

THE
BAHÁ'Í
WORLD

2003-2004



THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD
2003-2004

160 OF THE BAHÁ'Í ERA

THE LITTLE WORKS
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WORLD

2003-2004

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Introduction to the Bahá'í Community

A group in Australia organizes a conference to examine ways of using the knowledge of indigenous cultures to advance society while respecting the needs of those cultures and ensuring they are not exploited. In Turkey, a group visits a school for disabled children and uses the arts in an educational program about oral hygiene. People in Rwanda hold a meeting to discuss community issues and systematically examine the needs and opportunities in the region. In Switzerland, participants from 27 countries gather for a special centenary celebration. Organizers of a conference in Uganda commemorate International Peace Day by holding a panel discussion on ways to address issues related to conflict within the country. In the United States, scholars listen to a speaker explain that academic learning must evolve beyond competitive and adversarial modes in order to advance society. Young people from more than 30 countries come together in the Czech Republic to learn how they can contribute to the welfare of humanity. At a gathering in England, participants explore ways to use the arts to express humanity's spiritual nature, the importance of prayer, and the afterlife. Visitors travel to a remote island in Papua New Guinea for the opening of a new, uniquely designed community center. Men and women in

Malaysia come together for a conference to discuss the role of the advancement of women in the process of establishing world peace.

Although they come from diverse backgrounds and far-flung areas of the planet, these people all share a united view of the world, its future, and their role in shaping it. They are Bahá'ís.

The Bahá'í International Community, comprising members of the Bahá'í Faith from all over the globe, now numbers more than five million souls. Its members represent 2,112 ethnic and tribal groups who live in more than 100,000 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 2002* 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.

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 Husayn-'Alí was one of the leading adherents of the Bábí Faith Who was arrested and imprisoned during the tumultuous years of the Báb's brief ministry. 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 Husayn-'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.

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 knighthood—a title He acknowledged but declined to use. He 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.

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 supplementing the Faith's scriptures.

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 writings and giving direction and impetus to Bahá'í communities.

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 40 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 five million members; the number of National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies has grown from 56 to 183; and the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies has increased from 3,555 to 9,631.

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 is 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 forbade lying, stealing, adultery, homosexual acts, and promiscuity. The importance of the family is central to Bahá'í community life, as is the moral and spiritual education of children.

Bahá'ís often gather together in their communities to study the sacred writings of their Faith and to pray, but a central feature in Bahá'í community life is a meeting called the Nineteen Day Feast, at which all members join in worship, consult about community affairs, and socialize. 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, Uganda, the United States, and Samoa. 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.¹ 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 the 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.²

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.³

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.⁴

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.⁵

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.

The existence and growth of the Bahá'í community offers irrefutable evidence that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to

live and work together in harmony. While Bahá'ís are not unaware of the turmoil in the world surrounding them, their view is succinctly 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.⁶

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 See pp. 187–202 of this volume for further information on Bahá'í Houses of Worship.
- ² Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 2nd rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), p. 203.
- ³ Ibid., p. 204.
- ⁴ See pp. 135–40 and 213–23 for further information on the continuing persecution of Iran's Bahá'í community.
- ⁵ For the full text of this message and a report on its presentation around the world, see *The Bahá'í World 2002–2003*, pp. 89–98 and 79–87.
- ⁶ Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, *The Prosperity of Humankind* (1995). See *The Bahá'í World 1994–95*, pp. 273–96, for the complete text of this statement.

WRITINGS AND MESSAGES

Bahá'í Sacred Writings

*A compilation from the writings of
Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá
about the importance of family.*

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

After man's recognition of God, and becoming steadfast in His Cause, the station of affection, of harmony, of concord, and of unity is superior to that of most other goodly deeds. This is what He Who is the Desire of the world hath testified at every morn and eve. God grant that ye may follow that which hath been revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.¹



The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family, and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.²



That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds. . . .

The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.³



It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith, the reason being that a child who removeth himself from the religion of God will not act in such a way as to win the good pleasure of his parents and his Lord. For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, nor will he draw nigh unto any good.⁴



He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My glory, My loving-kindness, My mercy, that have compassed the world.⁵



O Muḥammad! The Ancient of Days hath turned His countenance towards thee, making mention of thee, and exhorting the people of God to educate their children. Should a father neglect this most weighty commandment . . . he shall forfeit rights of fatherhood, and be accounted guilty before God. Well is it with him who imprinteth on his heart the admonitions of the Lord, and steadfastly cleaveth unto them. God, in truth, enjoineth on His servants what shall assist and profit them, and enable them to draw nigh unto Him. He is the Ordainer, the Everlasting.⁶



The fruits of the tree of existence are trustworthiness, loyalty, truthfulness, and purity. After the recognition of the oneness of the Lord, exalted be He, the most important of all duties is to have due regard for the rights of one's parents. This matter hath been mentioned in all the Books of God and recorded by the Supreme

Pen. Consider ye that which the Merciful Lord hath revealed in the Qur'an: "Worship none but Him and show ye kindness unto your parents."⁷

Observe how kindness to parents hath been linked to belief in the one true God. Blessed are they who are wise and understanding, who see and perceive, who read and comprehend, and who observe that which their Lord hath revealed in the holy Books of former Dispensations, and in this incomparable and wondrous Tablet.⁸



O My people! Show honor to your parents and pay homage to them. This will cause blessings to descend upon you from the clouds of the bounty of your Lord, the Exalted, the Great.⁹



One of the distinguishing characteristics of this most great Dispensation is that the kin of such as have recognized and embraced the truth of this Revelation and have, in the glory of His name, the Sovereign Lord, quaffed the choice, sealed wine from the chalice of the love of the one true God, will, upon their death, if they are outwardly nonbelievers, be graciously invested with divine forgiveness and partake of the ocean of His Mercy.

This bounty, however, will be vouchsafed only to such souls as have inflicted no harm upon Him Who is the Sovereign Truth nor upon His loved ones. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Lord of the Throne on High and the Ruler of this world and of the world to come.¹⁰

From the Writings of the Báb

It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised: "Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense!" Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.¹¹

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

If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will advance, become illumined and spiritual; but if enmity and hatred exist within it, destruction and dispersion are inevitable.¹²



Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honor, as day succeedeth day.¹³



Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families. Therefore, as strife and dissension destroy a family and prevent its progress, so nations are destroyed and advancement hindered.¹⁴



In marriage the more distant the blood-relationship the better, for such distance in family ties between husband and wife provideth the basis for the well-being of humanity and is conducive to fellowship among mankind.¹⁵



O ye my two beloved children! The news of your union, as soon as it reached me, imparted infinite joy and gratitude. Praise be

to God, those two faithful birds have sought shelter in one nest. I beseech God that He may enable them to raise an honored family, for the importance of marriage lieth in the bringing up of a richly blessed family, so that with entire gladness they may, even as candles, illuminate the world.¹⁶



It is highly important for man to raise a family. So long as he is young, because of youthful self-complacency, he does not realize its significance, but this will be a source of regret when he grows old. . . . In this glorious Cause the life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. The home should be orderly and well organized. Their ideas and thoughts should be like the rays of the sun of truth and the radiance of the brilliant stars in the heavens. Even as two birds they should warble melodies upon the branches of the tree of fellowship and harmony. They should always be elated with joy and gladness and be a source of happiness to the hearts of others. They should set an example to their fellow-men, manifest a true and sincere love towards each other, and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family.¹⁷



According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister, and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.¹⁸



Were there no educator, all souls would remain savage, and were it not for the teacher, the children would be ignorant creatures.

It is for this reason that, in this new cycle, education and training are recorded in the Book of God as obligatory and not voluntary. That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge, and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts. Should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.¹⁹



Ye should consider the question of goodly character as of the first importance. It is incumbent upon every father and mother to counsel their children over a long period, and guide them unto those things which lead to everlasting honor.²⁰



Among the divine Texts as set forth in the Most Holy Book and also in other Tablets is this: it is incumbent upon the father and mother to train their children both in good conduct and the study of books; study, that is, to the degree required, so that no child, whether girl or boy, will remain illiterate. Should the father fail in his duty he must be compelled to discharge his responsibility, and should he be unable to comply, let the House of Justice take over the education of the children; in no case is a child to be left without an education. This is one of the stringent and inescapable commandments to neglect which would draw down the wrathful indignation of Almighty God.²¹



O ye loving mothers, know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined.²²



O handmaids of the Merciful! Render ye thanks unto the Ancient Beauty that ye have been raised up and gathered together in this mightiest of centuries, this most illumined of ages. As befitting thanks for such a bounty, stand ye staunch and strong in the Covenant and, following the precepts of God and the holy Law, suckle your children from their infancy with the milk of a universal education, and rear them so that from their earliest days, within their inmost heart, their very nature, a way of life will be firmly established that will conform to the divine Teachings in all things.

For mothers are the first educators, the first mentors; and truly it is the mothers who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courteous ways and learning and judgment, the understanding and the faith of their little ones.²³



Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.²⁴



Consider that if the mother is a believer, the children will become believers too, even if the father denieth the Faith; while, if the mother is not a believer, the children are deprived of faith, even if the father be a believer convinced and firm. Such is the usual outcome, except in rare cases.

For this reason both fathers and mothers must carefully watch over their little daughters and have them thoroughly taught in the schools by highly qualified . . . teachers, so that they may familiarize themselves with all the sciences and arts and become acquainted with and reared in all that is necessary for human living, and will provide a family with comfort and joy.²⁵



The question of training the children and looking after the orphans is extremely important, but most important of all is the education of girl children, for these girls will one day be mothers, and the mother is the first teacher of the child. In whatever way she reareth the child, so will the child become, and the results of that first training will remain with the individual throughout his entire life, and it would be most difficult to alter them. And how can a mother, herself ignorant and untrained, educate her child? It is therefore clear that the education of girls is of far greater consequence than that of boys. This fact is extremely important, and the matter must be seen to with the greatest energy and dedication.²⁶



The father must always endeavor to educate his son and to acquaint him with the heavenly teachings. He must give him advice and exhort him at all times, teach him praiseworthy conduct and character, enable him to receive training at school and to be instructed in such arts and sciences as are deemed useful and necessary. In brief, let him instill into his mind the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Above all he should continually call to his mind the remembrance of God so that his throbbing veins and arteries may pulsate with the love of God.

