted to a newly created position in which she traveled throughout the country to assist schools in developing financial accountability. Mrs. Kean worked conscientiously to bring indigenous Fijians, Indians, and other races together. The Universal House of Justice remarked on her “notable contribution to the promotion of multicultural harmony in Fiji,” and wrote that she “will long be remembered for the dedication with which she carried out the duties of Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer of the National Spiritual Assembly at various times over a period of some twelve years of distinguished service on the national body.”

BETTY KOYL

On 21 April 2006, in Lillehammer, Norway.

Born on 14 January 1917, Betty Koyl spent her early years as a Bahá'í in New York City and Chicago. In the 1940s and 1950s, in the face of threats to her safety, she carried out extensive travels to the Southern states of the United States of America, promoting concepts of the oneness of humanity in racially segregated places such as Little Rock, Arkansas, and Winston-Salem, North

Carolina. In 1960, she moved to Norway to help establish Local Spiritual Assemblies in towns on the southwest coast and later, in the east interior. From the mid-1970s she remained in Lillehammer, where she continued to serve the Bahá'í community with selfless devotion and warm humor. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States wrote, “we recall with admiration and deepest appreciation her 46 years of patient, wise and indefatigable efforts, in several different localities in her adopted Norwegian home . . . to form and maintain Local Spiritual Assemblies, those precious points of light in a Europe darkened by immorality and indifference to religion.”

MARIJKE (MARIA JOHANNA) VAN LITH-BOXMAN

On 16 January 2006, in Leiderdorp, the Netherlands.

Born in Bandung, Indonesia, on 16 January 1924, Marijke van Lith-Boxman moved with her family to the Netherlands when she was a young girl. She married Jacobus Eduard “Bob” van Lith in 1950. The couple lived in Amsterdam, where they were introduced to the Bahá'í Faith in 1951, joining the community the following year. They had seven children. Mrs. van Lith devoted her energies to her large family, as well as to publishing and translations into Dutch of Bahá'í literature. She also served on the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Haarlem. In 1976, Mr. and Mrs. van Lith moved to Suriname, settling in Paramaribo. They both served on the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Suriname, formed in 1977. Mrs. van Lith was soon afterwards appointed as an Auxiliary Board member for Suriname and French Guiana. She traveled widely throughout South America and the Caribbean for the next 17 years. In 1982, she went to Colombia to receive training at the Ruhi Institute and enthusiastically promoted its educational activities on her return. Following her husband's passing in 1983, Mrs. van Lith continued traveling, teaching, and assisting Bahá'í communities in Suriname. She was instrumental in establishing the Surinamese World Religions Day Foundation along with prominent leaders of the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Bahá'í communities. She traveled to some 40 countries promoting the Bahá'í teachings, including Russia, Indonesia, and New Zealand. Following her return to the Netherlands in 1994, Mrs. van Lith dedicated herself to her family and attending conferences as a representative of the Bahá'í International Community. These included the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995, Habitat II in Istanbul in 1996, and the Parliament of World Religions in Cape Town in 1999. A passionate advocate for women's rights, she met and conversed about the Bahá'í teachings with HRH Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands at an event called “Women and Labour 1898–1998.” Mrs. van Lith served on the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Leiderdorp from 1994 until her passing on the morning of her 82nd birthday. On hearing of her passing, the Universal

House of Justice wrote that her “longstanding dedication to the promotion of the Cause is recalled with gratitude and admiration.”

FREDERICK PALMER LOCKE

On 19 January 2006, in Limbe, Malawi.

Frederick Palmer Locke was born in Port Said, Egypt, on 20 March 1921. His early years were plagued by a congenital heart condition and, after his family sought a better climate by moving to California, USA, he was often confined to bed for months at a time. He enrolled in college several times but always had to drop out because of his health. Mr. Locke had known about the Bahá'í Faith since the 1940s when his sister Isobel (Sabri) embraced its teachings. He registered himself as a Bahá'í in 1967, after his first marriage ended in divorce, and dedicated himself completely to the service of the Faith. He remarried in 1970 and served on the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Grass Valley, California. In February 1975, he and his family moved to Malawi. Mr. Locke served the Faith in many capacities in Malawi, as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly, attending six International Conventions as a delegate, as treasurer of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Blantyre, and on numerous national committees. Mr. Locke was deeply respected and admired by many people, including numerous friends of Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Christian origins, who delivered words of love and respect at his funeral.