The son, on the other hand, must show forth the utmost obedience towards his father, and should conduct himself as a humble and a lowly servant. Day and night he should seek diligently to ensure the comfort and welfare of his loving father and to secure his good pleasure. He must forgo his own rest and enjoyment and constantly strive to bring gladness to the hearts of his father and mother, that thereby he may attain the good pleasure of the Almighty and be graciously aided by the hosts of the unseen.²⁷



If thou wouldst show kindness and consideration to thy parents so that they may feel generally pleased, this would also please Me, for parents must be highly respected and it is essential that they should feel contented, provided they deter thee not from gaining access to the Threshold of the Almighty, nor keep thee back from walking in the way of the Kingdom. Indeed it behoveth them to encourage and spur thee on in this direction.²⁸



Also a father and mother endure the greatest troubles and hardships for their children; and often when the children have reached the age of maturity, the parents pass on to the other world. Rarely does it happen that a father and mother in this world see the reward of the care and trouble they have undergone for their children. Therefore, children, in return for this care and trouble, must show forth charity and beneficence, and must implore pardon and forgiveness for their parents. So you ought, in return for the love and kindness shown you by your father, to give to the poor for his sake, with greatest submission and humility implore pardon and remission of sins, and ask for the supreme mercy.²⁹



O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love. Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver, and the Kind!³⁰



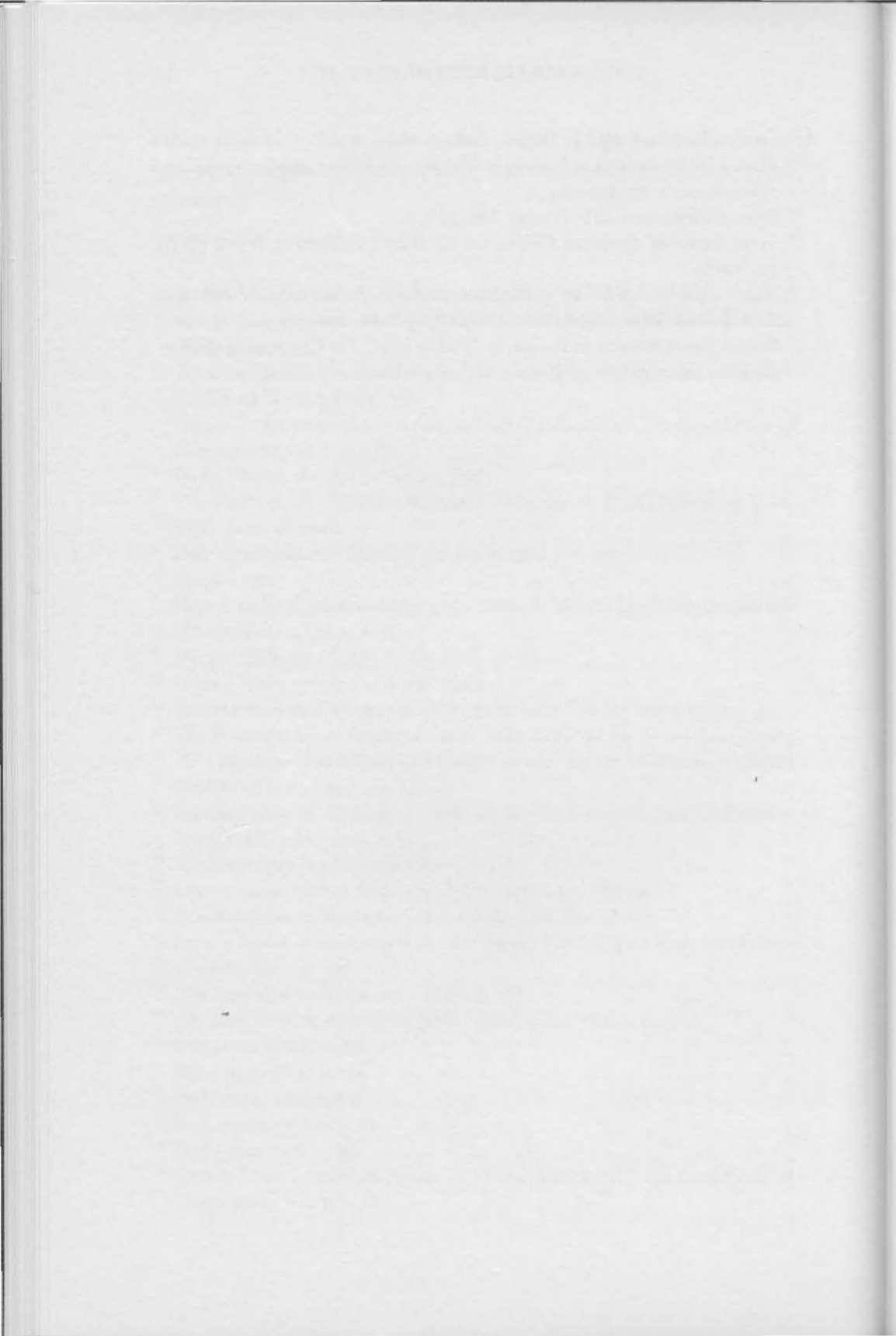
Regarding thy question about consultation of a father with his son, or a son with his father, in matters of trade and commerce, consultation is one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God. Such consultation is assuredly acceptable, whether between father and son, or with others. There is nothing

better than this. Man must consult in all things for this will lead him to the depths of each problem and enable him to find the right solution.³¹

NOTES

- ¹ From a Tablet revealed in Arabic and Persian, in "Divorce," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1 (Ingleside, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), p. 235.
- ² *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 156.
- ³ From a Tablet revealed in Persian, in "Bahá'í Education," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 248.
- ⁴ From a Tablet revealed in Persian, *ibid.*
- ⁵ *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), para. 48, p. 38.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, Questions and Answers, no. 105, p. 136.
- ⁷ Qur'án 4:36.
- ⁸ From a Tablet revealed in Arabic and Persian, in "Family Life," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 385.
- ⁹ From a Tablet revealed in Arabic, *ibid.*, p. 386.
- ¹⁰ From a Tablet revealed in Arabic, *ibid.*
- ¹¹ *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976), p. 94.
- ¹² *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. 144–45.
- ¹³ *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), para. 221.9, p. 292.
- ¹⁴ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 156.
- ¹⁵ From an unpublished Tablet revealed in Arabic and Persian.
- ¹⁶ *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, para. 88.1, p. 127.
- ¹⁷ From a Tablet revealed in Persian, in "Family Life," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 397.
- ¹⁸ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 168.
- ¹⁹ *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paras. 98.1–2, pp. 134.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 108.1, p. 141.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, para. 101.1, p. 134.
- ²² *Ibid.*, para. 114.1, p. 146.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, paras. 96.1–2, p. 133.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 95.2, p. 132.
- ²⁵ From a Tablet revealed in Persian, in "Bahá'í Education," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 287.

- ²⁶ From a Tablet revealed in Persian, *ibid.*, p. 286.
- ²⁷ From a Tablet revealed in Persian, in "Family Life," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, pp. 393-94.
- ²⁸ From a Tablet revealed in Persian, *ibid.*, p. 392.
- ²⁹ *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), pp. 231-32.
- ³⁰ *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003), p. 64.
- ³¹ From a Tablet revealed in Persian, in "Family Life," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 393.



Highlights of Messages from the Universal House of Justice

Since the first election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963, Bahá'ís around the world have turned with love, respect, and confidence to the governing council that guides their affairs. The House of Justice was ordained in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and given authority both to enact further application of Bahá'í laws and to legislate on matters not explicitly dealt with in the Bahá'í sacred texts. Each year, through letters to national and local communities and to individuals, this international body makes important announcements and provides counsel and direction.

In its 2003 message to the Bahá'í world on the occasion of the Festival of Ridván,¹ the Universal House of Justice began by noting the building momentum of the worldwide Bahá'í community, which is in the middle of a global Five Year Plan of expansion and consolidation. It attributed this to both the "increased coherence" in the Bahá'í community's pursuit of the elements of its plan and "the spirit of unrest pervading the planet."

The House of Justice pointed out that crises leading up to and including the war in Iraq held significant implications both for the Bahá'í community and for "the evolution of an increasingly global society in the throes of a turbulent transition." And while events

inspired hope for the oppressed Bahá'í community in Iraq, they also forced the cancellation of the Ninth International Convention at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa.

Describing world events as the “latest conflict in the unfolding of the Lesser Peace,” the Universal House of Justice noted the response of the world’s peoples in “angry” and “overwhelming” demonstrations—which, it remarked, often increase confusion rather than resolve it. The House of Justice urged the Bahá'ís to look to their Faith’s “vision and principles” for an “unambiguous explanation” of these events—and to become better equipped to respond effectively.

In contrast to the wider community, the Bahá'ís are making “giant strides” forward in achieving their goals, with 179 national communities now having divided their territories into “clusters,” which the House of Justice refers to as “seedbeds of expansion.” Furthermore, Bahá'ís have been gaining experience in the holding of “reflection meetings,” which “have become a powerful means of unifying thought and action across institutions and localities” and “have lent a potent stimulus to institutional and individual initiatives in a mutually supportive spirit.” In addition to the benefits of growing numbers of adults, youth, and children becoming involved in various aspects of community life, members of the general public have increasingly joined Bahá'ís in participating in study circles, devotional meetings, and children’s classes—the three core activities of the Five Year Plan. In sum, the House of Justice characterizes the community as “focused and on the move as never before” to implement “a Plan designed to fit the requirements of these times.”

Reviewing the major external affairs activities of the previous year, the Universal House of Justice notes that the message addressed to the world’s religious leaders in April 2002 was “seriously regarded” and in some quarters has even given “new perspective to interfaith activities”—steps towards achieving the letter’s purpose, which is to direct attention to “the urgent need for religious leadership to address the problem of religious prejudice, which is becoming a steadily more serious danger to human well-being.”

Bahá'í-inspired initiatives in the field of social and economic development continued to flourish during the year, with the establishment of eight new agencies, working in the fields of “the

advancement of women, health, agriculture, child education, and youth empowerment."

A summary of accomplishments and undertakings at the Bahá'í World Centre during the previous year includes the release of a new English translation of a volume of Bahá'u'lláh's tablet *Javáhiru'l-Asrár*, entitled *Gems of Divine Mysteries*; the restoration of Bahá'u'lláh's prison cell in Acre; and an increase in the size of pilgrimage groups to 200, as of October 2003. The House of Justice also traced the development of the institution of *Huqúqu'lláh* over the past decade, noting that Bahá'ís from many parts of the world are now knowledgeable about this law and "are responding to it with a spirit of devotion."

With the cancellation of the Ninth International Convention, the Universal House of Justice took steps in late April 2003 to distribute to all National Assemblies a signal document and a video that were to have been released at the gathering. The document, titled *Building Momentum: A Coherent Approach to Growth*, offers the "careful analysis" of the International Teaching Centre of "methods and approaches" used throughout the world in pursuit of the goals of the current Five Year Plan; it builds upon earlier documents that outline both the experience of the community and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.² The video, also titled *Building Momentum*, highlights different aspects of the growth process in which the worldwide community is engaged and was sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies for showing at National Conventions to "inform the deliberations of the delegates and bring joy to their hearts."³ A booklet prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development, titled *For the Betterment of the World*, which outlines Bahá'í approaches to social and economic development and gives examples of various Bahá'í-inspired projects around the world, was also made available to all National Assemblies.

On 29 April 2003, after the ballots that had been mailed in for the Ninth International Bahá'í Convention had been counted, the Universal House of Justice sent a message to the worldwide Bahá'í community announcing the newly elected members of the Universal House of Justice: Peter Khan, Farzam Arbab, Hooper Dunbar, Glenford Mitchell, Douglas Martin, Ian Semple, Kiser Barnes, Hartmut Grossmann, and Firaydoun Javaheri.

The appointment of the Counsellor members of the International Teaching Centre for its new term was announced in a message to all National Assemblies on 13 May 2003. Rolf von Czékus, Violette Haake, Paul Lample, Joan Lincoln, Payman Mohajer, Rachel Ndegwa, Zenaida Ramirez, Shahriar Razavi, and Penelope Walker were appointed to this institution for the coming five years, while Lauretta King's past service over 15 years was noted with gratitude.

On 12 June 2003, the announcement was made to all National Assemblies that the design of Siamak Hariri of Toronto, Canada, had been chosen from the 185 designs submitted for the Bahá'í House of Worship in Santiago, Chile—the "Mother Temple of South America."

On 26 November 2003, the Bahá'í holy day known as the Day of the Covenant, the Universal House of Justice addressed a lengthy letter to the Bahá'ís of Iran, which was also shared with National Assemblies around the world. The letter outlines the main points of a treatise written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1875, titled *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, which was addressed to the people of Persia and "was a summons—to the country's leaders and the population alike—to free themselves from blind submission to dogma and to accept the need for fundamental changes in behavior and attitude, most particularly a willingness to subordinate personal and group interests to the crying needs of society as a whole." The letter then goes on to review the modern history of Persia, showing how 'Abdu'l-Bahá's appeal was ignored and how actions of the various political regimes have only served to deepen the country's ills. The systematic campaign throughout all of these regimes to slander and persecute the Bahá'í community in Iran, and to intimidate anyone who might arise in its defense, is also outlined, but the Bahá'ís' "confident mastery of [their] moral purpose and [their] abiding love for the land in which [they] have suffered so greatly" is also noted with pride and gratitude. The House of Justice addresses the Bahá'ís of Iran, "To every fair-minded observer, you are the living proof that faith in God and confidence in social progress are in every sense reconcilable; that science and religion are the two inseparable, reciprocal systems of knowledge impelling the advancement of civilization." Praising "the spirit of courage and decency that you have displayed throughout these ordeals," the House of Justice promises, "Ahead lies the day

when your fellow citizens will have recognized and come to treasure the contribution you are destined to make to Iran's recovery of her rightful place among the nations of the world."

Less than two months later, on 12 January 2004, the Universal House of Justice addressed a letter to Iranian Bahá'ís living outside Iran, noting that the "organized campaign to destroy the Cause" in their native land "has clearly failed," owing both to the "heroism of the Iranian believers" and to "the determination of National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world to mobilize international protest, attract the attention of influential media, and ensure that the crimes committed against their brothers and sisters in Iran became an established issue in the ongoing indictment by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights of Iran's violation of universally accepted standards." In support of these efforts, the Universal House of Justice urges Iranian Bahá'ís living overseas, "do everything you can to reinforce and encourage the commitment of the company of heroic souls in the Cradle of the Faith on whose steadfastness so much continues to depend."

During the year in review, the Bahá'í community lost a number of long-standing servants, including former member of the Universal House of Justice David Hofman and former member of the International Teaching Centre Aziz Yazdi.⁴ But the most grievous loss was relayed to the Bahá'í world on 27 November 2003, when the Universal House of Justice announced the passing, on the previous day, of Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, who collapsed after meeting with Bahá'í pilgrims at the Bahá'í World Centre. As the House of Justice noted, "he had fulfilled his longing to serve the Cause to his last breath." It further wrote:

'Alí-Akbar Furútan's single-minded devotion to the Faith and its Guardian, the vital role he played in the establishment of the Administrative Order in Iran, his contribution to the spiritual and material education of children, his services as a Hand of the Cause of God, and his unswerving support of the Universal House of Justice together constitute an imperishable record of service in the annals of the Cause. His penetrating mind, his loving concern and his sparkling humor are ineffaceable memories in the hearts of the thousands of believers with whom he spoke.⁵

NOTES

- ¹ Each year during the Ridván Festival, from 21 April to 2 May, the Universal House of Justice addresses a major message to the Bahá'ís of the world, in which it reviews the previous year, analyzes current progress, and points the Bahá'í community towards fruitful opportunities that lie before it.
- ² Letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 27 April 2004.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ See pp. 234-35 and 239-40, respectively, for the obituaries of Mr. Hofman and Mr. Yazdi.
- ⁵ See pp. 227-30 for Mr. Furútan's obituary.

EVENTS
2003-2004



Members of the Navvab Choir performing at the 50th jubilee celebration in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, in August 2003.

Worldwide Jubilee

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OPENING OF THE TEN YEAR CRUSADE

In 2003–04, many Bahá'í communities celebrated their golden jubilees and remembered the beginning of an ambitious global plan for the expansion of the Bahá'í Faith.

Nineteen fifty-three was a momentous year for members of the Bahá'í Faith. Intercontinental conferences convened in Africa, Asia, and North America, and the year saw completion of two major projects: the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb in Haifa, Israel, and the dedication of the House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, USA. These triumphs offered visible and compelling proof of the growing influence and prominence of the Bahá'í community. But the victories that were to follow that year would be greater still.

Shoghi Effendi chose 1953 to inaugurate a worldwide "Spiritual Crusade" that would span a decade and have as its intent the spread of the Bahá'í Faith to those nations and territories not yet "opened" to the Faith. Known as the Ten Year Crusade, the campaign was the latest in a succession of plans implemented by Shoghi Effendi to carry out the mandate for the spread of the Faith initiated in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan.

Calling the plan "at once arduous, audacious, challenging, unprecedented in scope and character in the entire field of Bahá'í history," Shoghi Effendi challenged the Bahá'í community to "achieve

in a single decade feats eclipsing in totality the achievements which in the course of the eleven preceding decades illuminated the annals of Bahá'í pioneering."¹

The objectives for the plan were fourfold: development of the institutions at the Bahá'í World Centre, consolidation of existing and newly formed Bahá'í communities, and expansion to "unopened" territories, where there were no Bahá'ís. The ambitious scheme included introducing the Faith to some 131 countries and territories and forming 48 new National Spiritual Assemblies.

Also included were resolutions to vastly increase available Bahá'í literature and translate Bahá'í texts into many new languages, to erect two new Houses of Worship, and to greatly expand not only the number of Spiritual Assemblies around the world but also the number that had achieved legal incorporation.² The culmination of the Ten Year Plan came in 1963, coinciding with the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's public proclamation of His mission and the first election of the Universal House of Justice.

Shoghi Effendi carefully plotted out the course of the campaign, outlining its aims and assigning to each continent certain duties and responsibilities. Previous plans had made initial steps in spreading the Faith in Latin America, Africa, and Europe, but this global plan greatly expanded both the range of activity and the size of expectations.³

Notwithstanding the tremendous accomplishments called for by the plan, its spiritual significance was its most distinguishing trait. Shoghi Effendi wrote that "the primary aim of this Spiritual Crusade is none other than the conquest of the citadels of men's hearts."⁴ And once the plans were delineated, individuals began to respond almost immediately to pursue that "conquest"—eager to bring the Faith's teachings to new territories and inspire the peoples of the world with its message.

News of victories in country after country spread, as many people set out from their homes to participate in this unprecedented expansion in the global scope of the Bahá'í Faith. Those who rose up to assist the execution of the plan were distinguished by their spiritual strength and courage, choosing for themselves lives of sacrifice and hardship in order to spread the Faith around the world.

Those who carried the Faith to those virgin nations and territories were given the accolade "Knight of Bahá'u'lláh," a title not only appropriate to the crusade metaphor but also a fitting tribute to their perseverance and steadfastness through adversity. The victories won by the Knights, as well as by others who arose to support the plan's objectives, were seeds that have now borne fruit in many countries where vibrant Bahá'í communities contribute, through the application of Bahá'í principles, to the welfare of their societies.

Throughout the next 10 years, Bahá'í communities in those countries will hold anniversary celebrations commemorating triumphs won half a century ago and the development of their communities in the intervening years.

In 2003-04, Bahá'ís in Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, and North America all had opportunity to come together and reflect on both the circumstances of their beginnings and their prospects for the future. It would be impossible here to comprehensively examine the activities and effects of the Bahá'í communities in each of the countries, or to provide a complete survey of their illustrious histories, but the following presents some highlights of these anniversary gatherings.⁵

Africa

CAMEROON

The achievements by the Bahá'ís of Cameroon were among the most remarkable in the Ten Year Crusade. In 1953 'Alí and Violette Nakhjavání and Enoch Olinga undertook a difficult two-month car journey across Africa from Uganda with two other Bahá'ís to establish the Faith in Cameroon and other countries. Then, in early April 1954, Shoghi Effendi told Mr. Olinga that he wanted some Bahá'ís in Cameroon to take the Faith to five other countries and territories by 21 April, the First Day of Ridván. When there were more volunteers than needed, the Bahá'ís decided to choose the names by lot.

Samuel Njiki went to French Cameroon (now part of Cameroon), David Tanyi departed for French Togoland (now Togo), and three others went to territories now part of Ghana: Edward Tabe moved to British Togoland, Benedict Eballa to Ashanti Protectorate,



A group of participants at the jubilee celebrations in Cameroon in August, 2003.



A 1954 photo of Bahá'ís who played historic roles in Cameroon: (front, left to right) Enoch Olinga, 'Alí Nakhjavání, (back, left to right) Benedict Eballa, David Tanyi, and Samuel Njiki.

and Martin Manga to Northern Territories Protectorate. Each of the five men was later named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

Meanwhile, so many people had become Bahá'ís in Limbe through the efforts of Enoch Olinga in the few months since the Faith had been introduced in the country that a Local Spiritual Assembly was formed there in April 1954. Shoghi Effendi referred to Mr. Olinga as Abu'l-Futúh, a designation meaning "the father of victories," and he was later appointed as a Hand of the Cause of God in addition to being named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for British Cameroon.

The Bahá'í community in Cameroon is now 40,000 strong, with 58 Local Spiritual Assemblies. The country currently comprises the former French Cameroon and part of the former British Cameroon, which merged in 1961. The first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Cameroon was elected in 1967.

More than 560 Bahá'ís from all regions of Cameroon attended the 50th jubilee celebrations in Yaounde on 22 and 23 August 2003. Other guests came from Australia, Botswana, Canada, Equatorial Guinea, France, Morocco, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Among the guests of honor were George Olinga, son of Enoch Olinga, and former member of the Universal House of Justice 'Alí Nakhjavání and his wife, Violette. Other prominent guests included Joan Lincoln, Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre; her husband Albert Lincoln, Secretary-General of the Bahá'í International Community; Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Benedict Eballa; and Tiati à Zock, member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa.

The celebrations included music and two evenings dedicated entirely to cultural performances. Some 15 groups from all parts of the country, each comprising about 20 people, presented songs, poetry, and traditional dance.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The Bahá'ís of the Democratic Republic of the Congo marked the 50th anniversary of the Faith's activities within its borders with celebrations in Kinshasa on 6 and 7 September 2003. Guests of honor at

the jubilee included 'Alí and Violette Nakhjavání and Joan and Albert Lincoln. All four had spent many years as pioneers in Africa.

Jean Baptiste Nsa Lobete, Political and Diplomatic Counselor to the Governor of Kinshasa, spoke at the opening of the jubilee, saying that Bahá'í efforts in the country "justify the respect that the authorities of this country feel towards the Bahá'í community."

The Bahá'ís in the country have experienced much adversity as a result of the nation's political strife. Colonial authorities did not permit the promotion of the Faith by Bahá'í pioneers before 1953. Though there had been Bahá'í visitors to the country, they were prevented from spreading the Faith. Efforts to teach the Faith there did not begin until the Nakhjavánís, driving across Africa from Uganda, took Ugandan Bahá'í Samson Mungongo to the city of Kamina. At the same time, some Congolese who had become Bahá'ís in Rwanda and Burundi moved back to settle in their home provinces. The first Local Spiritual Assembly was elected in 1957; there are now 541. The first National Spiritual Assembly formed in 1970.

A reconciliation program is now under way after five years of turmoil in this country (which was once known as the Belgian Congo, and then, after independence in 1960, by a variety of other names, including Zaire). The turmoil had prevented all nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly from meeting together since 1998 until the jubilee.

The Vice-Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly, Sefu Lemba, read a message from the Universal House of Justice that lauded the community's steadfastness in the face of its trials: "Despite years of political strife and adversity that have severely torn the fabric of the society around you, the spirits of the believers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have remained unbroken, and you have managed to lay the foundations of a community whose influence is felt throughout the continent."

The jubilee program included songs from the Dawn of Carmel Choir, including performers who won acclaim throughout the Bahá'í world as the Congo Youth Choir at the opening of the terraces on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, in May 2001. Among many others to sing were the Navvab Choir, and the Mona Choir from the neighboring Republic of the Congo.



Members of the Dawn of Carmel Choir, which performed at the jubilee in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Among the 600 participants at the celebrations in the capital were three of the first Congolese Bahá'ís: Louis Selemani, Remy Kalonji, and Valerien Mukendi, now all in their 80s. They were joined by a dozen former pioneers from Europe, North America, and other parts of Africa. Bahá'ís in remote areas who were unable to attend the main jubilee festivities in Kinshasa held their own celebrations in support of the main event.