JOHN MCHENRY III

On 18 January 2006, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA.

John McHenry III, who was born on 22 November 1932 in Evanston, Illinois, was serving as an Army private stationed in Japan when he began to travel to Korea in the company of several other Bahá'í servicemen to promote the Bahá'í teachings. Despite a history of Bahá'í visitors dating back to the 1920s, no Bahá'ís had settled in Korea before 1953. The country elected its first Local Spiritual Assemblies in 1956 and, with the encouragement of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Mr. McHenry was able to establish permanent residence there in 1957. He settled in Kwangju and joined the teaching faculty at Chosun University. Mr. McHenry traveled throughout South Korea giving public talks about the Bahá'í Faith. In January 1963, he was appointed as an Auxiliary Board member. In 1964, Mr. McHenry married Ok-Sun Pak, with whom he raised three children. That same year, Korea's first National Spiritual Assembly was formed, by which time the Bahá'í community numbered several thousand. The McHenrys returned to the United States in 1966 but stayed determined to contribute to the development of the Bahá'í community in Korea. They moved back in 1969 and stayed until the mid-1970s. During this time, South Korea's Bahá'í population doubled, and Bahá'í marriage and holy days gained official recognition. Mr. McHenry also served as the first

Continental Counsellor to reside in Korea. On his return to the United States, Mr. McHenry worked for many years as a computer specialist in Washington, DC, and Denver, Colorado. He and his wife moved to Albuquerque in 1987. There, he served at various times as secretary or treasurer on the Local Spiritual Assembly. He maintained his great passion for teaching the Bahá'í Faith and held study classes. He passed away after a long and courageous battle with cancer. The Universal House of Justice, on learning of his passing, praised his "eagerness and reliability" and "staunchness of faith worthy of emulation."

RUTH KATHARINE MEYER

On 29 March 2006, in Linderos, Chile.

Born on 17 January 1908, Ruth Katharine Meyer was a conservatory-trained pianist who, with a degree in business administration and economics, worked as an economic analyst for the US government in Washington DC, where she became a Bahá'í in 1945. Despite being unfamiliar with Spanish, she volunteered to move to Latin America in 1947 after Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote about the great need for Bahá'ís to settle there. She arrived in Caracas, Venezuela, after traveling through several Caribbean islands teaching the Bahá'í Faith. Funding her travels through school-teaching, office work, and other jobs, she visited Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Argentina. In 1953, she opened the Venezuelan island of Margarita to the Bahá'í Faith and was honored by the Guardian with the title "Knight of Bahá'u'lláh." For 11 years, she assisted in the building of Bahá'í communities in several localities, before moving on to St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. She was elected to the inaugural National Spiritual Assembly of the Leeward, Windward, and Virgin Islands and served as its secretary. She participated in a number of projects in Venezuela and the Caribbean, taking the Bahá'í teachings to indigenous people. In 1969, Ms. Meyer moved to southern Chile. The following year, she was appointed as an Auxiliary Board member and spent more than a decade traveling across Chile and to several islands, as well as parts of Argentina and Bolivia. In 1979, she published a book in English and Spanish describing the Bahá'í Faith's development in Latin America. She was an independent and energetic woman, and the Universal House of Justice wrote that Ms. Meyer's "many services to the Cause, including her pioneering in Chile over several decades and her dedicated work in the Mapuche region will long be remembered."

'IZZATU'LLAH RASIKH

On 7 April 2006, in Rockville, Maryland, USA.

The fourth of eight children born into a Bahá'í family in Tehran, Iran, Dr. Rasikh began his career as a physician in 1943 in Khoramshar. He pursued a specialty degree in chest medicine at the University of Paris in France, serving

as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Paris during his studies. On his way back to Iran in 1952, he joined the first group of pilgrims after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War to visit the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa. There he had the opportunity to meet Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. In Tehran, Dr. Rasikh was appointed medical director of a chest hospital operated by Iran's social services system, but he gave up the position four years later to answer a call for Bahá'ís to settle in Indonesia. From 1956 to 1958, he served as professor of medicine at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta. In 1957, he was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of South East Asia. Health concerns forced him to leave in 1958. He went to the University of Mississippi, USA, for advanced studies in cardiology, and then went into private practice in Tehran in 1960. In 1968, he moved to the United States, beginning with a residency in psychiatry in Memphis, Tennessee. For 12 years, he was an attending psychiatrist at a hospital in Raleigh, North Carolina. On his retirement in 1984, he resided in Maryland and Florida before settling in McLean, Virginia. He continued to devote considerable time to Bahá'í activities. In 1985, at the request of the Universal House of Justice, he traveled to Pakistan to counsel Bahá'í refugees who had fled Iran after the 1979 Revolution. He also supported the launch of *Payam-e-Doost*, a program of the Bahá'í International Radio Service, and wrote numerous articles for the Persian-language periodical *Payam-e Bahá'í*. In his 70s, he made an extended visit to Albania to promote the Bahá'í teachings. Dr. Rasikh passed away at the age of 88 after a long illness. On hearing of his passing, the Universal House of Justice described him as a "steadfast, stalwart servant of Bahá'u'lláh, who has left an exemplary record of Bahá'í service spanning more than half a century. His courage as a pioneer to Indonesia . . . his humanitarian endeavors in several countries as a medical expert, and his constant study of the Writings and authorship and translation of articles are outstanding."

GERTRUDE SCHMELZLE

On 24 July 2005, in Caloundra, Queensland, Australia.

Born on 9 March 1922 in Datteln, Westphalia, Germany, Gertrude Schmelzle served the Australian Bahá'í community with great distinction. She and her husband became Bahá'ís in 1962, eight years after they had moved to Australia. Mr. Schmelzle's mother had been raised in the German Templar colony in Haifa, Israel, and had, as a child, encountered 'Abdu'l-Bahá. From the time of their joining the Bahá'í community, Mr. and Mrs. Schmelzle hosted countless gatherings, open to people from diverse cultural backgrounds and walks of life. Their home was always welcoming and many relied on Mrs. Schmelzle for counsel and kindness. For more than four decades, she served the community in various capacities, as a member of Local Spiritual Assemblies and regional committees, and as an assistant to the Auxiliary Board.

Mrs. Schmelzle greatly respected, and was devoted to, the indigenous population of Australia. She enjoyed close friendships with Aboriginal elders and their extended families. Her numerous visits took her to remote areas including Woorabinda, Alice Springs, along the Murray River, and from Cairns through the bush to aboriginal communities. Other travels included attending the One Tribe Institute in North Queensland, the opening of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Western Samoa, and a Health Conference in India. As a natural health practitioner, she was dedicated to a holistic approach combining scientific knowledge and an acute diagnostic skill. Her expertise was sought by many, including three Hands of the Cause of God—‘Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, Mr. John Robarts, and Mr. Abu’l-Qásim Faizi. With her husband’s support, Mrs. Schmelzle also carried out invaluable historical research about Haifa’s German Templar community, gathering photographs and interviews with its members. One interviewee, a 96-year-old woman, recalled sitting on the lap of Bahá’u’lláh when He sojourned briefly at her family’s home. On learning of her passing, the Universal House of Justice praised Mrs. Schmelzle’s “great devotion” and “fidelity for many decades, during which time she made a distinctive contribution to the advancement of the Cause.”