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The Bahá'í community in the Republic of the Congo celebrated its golden jubilee by honoring the struggles of the past and looking forward to its future. Two hundred people attended the 50th anniversary celebrations in Brazzaville from 29 to 31 August 2003. The event included 28 theatrical and musical performances, including a play by a theater troupe from Pointe Noire and a film that highlighted the history of the Faith in the country.

Severe political and social unrest in the country has affected the Bahá'í community, but the survival of the Faith in the Congo is a testament to the patience and fortitude of the Bahá'ís. The national

Bahá'í center—the venue of the jubilee festivities—was seized by the Communist regime in 1978 and occupied for 14 years, during which period the Bahá'í community was forced to stop its organized activities. Bahá'ís supported one another through mutual encouragement and informal family contacts, but without their elected administrative bodies.

When the Bahá'í community was reinstated in 1992, after the election of a new democratic government, the Bahá'ís regained use of the national center, were able to reestablish their administrative bodies, and resumed their community activities. There are now 20 Local Spiritual Assemblies, and the Bahá'í community is an active contributor to the country's development.

The Bahá'í Faith came to what is now the Republic of the Congo on 20 September 1953, when Ugandan Max Kanyerezi arrived in Brazzaville with 'Alí and Violette Nakhjavání. He was the first Bahá'í to reside in the country, then known as Middle Congo, and was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Nakhjavánís returned to the country to attend the 50th jubilee celebration, along with Bahá'í guests Joan and Albert Lincoln



Congolese Bahá'ís dancing at the celebration in Brazzaville.

and Dr. Ezzatullah Tai, who played a key role in assisting the growth of the Congolese Bahá'í community. Special guests included Roger Packa, the Cabinet Director for the High Commission charged with Moral and Spiritual Education, a branch of the Presidency of the Republic of the Congo.

National television news reported on the jubilee, and Albert Lincoln gave an interview on the radio and on one of the country's most popular TV shows.



*A Lesotho
Bahá'í
singing group
performing at
the country's
50th anniversary
celebrations.*

LESOTHO

Following a reception at the national Bahá'í center, more than 170 Bahá'ís gathered at the Lesotho Sun Hotel for two days of celebrations. Guests came from South Africa and Swaziland to enjoy performances of dance, music, and storytelling for the community's 50th anniversary, held 10–12 October 2003 in Maseru. The Butha Buthe Bahá'í Choir, the Men's Choir from Lesotho, and the Swaziland Bahá'í Choir all performed at the event, and a group from South Africa, Beyond Words, performed dances and depicted the lives of the first Lesotho Bahá'ís in a play written for the occasion.

Continental Counsellor Enos Makhele of South Africa spoke about the historical significance of the anniversary and Mapeko Mofolo, the Secretary of the National Assembly, told stories about the early days of the Bahá'í Faith in Lesotho.

The first Bahá'ís to arrive in the region, then known as Basutoland, were Frederick and Elizabeth Laws from the United States, who arrived in the country on 13 October 1953 and were each named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.

The affection they earned from the local people was reflected in the endearing nicknames they received: Mrs. Laws became known simply as "Malerato" (Mother of Love) and Mr. Laws as "Lerato" (Love). They stayed in Basutoland for 30 months, but when Mr. Laws could not get a work permit, they were forced to depart for South Africa. By that time there were 85 Bahá'ís in Lesotho and five Local Spiritual Assemblies. The community continued to grow even without its founding members, and the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Lesotho formed in 1971. There are now 26 Local Spiritual Assemblies, and Bahá'ís live in more than 470 localities throughout the nation.

MADAGASCAR

Representatives of Bahá'í communities on four Indian Ocean islands gathered to celebrate from 19 to 21 December 2003 in Antananarivo, Madagascar. Fifty Bahá'ís came from Réunion, Mauritius, and Seychelles to join with the 120 Malagasy Bahá'ís and visitors from Africa, Europe, and North America. Special guests included Malagasy government ministers, local government leaders, and representatives of other religious communities.

Interior Minister General Soja spoke at the gathering about the world-embracing principles of the Faith, noting the origin of the community on 21 April 1953, with the arrival of Meherangiz Munsiff. Ill health forced her to leave the country only a few months later, but by that time Danile Randrianarivo had become the first Malagasy to accept the Faith. Mrs. Munsiff's daughter, Jyoti, attended the jubilee and told stories of the early days of the Faith in Madagascar.

The first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tananarive was formed two years after Mrs. Munsiff's arrival, in April 1955, and the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Madagascar was elected in 1972. There are now 33 Local Spiritual Assemblies.

The celebrations garnered extensive media coverage: several newspapers published articles about the events, and the national television channel covered the closing ceremony.



The group BABY (Blantyre Active Bahá'í Youth) performing at the 50th jubilee of the Bahá'í Faith in Malawi.

MALAWI

Bahá'ís came from all over Malawi and nearby African countries such as Lesotho, South Africa, and Zambia to join in the celebrations held in Lilongwe on 9 August 2003. Other guests came from as far away as Australia, Bermuda, and Mauritius.

Jubilee festivities included a formal reception held at the Capital Hotel, where guest of honor Counsellor Enos Makhele of South Africa gave a talk on the Bahá'í Faith. Among the distinguished guests were British High Commissioner Norman Ling and Lilongwe City Councilor Stella Thunyani.

In her address, Councilor Thunyani spoke of the oneness of humanity and the unity of religions. "You may wish to ask yourself as to why a group of people of different races and creeds are dining together in a friendly atmosphere," Councilor Thunyani said. "I feel

it is through the divine love which is taught to us by the different messengers of God that we are one."

Members of the Bahá'í community recalled the struggles of the early days, caused by the separation of whites and blacks. Enayat Sohaili, a Bahá'í of Persian background, had arrived from India in 1953 and was classified as white, while the first Malawian Bahá'í, Dudley Smith Kumtendere, was black. These two original members of the Bahá'í community in Malawi would meet in the bush at night where they would say prayers, discuss plans, and then go their separate ways.

The colonial policy of discouraging racially mixed gatherings ended when Malawi, once known as Nyasaland, gained its independence in 1964. Since then, Bahá'ís have been able to meet openly and work in support of racial harmony in the country.

There are now some 15,000 Bahá'ís in Malawi, along with a national center, 15 local Bahá'í centers, two institute buildings, and 101 Local Spiritual Assemblies.

MAURITIUS

Representatives of three generations of Bahá'ís joined in the celebration in Port Louis, Mauritius, held from 12 to 14 December 2003. Members of the first generation of Bahá'ís appeared on the stage and lit candles held by representatives of the second generation of Mauritian believers, who in turn passed on the light to the third generation. Five members of the first generation spoke to the hundreds gathered at the event about the initial years, which were laden with difficulties and triumphs.

A group of youth presented an Indian dance and then depicted in a short dramatic sketch the introduction of the Faith to Mauritius and the events that led up to the current focus on children's classes, devotional meetings, and study circles. The youth workshops *Citoyens du Monde* (Citizens of the World), *Melody Channel*, and the *Diversity Dance Workshop* also performed at the event.

Speakers included Eddy Lutchmaya, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa, Bahá'í author Lowell Johnson, and long-standing Bahá'ís Sir Harry Tirvengadam, Paul Fabien, Retnon Muree, and Somoo Valayden.



Vice-President of Mauritius Raouf Bundhun (left) views a display at the country's anniversary gathering.

The Vice-President of the Republic of Mauritius, Raouf Bundhun, spoke at the event as the guest of honor and offered the Bahá'í community his best wishes for "success and great achievements in the future," saying, "The Bahá'í community has all the time been working assiduously, discreetly, and with a seriousness of purpose, and promoting the development of its members and the welfare of the people at large."

Special guest speaker Dr. Graham Walker of the United Kingdom described how only three years after the 1953 arrival of Otilie Rhein, the first Bahá'í in Mauritius, there were more than 100 members of the Faith, and three Local Spiritual Assemblies had formed by 1956. There are now 100 Local Assemblies.

Dr. Walker also gave a public address on "Science and Morality," an occasion opened by Dr. Indraduth Chunnoo, president of the Medical Council of Mauritius.

NAMIBIA

The early history of the Bahá'í Faith in Namibia was remembered at a gathering held from 19 to 21 December 2003 in Windhoek, with satellite celebrations held in the coastal towns of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. At the main jubilee gathering, local Bahá'ís welcomed Bahá'í guests from Botswana, Germany, Malawi, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Sandra Tjitendero, a member of the local Bahá'í community and wife of the Speaker of the Namibian Parliament, read the speech



*Hilifa Andreas
Nekundi and
Gerda Aiff
at the jubilee
celebrations in
Namibia.*

of her husband, Dr. Mose Tjitendero, who was ill on the day he was due to speak but joined the celebrations the following evening. Dr. Tjitendero praised the principles of the Bahá'í Faith and said that they not only give personal inspiration to him but they are also the highest aspiration of the government of Namibia. In particular he praised the "courage and spirit of those early Bahá'ís . . . who, despite the hostile political and social environment that existed at the time, persevered to demonstrate the principle of unity and oneness." Also present at the event were Maina Mkandawire, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa who resides in Malawi, and Lally Lucretia Warren, a former member of the Board and now a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Botswana.

Bahá'í youth from different regions of the country entertained participants with musical and dance performances. The 40-member Omaruru Children's Choir, from the Erongo area, sang songs in English and Otjiherero. Also performing was a dancing choir from the Kavango region of Namibia.

Hilifa Andreas Nekundi, the first Namibian to become a Bahá'í, told participants at the jubilee celebrations the dramatic story of how he joined the Faith. Mr. Nekundi (also known as Tate Hilifa) first heard about the Bahá'í teachings in 1955 from Ted Cardell of the United Kingdom, who was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

The two met when Mr. Cardell was looking for someone to translate a Bahá'í pamphlet into one of the local languages. Mr. Nekundi, an official police translator, agreed to help. Because of restrictions on interaction between different races in the country, the two men had to drive to an isolated place outside the city in the evenings, where they worked on the translation over a period of six weeks. The Bahá'í writings attracted Mr. Nekundi and inspired him to embrace the Faith for himself.

He later served on the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Windhoek and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Namibia. Today there are 25 Local Spiritual Assemblies, and Bahá'ís reside in 247 localities in the country.



Bahá'ís from former French West Africa and elsewhere at the Senegalese jubilee.

SENEGAL

Bahá'ís from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo gathered in Dakar, Senegal, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Bahá'í Faith in French West Africa. Guests from other parts of Africa, as well as Europe and North and South America, came to the festivities, held between 26 and 28 December 2003.

Some early Bahá'ís in the region gave accounts of the major events involving the Faith during the past 50 years. The first to bring

the Bahá'í teachings to the country were brothers Labíb and Habíb Işfahání, who arrived from Egypt in December 1953 and in April 1954, respectively. Since their arrival the community has expanded to 382 localities, with 54 Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Two distinguished guests at the celebration were Ibrahim Galadina and Moussa Kamaye, members of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa. The festivities were marked by joyous artistic performances by a variety of groups. A theatrical troupe from Mali performed dramatic stories about the early believers in Persia. The Bahá'í choirs of Burkina Faso, Dakar, and Kaolack entertained guests with their dances and songs, and a Bahá'í dance group from Dakar, Les Etincelles, performed two well-received shows.

SEYCHELLES

The golden jubilee celebration held 8 November 2003 in Victoria, Seychelles, garnered extensive coverage on television, on radio, and in the newspapers. The first events were a workshop on virtues education in schools and a presentation of books to the Ministry of Education, sponsored by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Seychelles.