SATANAM SINGARAVADIVELU

On 6 July 2005, in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

Satanam Singaravadivelu was born on 15 October 1940 in Seremban, Malaysia. His parents were ethnic Jaffna Tamils and devoted Hindus who had migrated to Malaysia from Ceylon. Mr. Satanam became a Bahá'í in April 1960 and devoted his energy to youth activities and widely promoting the Bahá'í teachings—including to the Asli people and Tamil-speaking populations, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles by motorcycle. He made extensive visits to Sabah, Sarawak, Burma, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sikkim, India, Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu, and Thailand. Mr. Satanam served on Local Spiritual Assemblies in Seremban, Jelebu, Port Dickson, and Rantau. He was a keen children’s class teacher, his warm and loving nature being a natural magnet for young people. He was appointed as an Auxiliary Board member in 1979. He served in this capacity until 1993, when he moved to Cambodia. He was also appointed as the first representative of the Institution of Ḥuququ’lláh for West Malaysia. He served again as an Auxiliary Board member in Cambodia and played a key role in the re-formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Cambodia following decades of civil war. Mr. Satanam and his wife moved to Indonesia in 1996, settling in a remote and difficult locality where their home became a haven and refuge for a sorely persecuted community. He encouraged and assisted the Bahá'ís to start small, sustainable socioeconomic projects. In 1999, after another move, he was appointed an Auxiliary Board member for

Laos. From December 2003 until his passing, Mr. Satanam battled cancer but continued to visit Bahá'í communities and promote the training institute process. In its message of condolence, the Universal House of Justice wrote that Mr. Satanam's life was "distinguished by over forty years of service to the Faith" and that his "contributions to the development of the Cause in many countries in Asia, including Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, and Malaysia, and his distinguished service as a member of the institutions in those areas are recalled with deep appreciation."

Statistics

General Statistics

More than 5 million people are members of the Bahá'í Faith. As of Ridván 2006, the Bahá'í community had 179 National Spiritual Assemblies and thousands of Local Spiritual Assemblies around the world. The Bahá'í Faith is established in 191 independent countries and 45 dependent territories or overseas departments. There are 2,112 indigenous tribes, races, and ethnic groups represented within the worldwide Bahá'í community.

Social and Economic Development

Bahá'í development activities are initiated either by individuals or groups of believers, or by Bahá'í administrative institutions. 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.

ACTIVITIES OF FIXED DURATION

Most Bahá'í social and economic development efforts are fairly simple activities of fixed duration in which Bahá'ís around the world

address the problems and challenges faced by their localities through the application of spiritual principles. These activities either originate in the Bahá'í communities themselves or represent responses to invitations from other organizations. It is estimated that in 2005–2006 there were several thousand endeavors of this kind, including clean-up projects, health camps and the provision of various other types of services, workshops and seminars on such themes as race unity and the advancement of women, and short-term training courses.

SUSTAINED PROJECTS

The second category of Bahá'í social and economic development activity consists of approximately 600 ongoing projects. The vast majority are academic and tutorial schools, while others focus on areas such as literacy, basic health care, moral education, child care, agriculture, the environment, and microenterprise. Some of these projects are administered by nascent development organizations, which have the potential to grow in complexity and in their range of influence.

ORGANIZATIONS WITH CAPACITY TO UNDERTAKE COMPLEX ACTION

Certain Bahá'í development efforts have evolved into development organizations with relatively complex programmatic structures and significant spheres of influence. They 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. Also included in this category are several institutions—especially large schools—which, although focusing only on one field, have the potential to make a significant impact. In this category there are currently 45 such organizations.

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The official Web site of the Bahá'í International Community, offering information about the Bahá'í Faith and its worldwide community to the general public, as well as to journalists, academics, and researchers.

<http://info.bahai.org/>

Bahá'í Topics, an information resource including a brief introduction to the Bahá'í Faith, its teachings, history, and community activities, in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Persian, and Arabic.

<http://reference.bahai.org/>

The Bahá'í Reference Library, containing downloadable versions of all of the authoritative texts of the Bahá'í Faith in English, Persian, and Arabic.

<http://news.bahai.org/>

The Bahá'í World News Service, reporting on news, activities, and developments around the world.

<http://media.bahai.org/>

The Bahá'í Media Bank, a collection of more than 2,500 usable, high-resolution images of historical figures, holy places and buildings, and contemporary community activities.