Organizers received an overwhelming response to the workshop—with more than 100 teachers from public and private schools attending and extensive inquiries from members of the public who wanted to obtain a publication on virtues for their own use.

Sarah René, the First Lady of Seychelles and a member of the NSA, spoke at the event on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly. The Minister of Education, Danny Faure, also spoke, thanking the Bahá'í community for its gift of books and lauding its contributions to education in the island nation.

Munirih Zarqani, the wife of the late Abdul Rahman Zarqani, one of the first Bahá'ís to pioneer to Seychelles, was in attendance and unveiled a commemorative plaque along with Dr. Badi Abbas, the son of the late Kamil Abbas, who arrived in Seychelles from Iraq in November 1953. Both Kamil Abbas and Mr. Zarqani were named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.

The celebrations also included artistic performances, with some 100 performers in a pageant presenting songs, video, dances, and



The Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly, Antonio Gopal (right), presents books to Seychelles Minister of Education, Danny Faure, at the jubilee gathering.

skits. The pageant generated so much interest that it was staged twice more in the following week, both times to full houses.

SOUTH AFRICA

Members of the local community of Phokeng organized most of the South African jubilee celebrations, held there from 21 to 22 November 2003. More than 600 Bahá'ís attended the main festivities, and additional gatherings were held in Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Mafikeng, Pretoria, Sabie, and Umtata.

African dancing, music, and dramatic performances, including presentations by the group Beyond Words, gave artistic and emotional energy to the national jubilee celebrations. At one point, all the members of the National Spiritual Assembly sang to the audience from the stage.

The Queen Mother of the Bafokeng tribe, Dr. Semane B. Mologeti, a guest of honor at the celebrations, said she was delighted the jubilee was held in her province—the home of the first indigenous South African Bahá'ís—and she praised the Bahá'í community's work for peace and unity. Members of the Continental Board of Counselors Beth Allen and Enos Makhele also gave talks at the gathering.

Ephens Senne, whose wife was the first South African woman to accept the Faith, spoke about the early history of the Faith in South Africa and how the racial tensions were almost overwhelming. He



Above left: Hand of the Cause of God 'Ali-Muhammad Varqá (front row, second from right) with members of the first National Spiritual Assembly of Congo and Gabon in 1971. Above right: Hand of the Cause of God William Sears (left), his wife, Marguerite, and son Michael on their way to South Africa in 1953.



Above: Participants at the first national convention in Malawi in 1970. Top left: Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for Namibia Ted Cardell with his wife, Alice, and two of their children in 1960. Bottom left: Hand of the Cause of God Enoch Olinga on a visit to the Solomon Islands. Below: (Left to right) Early Bahá'ís in the Cook Islands in 1955: Rima Nicholas, Tuaine Karotaua, and Edith Daniels.



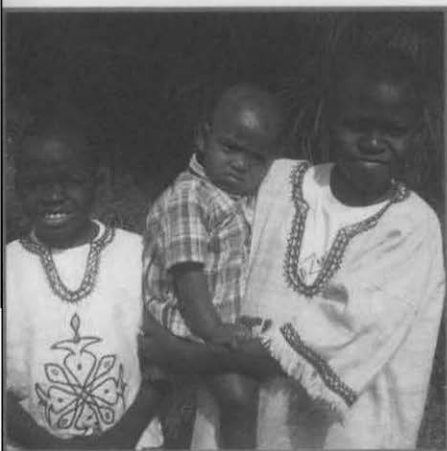


Above left: A participant at the Bahá'í community's 50th jubilee in the Republic of the Congo. Above right: Participants at the 50th anniversary celebrations in the Canary Islands.



Directly below: Bahá'í pioneer Nan Greenwood (right) with Lady Maui Short at the anniversary gathering in the Cook Islands. Far below: The Lakalaka Dance Group performing at the Tongan jubilee.

Above: 'Alí and Violette Nakhjavání at the September celebrations in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Below: Young Bahá'ís at the jubilee. Senegal.





Cousins Direlang Nakedi (left) and Kelebogile Khunou praise their grandparents for their contributions to the Bahá'í Faith in South Africa at the jubilee celebration.

described the oppressive atmosphere of apartheid, explaining that he and his wife were initially scared that the Bahá'ís, because they were white people, had plans to kill them. That fear vanished as they got to know the Bahá'ís, but still they had to be very careful about meeting them because of their apprehensions about official surveillance.

The first Local Spiritual Assembly formed in 1954 in Johannesburg, and the election of the National Spiritual Assembly, responsible for administering the whole of southern Africa, followed two years later. It assisted the formation of 14 National Spiritual Assemblies in southern Africa and also three "homeland" regions, which were later incorporated again within South Africa. Today South Africa has its own National Spiritual Assembly, which also administers the island of St. Helena. There are 38 Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Hand of the Cause of God William Sears, his wife Marguerite, and their son Michael were the first of 37 pioneers to arrive during the Ten Year Plan. Their farm became a place for people of different racial and religious backgrounds to deepen their understanding of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.



Participants at the 50th jubilee festival in Zimbabwe.

ZIMBABWE

Jubilee festivities in Harare, Zimbabwe, featured a variety concert following the opening ceremony; it was attended by Bahá'ís from every province of Zimbabwe. Among the performers was a Bahá'í youth group from Bulawayo, Isitsha Sothando (Portal of Love), which performed the Ndebele tribe's traditional dance for community celebrations. Other groups included Letters of the Living, a group from Mashonaland Central Province, and the Chiweshe Bahá'í Choir. Children and youth from Harare also sang during the event, and a Bahá'í youth from Matabeleland, Sithule Moyo, recited a poem.

The event, held 12–14 December 2003, followed smaller regional congresses throughout the year to mark the golden jubilee. Television, radio, and newspapers provided extensive coverage of the event,

and the *Herald*, a national newspaper, carried two major articles on the Faith.

In the official opening address, the founder and acting Vice-Chancellor of the Women's University in Africa, Hope Sadza, called the 50th anniversary "a remarkable landmark." Dr. Sadza said she cherished the hope that the Bahá'ís would help Zimbabwe to "become an abode of peace and tranquility and the envy of the rest of the world."

Among those in the audience were a former cabinet minister, a representative of the diplomatic corps, leaders from Christian churches, and other distinguished guests. Nathan Shamuyarira, a government official, addressed the conference and spoke about his high regard for the Faith's teachings and principles, and his great respect for the Bahá'ís.

Bahá'ís live in more than 1,600 urban and rural localities in the country, and there are 43 Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Some of the early Bahá'ís of Zimbabwe were also introduced to the participants. They included 'Izzatu'lláh Zahrá'í, Douglas Kadenhe, Nura Faridian (now Steiner), Enayat and Iran Sohaili, and



Participants gathered at the Yukon Bahá'í center for the anniversary celebration there.

former member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa Shidan Fat'he-Aazam and his wife Florence.

Mr. Zahrá'í was the first Bahá'í to arrive in the country during the Ten Year Crusade. He was followed soon after by Claire Gung, Eyneddin and Tahereh Alai, and Kenneth and Roberta Christian. All six received the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

Americas

YUKON

In a four-day gathering from 29 August through 1 September 2003 at the Yukon Bahá'í center on Lake Laberge, Bahá'ís in Canada's Yukon Territory celebrated the arrival of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh Ted and Joan Anderson. The gathering brought attendees from several regions of Canada and the United States.

Some 100 people attended the celebration, including guest of honor Ted Anderson. He spoke at the celebration about the early history of the Faith in the Yukon and of the 50 years of progress since then. Other special guests included Auxiliary Board member John Sargent, members of the National Spiritual Assembly, and Slim Lubeseder and Robert Fleming, two of the first three people to become Bahá'ís in the territory.

Much of the gathering reflected the culture of the First Nations peoples, and Mr. Anderson's grandson Teddy performed a native hoop dance as part of the entertainment. Other native elements included a healing circle, a pipe ceremony, a sweat, and a sacred campfire that was kept burning throughout the celebrations.

Asia

ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR

Jubilee events held 10–12 November 2003 in Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar, included a dinner for high-ranking officials. Lt. Governor Shri N. N. Jha praised the work being carried out by the Bahá'ís in the territory, which is composed of 540 islands. At a unity concert attended by some 700 people, the Chief of Staff of the Andaman and Nicobar Command, Rear Admiral Rakesh Kala, wished the Bahá'ís all the best in their work and activities.



Jamshed Fozdar (left) presents a memento of the anniversary celebration to the Chief of Staff of the Andaman and Nicobar Command, Rear Admiral Rakesh Kala.

Jamshed Fozdar was one of the guests of honor at both the official dinner and the concert. His father, Dr. K. M. Fozdar, first brought the Bahá'í Faith to these islands in 1953 and received the title of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. Although he had to leave the islands after four months, by then four local people had become Bahá'ís, and they continued the development of the community.

The events attracted wide coverage in both English- and Hindi-language newspapers. All India Radio repeatedly led its bulletins with news of the jubilee, broadcast quotations from Bahá'u'lláh's writings, and carried live interviews with three Bahá'ís. Local television also covered the unity concert, which featured a program of songs and dances presented by Bahá'í youth and other high school students, all on themes of peace, harmony, and unity.

Australasia

COOK ISLANDS

More than 100 people attended the jubilee celebrations in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, held from 10 to 15 October 2003. Among the official guests at the jubilee were Queen Elizabeth II's representative to the Cook Islands, Frederick Goodwin, and his wife, Ina Goodwin; the

former representative, Sir Apenera Short and Lady Short; and Prime Minister Robert Woonton and his wife, Sue Woonton.

The festivities were also attended by traditional tribal chiefs and a representative from the country's Religious Advisory Council. Bahá'í speakers included Heather Simpson, member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, and Alan Wilcox, Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand.

Georgie Skeaff, who has compiled a record of the Cook Islands Bahá'í community, led a tour to historical Bahá'í landmarks, which included places where the first Bahá'í pioneers in the country lived.

The Faith came to the islands through the efforts of Edith Danielsen, from the United States, who arrived in 1953, and Dulcie Dive, from New Zealand via Australia, who arrived in 1954. Both were named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. In March 1955, two Cook Islanders, Tuaine Karotaua (also known as Peter Titi) and Rima Nicholas, became Bahá'ís. A year later, the first Local Spiritual Assembly was formed.

The jubilee events also included a devotional gathering that opened with a prayer said in eight languages, and featured children



Youth and children celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Bahá'í Faith in the Cook Islands.

singing and reading from the Bahá'í holy writings. Other highlights included a concert with singing, drumming, and dancing, and a visit to the island of Aitutaki.

KIRIBATI

The President of Kiribati was among the attendees at the anniversary celebrations in Abaiang, Kiribati, held on 4 March 2004. President Anote Tong addressed the gathering, urging, "governments of the land and spiritual governments should work hand in hand for the welfare of the people."

A report from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Kiribati was read to the participants by Atita Atanrerei. The report recounted the introduction of Faith by Elena and Roy Fernie, who left their home in Panama and arrived to live in the village of Tuarabu, Abaiang, on 4 March 1954. Both were named Knights of



The President of Kiribati, Anote Tong (left), being greeted by Itebatu Tiare, the Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of Kiribati.

Bahá'u'lláh. In the 50 years since their arrival, more than 10,000 local people have joined the Faith throughout the country.

Among those participating in the jubilee celebrations were Taukoriri Eritai, who became a Bahá'í at the time the Fernies were on Abaiang, and Bahá'í teachers in Kiribati, Joe Russell and John Thurston. Also attending was a representative of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand, Michael Fudakowski, who lived for some 17 years in Kiribati with his wife, Robin White, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Australasia, and their family.

The celebration included a feast and musical and dramatic performances. Two national newspapers and two national radio stations covered the events.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Celebrations to mark the anniversary of the arrival of the Faith in the Solomon Islands, held between 27 February and 1 March 2004 at the national Bahá'í center in Honiara, were attended by some 500 people from all over the country. The celebrations welcomed visitors



Members of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Togori, Makira, Eastern Solomon Islands, at the jubilee, with Counsellor Jalal Mills (left).

from Australia and Papua New Guinea, and satellite functions were also held in Gizo, Hareapa, and Malaita.

The jubilee's guest of honor was Governor-General Sir John Ini Lapli, who commended the Bahá'í community for "endlessly and untiringly promoting unity, peace, and the brotherhood of mankind in the country over these 50 years of [the country's] life."

The Deputy Prime Minister also attended the official function, along with other government ministers, ambassadors, and high-commissioners from all diplomatic missions, a High Court judge, and many prominent members of the community. Among the Bahá'í guests was Continental Counsellor Jalal Mills, a son of John Mills, who was the first expatriate to become a Bahá'í in the country. John Mills and his wife were also present at the jubilee celebrations.

The jubilee was covered by both main national newspapers and the national radio, the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation.

The Faith was introduced to the islands by Bahá'í pioneers Alvin and Gertrude Blum from the United States, who arrived on 1 March 1954 and were subsequently named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. Keithie Blum Saunders, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Blum, who lives in Honiara, gave an account of the lives of her parents and told of their services in establishing the Bahá'í community in the Solomon Islands and in opening various businesses. Gertrude Blum also helped to establish the National Council of Women and the Red Cross Society, and her husband was a member of the Honiara Town Council, a chairman of the Medical Board, and one of the founders of the Chamber of Commerce and of the Scout Movement.

A photo exhibition featured images of the history of the Bahá'í community in the Solomons from the mid-1950s to the present day, with photographs of some of the early Bahá'ís, including the first Solomon Islander to accept the Faith, Billy Gina, and a traditional chief from the Are Are region of Malaita, Hamuel Hoahania, whose conversion was the start of large-scale enrolment in the Bahá'í Faith by residents of Malaita.

TONGA

Highlights of the jubilee celebrations in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, held from 24 to 28 January 2004, included a welcoming ball with 600



*Tongan
Bahá'ís
outside the
royal palace
after the
parade.*

guests, a morning devotional gathering attended by 500, and a luncheon attended by some 800 guests, including a member of the royal family. Bahá'ís from various Tongan island groups, such as Eua, Haapai, and Vavau, gathered for the jubilee. Others came from Australia, Hawaii, the Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Samoa, and the continental United States.

Crown Prince Tupouto'a, the first son of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, welcomed a parade of more than 400 Bahá'ís who arrived at the royal palace after setting off from the newly renovated national Bahá'í center. They wore traditional Tongan woven clothing and carried flags and banners proclaiming such principles of the Bahá'í Faith as the oneness of religion and the unity of mankind.

A local Bahá'í dance troupe presented a traditional Tongan dance, called Lakalaka, and Native American artist Kevin Locke, representing the Bahá'ís of the United States at the jubilee, performed a hoop dance that was broadcast on the national news.



Bahá'ís from Vanuatu parading through the streets of Port Vila as part of their anniversary events.

Following royal protocols, traditional orators Masila and Leka—both of them Bahá'ís—spoke on behalf of the Bahá'í community and expressed their appreciation to the royal family. The Prince's orator, Vakalahi, assured the Bahá'ís that the Faith would continue to be under the blessing of the royal family and noted the many contributions of the Bahá'í community to Tonga.

Among the special guests was Stanley Bolton, who arrived from Australia as the first Bahá'í in the country on 25 January 1954, for which he received the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, as did two other pioneering Bahá'ís: Dudley Moore Blakely and his wife Elsa (Judy) Blakely, who arrived from the United States on 12 July 1954.

The Honorable Ma'atu, the second son of the King, was the guest of honor at a jubilee luncheon. Other guests were retired Speaker of the Parliament, Hon. Fusitu'a, accompanied by his daughter; Donald Blanks, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia; representatives of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Australia, Hawaii, New Zealand, and Samoa; and many government officials, community leaders, and members of the Christian community of Tonga.

The jubilee was an occasion of unprecedented media coverage of the Bahá'í Faith in Tonga, with the national TV channel and radio

covering three nights of the jubilee. Reporters from two newspapers also covered the events.

The evening program featured a choir competition that included groups from Australia, New Zealand, and Tonga, with songs based on the Bahá'í sacred writings. The five-day jubilee celebrations ended with a picnic and a dance that saw participants from different islands dressed in traditional garb.

VANUATU

On the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Bahá'í Faith in Vanuatu, a parade set out from Bahá'í Street and moved through the center of Port Vila, the capital city, led by traditional dancers from the island of Tonga. Members of local Bahá'í communities, wearing outfits in different floral prints, followed them, singing and waving to the crowd under banners proclaiming principles of their Faith such as "the oneness of humanity."

Interspersed with the marchers were colorful floats, including a replica of the *SS Caledonien*, the ship on which Bertha Dobbins traveled to Port Vila in 1953. Mrs. Dobbins was the first to bring the Bahá'í Faith to what was then known as New Hebrides.

In the time since her arrival, the Bahá'í community of Vanuatu has been established in 199 localities throughout this archipelago of some 80 islands, with a National Spiritual Assembly and 44 Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Before a 500-strong audience that included many government and community leaders, the chairman of the National Council of Chiefs, Chief Paul Tahí, welcomed the parade and congratulated the Bahá'ís on the anniversary, lauding the community's contributions not only to the unity of the country, but also to business and health.

At a public festival on Port Vila's tropical seafront, other leaders to speak about the Faith included Vanuatu's Director-General of Education, Abel Nako, and the Mayor of Port Vila, Patrick Crowley.

Representatives came from Bahá'í communities in French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and the Solomons. Among the many international guests attending the jubilee were a representative of the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia, Kath Podger, and a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, Stephen Hall.

A Bahá'í choir and dance groups from the Vanuatu island of Efate, and from New Caledonia and French Polynesia, provided entertainment for the event, which included a full-day public concert of song and dance staged on the city's seafront.

Bahá'í communities in Ambae, Malakula, Pentecost, and Tanna held additional local jubilee festivities.

Europe

BALEARIC ISLANDS

Celebrations for the golden jubilee of the Faith in the Balearic Islands took place in Calvia, Mallorca, and Soller from 21 to 23 November 2003. Many artists, including the local Bahá'í choir and the San Jaime Choir, performed at the events. Regional dances and performances on violin and piano were also part of the entertainment.

Guests included Emilio Egea, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, and members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Spain, along with representatives of Buddhist, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim organizations, who participated with the Bahá'ís in a panel discussion on religious dialogue, which was covered by the local media.

Several high-ranking officials also attended the celebrations, including the Director of the Human Rights for Children Office, a UNESCO representative, and senior members of the Education Council, who praised the Bahá'í community's work for social welfare.

Charles Monroe Ioas of the United States, one of the first to bring the Faith to the islands, was present at the jubilee. He was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, as was Virginia Orbison of the United States, who arrived in August 1953 as the first Bahá'í in the Balearics. Jean and Tove Deleuran from Denmark, who followed soon after, were also named Knights.

CANARY ISLANDS

Songs originating in the Canary Islands were a highlight of the festivities held in the capital, Las Palmas, from 10 to 12 October 2003. Guests from Austria, Morocco, Senegal, and Spain joined local Bahá'ís to watch a video documentary about the 50 years of Bahá'í activity in the islands, while another film, produced by local youth,

depicted the significant role young people played in the history of the Bahá'í community.

Mahnaz Nekoudin, in a speech at the celebration, paid tribute to the early Bahá'í pioneers, many of whom were present at the jubilee and received roses as a gesture of gratitude.

The Faith first came to the Canary Islands in October 1953 when George and Peggy True and their son Barry arrived from the United States. Mr. and Mrs. True were both named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. Two other Bahá'ís were named Knights for their contributions to the early community: Gertrude Eisenberg of the United States and Shoghi Riaz Rouhani, a Bahá'í from Egypt. Both settled on the island of Grand Canary.

Mr. Rouhani, who was present at the jubilee, talked about the significance of the historic events 50 years ago. Barry True addressed the gathering and offered an affectionate reminiscence of his parents. Also contributing to the festivities were Emilio Egea and Sohrab Youssefian, members of the Continental Board of Counsellors.



Participants at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Bahá'í Faith in the Canary Islands.



Youth in Sicily gathered for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Bahá'í Faith on the island.

In conjunction with the jubilee, the Bahá'ís organized an inter-faith panel discussion, which was held at the Writers' Guild of Las Palmas, and brought together members of the Buddhist, Catholic, and Jewish communities, as well as the consuls representing Ireland and Italy. The jubilee events were covered in two regional newspapers and on television.

SICILY

From 19 to 21 September 2003, the Bahá'ís of Sicily celebrated the golden jubilee of the arrival of the Bahá'í Faith on their island. Three hundred guests from 15 countries attended the celebrations held in Campofelice di Roccella near Palermo.

Guests of honor included former member of the Universal House of Justice 'Alí Nakhjavání and his wife, Violette. The celebration was an occasion to recall how the community has grown over the years.

The Bahá'í Faith first arrived on the staunchly Catholic island in 1953, borne by Emma Rice, who left behind a comfortable family estate in the United States to settle there. She was followed a week later by Stanley and Florence Bagley and their three teenaged children, also from the us.

Mrs. Rice and the members of the Bagley family were all designated Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. Through the activities of the Bahá'í pioneers and other arrivals, and with visits by Hand of the Cause of God Ugo Giachery, the Faith grew. The first Local Spiritual Assembly formed in 1957.

At the jubilee, Italian Bahá'í Mario Piarulli shared memories of Dr. Giachery, who was born in Palermo. Mr. Piarulli has recently finished writing a book, *Gli Ambasciatori di Bahá'u'lláh* (*The Ambassadors of Bahá'u'lláh*), which he dedicated to the memory of Dr. Giachery.

Another author present was Rino Cardone, who launched his recently published history of the Sicilian Bahá'í community, *La Sicilia dalle Infinite Perle* (*The Countless Pearls of Sicily*).

A highlight of the jubilee was a teleconference between the participants and Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá in Haifa, Israel. Dr. Varqá, who has been a regular visitor to Sicily, also sent a special letter for the occasion, which read in part: "Following 50 years of hard effort and activities, you have been successful in creating a community which could be presented as a model of integrity, harmony, and fellowship that generates the sweet fragrance of divine love in all parts of the islands of the Mediterranean Sea."

NOTES

- ¹ Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950–1957* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 41, 42.
- ² A summary of these goals can be found in *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XII (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1956), pp. 256–74, and in Shoghi Effendi's cable announcing the launch of the plan, in *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, pp. 40–45.
- ³ This system of plans for the development of the Bahá'í community continues still today, under the direction of the Universal House of Justice. The current Five Year Plan was launched in 2001.
- ⁴ *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, p. 152.

- ⁵ More information about many of these jubilee celebrations can be found on the Web site of the Bahá'í World News Service, <http://news.bahai.org/>. For a comprehensive list of countries and territories opened during 1953-54, see Glenn Cameron with Wendi Momen, *A Basic Bahá'í Chronology* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1996), pp. 291-320.

The Year in Review

There is perhaps no event more anticipated in the Bahá'í world than the international convention for the election of the Universal House of Justice, held every five years at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel. The Bahá'í Faith has no clergy, and its governance is carried out by democratically elected bodies, at the head of which is the House of Justice. That body was ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, and He wrote that it was "charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries."¹

The electorate is composed of the members of National Spiritual Assemblies around the world, who are subject neither to campaigning nor to nominations. They are each themselves elected as a result of a process in which electors are guided to vote in a prayerful and reverent attitude, focused on the Faith's teachings that advise them to choose "the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability, and mature experience."²

The exercise of casting the ballots in voting during the convention is ordinarily a dramatic event: members of National Spiritual Assemblies, many dressed in colorful national costumes, form a



Nineteen Bahá'ís from 18 countries gathered in Haifa to serve as tellers for the election of the Universal House of Justice in April 2003.

procession and individually deposit envelopes into the ballot box. The importance of the election, though, goes far beyond this display—and in a year when it became impossible, it was replaced by something much more pragmatic but no less significant.