<http://library.bahai.org/>

The official Web site of the International Bahá'í Library in Haifa, Israel. The site contains information about the library's catalog and collections, policies, and services.

<http://statements.bahai.org/>

Statements offering the Bahá'í perspective on contemporary issues and themes, issued by the Bahá'í International Community to United Nations agencies and conferences.

<http://www.onecountry.org/>

One Country is the online newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community. The site contains numerous in-depth feature stories on the United Nations, noteworthy social and economic development projects, environmental efforts, and educational programs.

<http://denial.bahai.org/>

An official Web site of the Bahá'í International Community exploring Iran's campaign to deny higher education to the Bahá'ís.

<http://question.bahai.org/>

A detailed survey of "the Bahá'í question," exploring Iran's campaign of "cultural cleansing" against the Bahá'ís, the current situation, the historical background, and the international response.

<http://terraces.bahai.org/>

The history and purpose of, and useful visitor information about, the magnificent garden terraces at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

Selected New Publications in English

Bahá'í Sacred Writings

The Tabernacle of Unity: Bahá'u'lláh's Responses to Mánikchí Šáhib and other Writings

Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2006. 80 pp.

This small book contains Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Mánikchí Šáhib, a prominent Zoroastrian, and a companion Tablet addressed to Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the secretary to Mánikchí Šáhib at that time. These, together with three shorter, inspirational Tablets, offer a glimpse of Bahá'u'lláh's relationship with the followers of a religion that had arisen, many centuries before, in the same land that witnessed the birth of His own Faith.

Other Publications

Bahá'í Parenting Perspectives

Negin and Nima Anvar. Oxford: George Ronald, 2006. 194 pp.

Focusing on the spiritual upbringing of children, this book brings together the insights of 30 couples as they answer 50 questions about parenting from their own perspective, using the Bahá'í writings as a guide. A variety of approaches and issues are explored to assist readers to develop their own parenting style.

Bahá'í Pilgrimage

Denny Allen and Lesley Taherzadeh. Oxford: George Ronald, 2005. 197 pp.

A photographic record of pilgrimage to the holy places at the Bahá'í World Centre in northern Israel, intended for those who have been on pilgrimage and for those who have not yet been or who are unable to go. The guided pictorial journey, with more than 350 full-color illustrations, invites meditation and reflection, and provides a wealth of historical information and detail.

Divine Educators

Farnaz and Bijan Ma'súmián. Oxford: George Ronald, 2005. 161 pp.

Despite diverse, sometimes conflicting, cultural expressions and human interpretations, all the great religious traditions share a common foundation that fosters love, unity, and brotherhood. This book provides scriptural and historical evidence for commonalities in the lives, characters, and teachings of the central figures of seven world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith, from the scriptural sources of each religious tradition.

The Essence of the Covenant: Features, History, and Implications

Shahin Vafai. West Palm Beach, FL: Palabra Publications, 2005. 296 pp.

This book aims to assist readers to gain a deeper understanding of the features, history, and implications of the Bahá'í Covenant, designed for the unification and pacification of all nations and peoples. Containing detailed explanations, quotations for reflection, illustrations, and study questions, the text explores such themes as the purpose of the Covenant, the station and function of the successive leaders of the Bahá'í Faith, and the individual's relationship to the Covenant.

Exiles of the City of Love: A Touching Tale of a Woman's Suffering, Determination, and Courage

Compiled and edited by Mahintáj Ízadí. New Delhi: Royal Falcon Books, 2005. 94 pp.

The story of two people who, during the Second World War, along with the Bahá'ís of Ashkhabad, were imprisoned, persecuted, and banished to Siberia. Compiled by a woman who was born in Ashkhabad and later deported to Iran, it is a story of love, sacrifice, and determination to live according to belief and moral principle even under extreme hardship.

Faith, Physics, and Psychology: Rethinking Society and the Human Spirit

John Fitzgerald Medina. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006. 537 pp.