The House of Justice cancelled the Ninth International Convention in the midst of a year that it described as “agitated by a succession of crises,”³ and while those crises rattled great nations, they could not unsettle the unique process of the election of the Universal House of Justice.

Though the physical scene of the convention, a marvelous display of diversity and democracy, was gone, the Bahá'í world was still wrapt by the occasion. In place of the thousands of delegates came 19 tellers from 18 countries, representing every continent, who would each count the more than 3,300 ballots sent by post. On 29 April 2003, after the ballots were counted, a message was sent announcing the results of the election to Bahá'ís all over the world.⁴

The success of the process demonstrated that though the Bahá'í community is far from insulated from the outside world, the fluc-

tuation and exigencies of the world do not disturb the foundations of the Faith. And all around the world Bahá'ís seek to counteract those changes and chances of the world, working diligently towards a prosperous future for mankind.

This article presents an overview of Bahá'í activities during 2003–04, and though capturing all of the events would be too daunting to attempt, the excerpts here should provide a salient glimpse of the character of the worldwide Bahá'í community in its efforts to uplift the whole of humanity as it moves through its “turbulent transition” to embrace unity and collective security.

Building Momentum for Transformation

A video entitled *Building Momentum*, which was planned for distribution at the convention, was instead forwarded by mail, along with a document prepared by the International Teaching Centre titled *Building Momentum: A Coherent Approach to Growth*, to all National Spiritual Assemblies. The document offers a structured analysis of the means by which Bahá'ís are implementing the goals of the Five Year Plan, a worldwide process of systematic development of human resources in which the Bahá'í community is currently engaged to effect its consolidation and expansion.

The process is bringing a fresh vitality to many Bahá'í communities, and the past few years have seen an evolution in the culture of those communities, centered around the training institute process and the “core activities” of the Five Year Plan: devotional meetings, children's classes, and study circles.⁵

The video *Building Momentum* offers an inspirational portrait of Bahá'í communities in Australia, Canada, Colombia, Italy, Malaysia, Nepal, and Zambia that are enacting transformation by applying the guidance of the Universal House of Justice in their development. The video allowed the Bahá'ís not only to reflect on the progress made so far during the Five Year Plan, but to see an image of themselves as an energetic, worldwide community on the move, with individuals and groups enthused about taking charge of their own spiritual and material development.

It also enabled Bahá'ís around the world to deepen their appreciation of the systematic processes in which the electors are



*Anis Mojgani
recites a poem
at the Southern
Regional
Conference
in Nashville,
Tennessee, USA,
in November
2003.*

engaged and to more keenly appreciate the reality of the words of the House of Justice, "The individual alone can exercise those capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities . . . to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society."⁶

One observer, describing the impact of viewing the video, said that it was as if all the documents of the Universal House of Justice had come to life: "People were talking about their area's level of growth and development, having reflection meetings, and carrying out the study circles, children's classes, devotional meetings." She said she had witnessed the truth of the assertion that Bahá'í communities had "unity in thought, cohesion in their work."

That same unity and cohesion were evidenced at the Southern Regional Bahá'í Conference, in Nashville, Tennessee, USA, held from 27 to 30 November 2003. Some 4,000 Bahá'ís attended the conference, which was opened by Vice-Mayor Howard Gentry Jr. Among the speakers at the conference were Kenneth Bowers and Robert C. Henderson, members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, and Eugene Andrews and Rebequa Murphy, members of the Continental Board of Counsellors.

Artistic presentations at the conference included many musical and dramatic performances, a journey for children through

reconstructed historical places associated with the Faith, film screenings, displays of the visual arts, and creative devotional gatherings. The Bahá'í choir Voices of Bahá also gave a concert at the historic Ryman Auditorium, once home to the Grand Ole Opry.

Participants discussed the development of the three core activities in sessions aimed at furthering the process of the expansion of the Faith in the region. The Regional Bahá'í Council of the Southern States, which sponsored the conference, reported "extraordinary progress" in the number of study circles in the region and in the number of participants who have completed the sequence of courses and been trained as tutors. At the conference, which was open to the public, 18 people joined the Faith.

Southern states are currently home to several "clusters" in advanced stages of growth, and participants at the conference pledged to undertake systematic activities to ensure the region continues in that tradition.

Clustering is a key process shaping Bahá'í communities, entailing mapping and sectioning of countries and into clusters of a size and composition that maximize human resources and the potential for growth. This mapping, in conjunction with the development of the institute process, has allowed for a systematic vision of the evolution of Bahá'í communities.

Reflection meetings bring together members of clusters to consult about challenges and opportunities and make plans for the future. Bahá'ís in the Kigali cluster in Rwanda joined together on



Participants at a November 2003 reflection meeting in Kigali, Rwanda, meet to discuss plans for Bahá'í activities in their region.



Youth provide entertainment at a training institute conference held in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 27 December 2003 to 12 January 2004.



Bahá'ís at a reflection meeting in Sierra Leone in 2003.

30 November 2003 in the third such meeting in the Kigali cluster of communities.

The Kigali cluster comprises five Local Spiritual Assemblies and is currently home to six regular study circles, five children's classes, and nine devotional meetings. The 60 participants at the reflection meeting in November, half of whom were youth, studied the *Building Momentum* document from the International Teaching Centre and enjoyed songs and traditional dances.

The evolution being effected in Bahá'í communities has also brought a blurring of the lines between people who are and who are not Bahá'ís, and members of the public are participating in activities in increasing numbers. In the words of the Universal House of Justice, "The culture now emerging is one in which groups of Bahá'u'lláh's followers explore together the truths in His Teachings" and "freely open their study circles, devotional gatherings and children's classes to their friends and neighbors."⁷

In Ethiopia, the local community in Zway experienced success by inviting high school students to join in study circles; several became Bahá'ís as a result and were encouraged to gain the training to become study circle tutors and continue to extend the influence of the process. The increase was remarkable, and in September 2003, when the Local Spiritual Assembly of Zway hosted 600 people for a luncheon, more than half of them were newly enrolled Bahá'ís who had been attracted through the study circles.

The "building momentum" that is animating Bahá'í communities was also the theme of a youth conference in Otavalo, Ecuador, held in February 2004. Some 180 participants from all over Ecuador, as well as visitors from Brazil, Canada, Panama, and the United States, joined in the conference.

Members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, Continental Counsellor Leticia Solano, and Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Howard Menking all joined the conference as special guests. In addition to inspiring talks about the history of the Faith and the role of youth, the conference included artistic evenings, devotional periods in the mornings, and sports and games.

After Ms. Solano spoke on the main theme of the conference, the participants were grouped by cluster, each group designing a plan in which all members would play a role. The conference resulted

in commitments from the youth to engage in service projects and campaigns to spread the teachings of the Faith. Two people declared themselves Bahá'ís as a result of the conference.

Bahá'í youth, both in their home communities and in gatherings such as the conference in Otavalo, hope to rise to fulfill the expectations expressed by Bahá'u'lláh in His statement, "Blessed is he who in the prime of his youth and the heyday of his life will arise to serve the Cause of the Lord."⁸ Youth are called upon to use their energy and vitality for the service of their Faith and humanity.

In Hluboka, Czech Republic, a six-day gathering to inspire Bahá'í youth to make their contribution to the welfare of humanity attracted participants from more than 30 countries. The atmosphere of the seminar, which was held at the Townshend International School from 26 December 2003 to 1 January 2004, was characterized by the joy and camaraderie of the some 220 participants. In addition to the many European Bahá'ís, attendees came from places as far away as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.

In a talk that drew on analysis by Shoghi Effendi and messages from the Universal House of Justice, Robert Henderson, Secretary-General of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, told the youth that they were "witnessing the disintegration of international order."

Bahá'í youth, he said, should strive to become examples of the transforming power of Bahá'u'lláh, even as "sovereign states are unable to stop the spread of terrorism and war, to stabilize the



One of the workshops at the "Changing Times" youth conference in the Czech Republic, held from 26 December 2003 to 1 January 2004.

world economy or to alleviate the sufferings of millions." He told the youth that they should "elevate the atmosphere" in which they live, face challenges with confidence, and become the embodiment of excellence in their personal lives, academic training, professions, and spiritual qualities.

Topics by other speakers included the importance of ethics in business, the equality of men and women, Bahá'í history, and preparation for marriage.

Workshops aimed at inspiring the youth to incorporate Bahá'í principles in their lives included a focus on two current themes in Bahá'í activities worldwide—the arts in Bahá'í community life and the importance of devotional meetings.

Finding new ways to incorporate arts into community life was also the goal of a national festival in Scarborough, England, that drew more than 1,200 people. The festival focused on exploring ways to creatively portray the themes in *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, the first book of the Ruhi series of courses.

This sequence of courses, created at the Ruhi Institute in Colombia, is widely used in study circles by Bahá'ís around the world. Bahá'ís and others are participating in rapidly increasing numbers in the courses, and the books' use has had a positive impact on the development of spiritual insights, knowledge, and skills. The first book is primarily about understanding prayer, life after death, and the spiritual nature of human beings.

Festival coordinator Rob Weinberg said that the Scarborough event, held 7–9 November 2003, was aimed at encouraging people to reflect on their spiritual nature through its portrayal in dramatic and musical performances, audio-visual presentations, and talks.

The spiritual realities that underpin human existence, the main theme of the first book in the sequence of Ruhi courses, was the topic of an address by Sohrab Youssefian, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors. The theme of prayer was expressed through an exhibition that showed the development of Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the world, with rare drawings and photographs of those Temples displayed alongside architectural models. Illustrating the theme of life after death, Arabella Velasco, a British writer and actress, presented *A Light at the End of the Tunnel*, her play based on first-hand accounts of near-death experiences.

Members of the musical group Soul Tunes, which performed at the "Reflections on the Life of the Spirit" festival in Scarborough, England, with friends. Singer Hatef Sedkaoui is second from the left.



Creators of the theatrical production Pure, about the life of Tāhīrih, which was performed in Scarborough. Pictured (left to right) are director Jessica Naish, actor Shirin Youssefian-Maanian, and playwright Annabel Knight.

Bahá'ís in the UK study the first book of the Ruhi courses, Reflections on the Life of the Spirit, in a study circle.



Other themes explored by the presentations at the festival included the status of women, illustrated through a play depicting the life and death of the nineteenth-century Persian poet, Ṭáhirih, who heralded a new age of emancipation for women and challenged the religious fundamentalism of her time.

Prominent musicians at the festival included Conrad Lambert, who gave a solo performance, and Tunisian-born Hatef Sedkaoui, who played a blend of Western and traditional Arabic music with his Marseilles-based band, Soul Tunes.

Shoghi Effendi affirmed the importance of the arts in attracting people to the Faith: "The day will come when the Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings are presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing."⁹

That sentiment is well known by Bahá'í dance workshops such as the Portuguese group Geração Viva ("Living Generation"), which has been a dynamic tool for spreading the teachings of the Faith through the arts. On 19 February the group performed in Barcelos, Portugal, to an audience of 500 people, including teachers, students, and parents. After the event, the school requested that a tape be made of the performance.



Members of a Bahá'í youth workshop performing at a conference in Sydney, Australia, in 2003.