This book asks why, despite the progress of Western civilization in economic, scientific, and other areas, there has been a lack of corresponding progress with respect to spiritual life, which has left much of society feeling disoriented and unbalanced. The author sheds light on ways to address this imbalance. The ultimate goal of the examination is to present a path toward a prosperous global civilization that fulfills humanity's physical, psychological, and spiritual needs.

Healing the Wounded Soul

Phyllis K. Peterson. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005. 195 pp.

A survivor of childhood sexual abuse, the author recounts in clear and helpful detail the source of her shame, the difficulties she encountered in developing as a human being, and the healing roles of faith and her own search for truth in achieving a lasting positive self-image and the capacity to help others. The book outlines a remarkable journey of recovery accompanied by traumatic events, therapy, misdiagnoses, and an evolving personal philosophy based on spiritual insights gleaned from performing as an artist, her experiences with Bahá'ís and Bahá'í teachings, and intensive study of anger and codependency.

I'll Have the Fruit and Grains, Please!

Victoria Leith. Oxford: George Ronald, 2005. 176 pp.

The author investigates different ways to improve health, drawing on Bahá'í perspectives about keeping a healthy body and mind. Aimed particularly at young people, this book is about making healthy choices pertaining to food, sleep, simplicity, and moderation. The book includes a selection of recipe suggestions for family meals, snacks, and entertaining.

The Journey of the Soul: Life, Death, and Immortality

Compiled by Terrill G. Hayes, Betty J. Fisher, Richard A. Hill, and Terry Cassidy. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006. 150 pp.

A collection of profound readings, meditations, and prayers from the Bahá'í writings, this book explores life's weightiest questions: What is the purpose of life? What is death? How do we attain true happiness? What is the soul and how does it develop? What is the nature of the afterlife?

The Last War: Racism, Spirituality, and the Future of Civilization

Mark L. Perry. Oxford: George Ronald, 2005. 352 pp.

An exploration of the methods by which humanity can lay the groundwork for a new civilization, using the analogy of an archaeological dig to survey the historical roots of racism and the despiritualization of society.

Lights of the Spirit: Historical Portraits of Black Bahá'ís in North America, 1898–2000

Edited by Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis and Richard Thomas. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006. 308 pp.

A groundbreaking resource that uncovers the role played by black people in the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith in North America. Drawing on a wide range of sources including personal essays, letters, and journals, the book explores the lives of a diverse group of people—including lawyer Louis Gregory, poet Robert Hayden, jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, Broadway actress Dorothy Champ, and Canadian singer Eddie Elliot.

Living in the Half-Light: Sketches of a Bahá'í Family

Jean Gould. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006. 179 pp.

Through 30 short vignettes, each introduced with a selection from the Bahá'í writings, the author recalls the struggles and triumphs of life in a Bahá'í family at the end of the twentieth century. This book contains numerous examples of how the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith can be applied to daily family life.

O My Brother

Madeline Hellaby. Oxford: George Ronald, 2005. 176 pp.

This book particularly appeals to students of the Bahá'í Faith from Christian denominations. The author presents a thoughtful and challenging account of how she and her husband—both long-time members of the Unitarian church—investigated and embraced the Bahá'í Faith. William Hellaby was a minister in the church whose growing commitment to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh brought with it moral decisions and the loss of the family's livelihood.

Partners in Spirit: What Couples Say About Marriages That Work

Heather Cardin. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006. 273 pp.

More than 20 married couples share what has worked to strengthen their relationships during their years together. Their stories and advice incorporate Bahá'í perspectives on marriage, involving an equal partnership in the spiritual development of both husband and wife.

The Power of Prayer: Make a Joyful Noise

Pamela Brode. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006. 270 pp.

For readers interested in the practical application of prayer, meditation, and spirituality, the author, inspired by her own experiences with prayer, has collected stories from others who have had firsthand experience with the transformative power of prayer.

A Privilege So Priceless: Becoming a Better Teacher of the Bahá'í Faith

Dale W. Eng. Bellevue, WA: Exir Publishing, 2005. 253 pp.

A detailed look at teaching the Bahá'í Faith. Among topics covered are: why teaching is so important, the individual's role in teaching, the crucial need for wisdom in teaching, the process and psychology of teaching, and systematic teaching as part of the organic growth of the Bahá'í Faith. The book contains inspiring historical examples of several renowned teachers of the Bahá'í Faith and aspects of how they taught.

Prophet's Daughter: The Life and Legacy of Bahíyyih Khánum, Outstanding Heroine of the Bahá'í Faith

Janet A. Khan. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005. 359 pp.

A biography of the eldest daughter of Bahá'u'lláh who faithfully served her family and the early followers of a then completely new faith through nearly seven decades of extreme hardship. The author explores the example of Bahíyyih Khánum's life and her remarkable personal qualities, and demonstrates their special relevance to issues confronting society today.

The Reality of Man

Compiled by Terry Cassiday, Christopher Martin, and Bahhaj Taherzadeh. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005. 173 pp.

A collection of Bahá'í writings on the spiritual nature of human beings. Topics include God's love for humanity; the purpose of life, our spiritual reality, the nature of the soul, how human beings develop spiritually, and immortality and life hereafter. The writings are from Bahá'u'lláh and His appointed successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Responding: 101 Questions Often Asked of Bahá'ís

Dale W. Eng. Bellevue, WA: Exir Publishing, 2005. 1,031 pp.

Intended as an aid to teaching the Bahá'í Faith, this book considers questions often asked of Bahá'ís—with each answer written as if given in direct response

to a questioner. The book also provides extensive Bahá'í references for each topic so readers learn exactly what the teachings say on a subject.

The Spirit of Agriculture

Edited by Paul Hanley. Oxford: George Ronald, 2005. 240 pp.

A collection of essays looking at the importance of agriculture from a Bahá'í perspective. The book includes an overview of agriculture in the world's religions, Bahá'í approaches to food and genetic crop modification, and contains case studies of social and economic development projects around the world.

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). Most of the books listed below have been published by various Bahá'í Publishing Trusts in a wide range of languages, and are available from bookshops, libraries, online bookstores, or directly from the Trusts. Please see the Directory on pp. 253–55 for addresses.

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

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 which He explains 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 on 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 100 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, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980.

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. rev. ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998.

A textbook providing an overview of Bahá'í history, teachings, administrative structure, and community life.

The Bahá'í Faith: A Short History

Peter Smith. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999.

A comprehensive study of the history of the Bahá'í Faith, from its origins in mid-nineteenth-century Iran to the spiritual and social concerns of the present day, covering key people, places, and events.

Glossary

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: (1844–1921) Son of Bahá’u’lláh, designated as 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, international, 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 purposes of the propagation and protection of the Faith under the guidance of the head of that Faith, the Universal House of Justice.

‘Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum: (1910–2000) 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 was 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. After Shoghi Effendi’s passing in 1957, she traveled extensively to teach the Bahá’í Faith, consolidate

Bahá'í communities, and serve as a representative of the Universal House of Justice at major events.

Arc, the: An arc cut into Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, along which the international administrative buildings of the Bahá'í Faith have been 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, Who was the Prophet-Founder of the Bábí Faith and the Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh. Born on 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 Násiri'd-Dín Sháh on 9 July 1850.

Bahá'í Era (BE): 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 of God after the expiration of at least 1,000 years. See also *Calendar, Bahá'í*.

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 with a branch in Paris, and an Office for the Advancement of Women.

Bahá'í World Centre: The spiritual and administrative center of the Bahá'í Faith, comprising the holy places in the Haifa–Acre area and the Arc of administrative buildings on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel.

Bahá'u'lláh: The title, meaning “Glory of God,” 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.

Bahj: Arabic for “delight.” Located near Acre, it is a place of pilgrimage for Bahá’ís which comprises the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, the mansion which was His last residence, and the surrounding gardens that serve to beautify the site.

Calendar, Bahá’í: Year consisting of 19 months of 19 days each, with the addition of certain “intercalary days” (four in ordinary and five in leap years) between the 18th and 19th months in order to adjust the calendar to the solar year. Naw-Rúz, the Bahá’í new year, is astronomically fixed, commencing at the vernal equinox (21 March). The Bahá’í era (BE) begins with the year of the Báb’s declaration (1844 CE). See also *Bahá’í Era*.

Children’s Classes: One of the *core activities*. The provision of education for children, whether Bahá’í or not, in a locality, often focusing on the development of essential capacities and a strong moral framework that assists children to achieve excellence in material, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of life.

Clusters: Geographical areas within a country, designated by national or regional Bahá’í institutions, to help facilitate grass-roots planning for the growth and development of Bahá’í communities on a manageable scale.

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 members of a National Spiritual Assembly, or electing members of the Universal House of Justice.

Core Activities: *Children's classes, devotional meetings, and study circles* have been designated by the Universal House of Justice as the *core activities* that every Bahá'í community should try to provide as fundamental building blocks of community life, open to all people living within a locality.

Counsellor: See *Continental Boards of Counsellors*

Devotional Meetings: One of the *core activities*. The regular gathering together of individuals in a locality for prayer and worship, considered an essential practice for the spiritual health and well-being of a community.

Hands of the Cause of God: Individuals appointed by Bahá'u'lláh, and later by Shoghi Effendi, who were charged with the specific duties of protecting and propagating the Faith. (Four individuals were recognized posthumously as Hands of the Cause by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.) With the passing of Shoghi Effendi, there was 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 of 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 co-ordinating, 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 the surviving Hand 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 specified new territories to the Faith during the first year of the Ten Year Crusade (1953–1963) and subsequently applied to those who first reached the remaining unopened territories on the list 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 signalizing 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 Ridván 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 and the wife of Bahá'u'lláh, His son who died in prison in Acre, and 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 Ridván 2006, there were 179 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” describes 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.

Regional Bahá'í Council: An element of Bahá'í administration between the local and national levels, established at the discretion of the Universal House of Justice in countries where the condition and size of the Bahá'í community warrant. A means of decentralizing the work of the National Spiritual Assembly, a Regional Council may be formed either by election or by appointment, depending on local requirements and the condition of the Bahá'í community. It provides for a level of autonomous decision making on both teaching and administrative matters. In some countries, State Bahá'í Councils perform these tasks within specific civic jurisdictions.

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.” 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.

Ruhi Institute: A Bahá'í *training institute* in Colombia. Its programs of systematic and sustained education, particularly courses delivered through *study circles*, have been widely adopted by Bahá'í communities throughout the world.

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.

State Bahá'í Council: *See* Regional Bahá'í Council.

Study Circles: One of the *core activities*. A delivery system for *training institute* courses, consisting of small groups of people, regardless of their ideas or beliefs,

meeting on a regular basis in a locality with a trained tutor or facilitator. Materials developed by the *Ruhi Institute* are studied and active participation in a learning process is engendered, supplemented by artistic, service, and social activities.

Tablet: Divinely revealed scripture. In Bahá'í scripture, the term is used to denote writings revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, or 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Ten Year Crusade: (1953–1963) Ten Year Plan initiated by Shoghi Effendi for teaching the Bahá'í Faith, which culminated in the election of the Universal House of Justice during the centenary of the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh. The objectives of the Crusade were the development of the institutions at the World Centre, the consolidation of the communities of the participating National Spiritual Assemblies, and the spread of the Faith to new regions. See also *Knight of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Training Institute: A systematic approach to learning aimed at imparting knowledge, skills, and spiritual insights into fundamental aspects of the teachings and practices of the Bahá'í Faith. The program of the training institute consists of a sequence of courses offered at a central location or through study circles at the local level.

Universal House of Justice: Head of the Bahá'í Faith after the passing of Shoghi Effendi, and the 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 all National Spiritual Assemblies, who gather at an International Convention. The House of Justice was elected for the first time in 1963. It occupied its permanent seat on Mount Carmel in 1983.

Some entries adapted from *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, Wendi Momen, ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989).

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*Note: Numbers in italics
refer to photographs.*

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