In Singapore, the Bahá'í choral group In Unison staged a public performance for 300 people at the Raffles Hotel on 25 May 2003. The choir's members come from a variety of ethnic and national backgrounds: American, Australian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Persian, and Sinhalese. They performed songs based on the Bahá'í writings as well as those with Bahá'í themes, each introduced with an explanation of the relevant Bahá'í principle. The choir, which formed in 2000, has performed in the past at many private and public functions, including events sponsored by the Interreligious Organization of Singapore.

Building Communities

The ongoing process of building distinctive Bahá'í communities means not only concentrating on individual spiritual development but also finding ways to promote creativity and increased capacity, and to create distinctive social patterns.

For many Bahá'í communities, celebrating their progress in the time since their founding has offered a way to show how much has been accomplished. During 2003–04 several countries celebrated the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Bahá'í Faith in their lands.¹⁰

In Switzerland, meanwhile, Bahá'ís had the opportunity to reflect on a century of the Faith in the country at a gathering in Interlaken in September 2003 which brought together Bahá'ís from all parts of Switzerland and guests from 26 other countries. The celebrations followed an official reception for dignitaries held at the national Bahá'í center in Bern, during which a senior Swiss political leader paid a high tribute to the country's Bahá'í community.

Federal Chancellor Annemarie Huber-Hotz congratulated the Bahá'ís “for the ideas you stand for and to which you are committed: the unity of humankind, world peace, tolerance towards people of other cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. I am here because I share your ideals and consider your efforts for their implementation as essential steps on the path towards a more peaceful world.”

Among the 450 participants at the celebrations were guests of honor 'Alí Nakhjavání, a former member of the Universal House



Some of the 450 participants from 27 countries who came to Interlaken, Switzerland, for the celebration of the Bahá'ís' 100th anniversary there.

of Justice, and his wife Violette. Other guests included government officials, parliamentarians, and representatives of nongovernmental and religious organizations. Also present at the centennial celebrations was Annemarie Krüger, granddaughter of Swiss Bahá'í Auguste Forel, noted scientist and humanitarian.

Participants enjoyed various artistic presentations and heard about the history of the Bahá'í community in Switzerland. Ariane Schaller related the stories of her grandparents, Joseph de Bons, from Switzerland, and his French American wife, Edith, who were the first Bahá'ís to reside in Switzerland. Nils Semle recounted stories of his father, Fritz Semle, who accepted the Faith in 1920 and was elected a member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Switzerland in 1962.

In Kingston, Jamaica, Governor-General Sir Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke proclaimed 25 July 2003 as "Bahá'í Day" to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the first Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly in the country.

His official proclamation read: "Whereas the Bahá'í Faith teaches that 'The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens,' and



Governor-General Sir Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke presenting the proclamation establishing "Bahá'í Day" in Jamaica to mark the 60th anniversary of Jamaica's first Local Spiritual Assembly.

embraces as its supreme goal the unification of the entire human race, consisting of divers peoples and cultures . . . I do hereby proclaim July 25, 2003, 'Bahá'í Day' and urge the members of the Bahá'í Faith, and likewise all citizens of goodwill, towards the high ideals of spiritual brotherhood, and of carrying humanity forward in an ever-advancing civilization."

The announcement came at the end of two weeks of events throughout the country, which included local celebrations such as a picnic and a dance party, talks on Bahá'í topics, and a blood drive organized by the Bahá'ís of Kingston. An official reception was held at the national Bahá'í center in Kingston on 25 July and a public devotional gathering, with more than 150 participants, involving prayers and readings from the Bahá'í holy writings, was held two days later.

Bahá'ís in Belarus also celebrated an anniversary, hosting a festival to mark the 25th year since the arrival of the Faith in the country. Held 7 December 2003 at the Kastychnitski Hotel in Minsk, the festival drew participants from all over Belarus. Special guests included Helmut Winkelbach, the German Bahá'í who was the first

to bring the teachings of the Faith to the country, an act for which he was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

Participants viewed a multimedia presentation on the history of the Belarusian Bahá'í community and heard commentary from some of its first members. The festival also drew attention to social projects undertaken by the Bahá'í community, such as distribution of scientific literature presented by the international Sabre Fund among universities and schools, rendering charitable assistance to children's homes and boarding schools, philanthropic performances of the Bahá'í youth dance group in different cities, and the promotion of the "My Home" project on improving family relations.

The next day, news about the presentation was covered by the largest Belarusian news organization, Belapan.

While these Bahá'í communities had opportunity to consider the milestones of the past, Bahá'ís also look towards future developments. Foremost among these is the impending construction of the House of Worship to be built in Santiago, Chile, which will stand as the "Mother Temple of South America." The Temple will be the eighth in the world and last of the "continental" temples.¹¹

After reviewing 185 submissions, the Universal House of Justice announced in 2003 that it had selected Siamak Hariri as the architect for this project. A partner at the Toronto-based Hariri Pontarini firm, Mr. Hariri was the winner of the Toronto Urban Design Award in 2000 and has completed many high-profile projects in Canada.

His design for the Temple, which is already attracting attention in architectural circles, is striking for its lack of straight lines—its body will be constructed of nine gently curved alabaster "wings," and even the paths of its gardens will be slightly oblique.

Architecture critic Gary Michael Dault described the building as a "hovering cloud, an architectural mist," saying that it "acknowledges blossom, fruit, vegetable and the human heart—but rests somewhere between such readings, gathering them up and transforming them into an architectural scheme that is simultaneously . . . engagingly familiar and brilliantly original."

The loose parameters offered by the House of Justice's guidelines required only that the Temple have nine sides and a dome of at least 30 meters. The planned structure will be about 30 meters tall, between 25 and 30 meters wide, and will be surrounded by an



Siamak Hariri, architect of the Bahá'í Temple to be built in Santiago, Chile, stands with a model of the building.

extensive radiating garden comprising nine reflecting lily pools and nine prayer gardens. Mr. Hariri said the building would take its place as a sister Temple to the other Mother Temples—and yet “find its way into its own gentle and compelling uniqueness.”

Other Bahá'í communities were also engaged in building projects, albeit on smaller scales, and new national centers in Africa, Europe, and the Pacific Islands have invited praise from prominent people.

The President of the Republic of the Seychelles, France Albert René, attended the official dedication ceremony in Victoria of the country's new national Bahá'í center. Also among the some 400 guests were the Vice-President and other government ministers, as well as Bahá'í visitors from India, the Maldives, Mauritius, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom. The design concept for the center integrates classical Greek style on the ground floor with traditional Seychelles architecture on the upper floor.

In Ireland, the Mayor of Derry, Councillor Kathleen McCloskey, officially opened the city's new Bahá'í center on 1 May 2003. “Your community adds to the richness and diversity of life within this city,



Bahá'ís Rosemary O'Mara and Brendan McNamara talking to the Mayor of Waterford, Ireland, Alderman Tom Cunningham (center), who visited the Bahá'í summer school there in 2003.

and I look forward to many more years of Bahá'í involvement and good work within the wider community," said Councillor McCloskey. She also acknowledged, "Important contributions have been made by the local Bahá'í community on the proposed appointment of a Commissioner for Children, and the community has also done sterling work in the struggle to overcome racism, discrimination, and prejudice within our city."

In Kiniving, Papua New Guinea, a town where all the residents are members of the Bahá'í Faith, more than 300 people gathered from 11 to 14 July 2003 for the opening of the Bahá'í center on the remote island.

The center's architect, Roro Kugewa, gained his inspiration for the building's nautical design from a picture of an ark on the cover of a Bahá'í publication. Mr. Kugewa incorporated ship-like aspects such as the resemblance of the center's ground-floor meeting room to a ship's hold, with slightly curved half-walls and windows at eye level. The upper level of the building has an enclosed room for the

meetings of the Local Spiritual Assembly and outside the upper room is a deck, the view from which overlooks the whole village.

Marsha Milani, a representative of the National Spiritual Assembly of Papua New Guinea, presented photographs of the Shrine of the Báb and the terraces on Mount Carmel as gifts for the centers in Kiniving and nearby Doi and Bulu. In return, the Local Spiritual Assemblies and individual Bahá'ís presented gifts of treasured woven bags, known as bilums, to the national Bahá'í institution.

Bahá'ís in Cyprus had cause to celebrate for entirely different reasons, when northern and southern Cypriot communities were able to meet together for the first time in 30 years. Sixty Turkish and Greek Bahá'ís joined together at the Bahá'í center in Nicosia for a devotional meeting on 27 April 2003, when they were permitted to cross the demarcation line that has divided the island since 1974. The event followed the decision by the Turkish Cypriot authorities to lift the ban on travel across the cease-fire line.

Scholarship, not only excellence in traditional academic environments, but also studying the Bahá'í writings, the history of the Faith, and the ways in which the Bahá'í teachings can be applied



Bahá'ís in Papua New Guinea at the opening of the new center in Kiniving, in July 2003.

to modern problems, is another important facet of Bahá'í activity, which is promoted by organizations such as the Association for Bahá'í Studies. Founded in 1975, the Association for Bahá'í Studies now has chapters in dozens of countries, each dedicated to advancing the study of the Faith.¹²

More than 1,300 participants attended the 27th annual conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies in North America, held 29 August–1 September 2003 in San Francisco, California. A wide range of lectures, panel discussions, workshops, and artistic performances evoked the conference's theme, "Religion and Community in a Time of Crisis."

Prof. Suheil Bushrui delivered the Hasan M. Balyuzi Memorial Lecture, proposing that scholars should move away from competitive and adversarial modes. "Contemporary academic scholarship," he said, "is often vindictively vicious in attacking an idea or an author regardless of the merit of the thesis proposed. All knowledge in the Bahá'í point of view is measured by its benevolent influence and contribution to the unity and prosperity of the human race."

In all, more than 90 papers, panel discussions, and workshops were presented at the conference, featuring topics such as "Creative Dimensions of Life Crisis and Suffering," a discussion on "Faith, History, and Community Building in the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths," and a panel discussion on "The Press as a Consultative Forum," with Bahá'í journalists. Other presentation and workshop topics included human rights and religious extremism, applying principle-based indicators of development, multiracial community building, bioethics, economics and social justice, and gender and ethics.

Special interest groups within the association held presentations on topics ranging from agriculture and ecology to marriage and family life, and the conference welcomed the inauguration of a new special interest group on indigenous studies, which opened with a panel discussion that explored the diverse ways of "knowing" and "seeing" among indigenous peoples.

Building a United Society

In addition to the effort expended in consolidating their own communities, Bahá'ís are actively involved in public outreach projects



*(Above)
Some of the
participants
at the 27th
annual
conference of
the Association
for Bahá'í
Studies–North
America, in
the summer
of 2003. (Left)
Members of
the Asako
Takami Dance
Group, which
performed at
the conference.*

and initiatives that use the spiritual principles and ideals of their Faith to promote a more unified and peaceful society. By doing so, they are contributing to an "ever-advancing civilization," in which the bonds that unite humanity can transcend the barriers of race, gender, and nation.

Bahá'ís have been particularly active in projects to promote the advancement of women. Equality between women and men is described as a vital element to the success of humanity as a whole, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that humanity's full potential cannot be reached unless equality is realized: "until this equality is established, true progress and attainment for the human race will not be facilitated."¹³

In many places, pursuing this ideal requires a struggle against entrenched ideas and practices that have allocated to women a lesser place in society and have ignored their potential for contributing to social development. Bahá'ís in Ipoh, Malaysia, organized a public forum on "Women and Peace" in order to demonstrate the role that women have in fostering a peaceful society. The speakers who addressed the 70 people gathered at the Royal Ipoh Club included Valarmathi Arumugam, a member of the Bahá'í community of Ipoh, and Yuet Mei Nambiar, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Malaysia. Ms. Arumugam chaired the event and highlighted the conference's theme in her speech about the contributions of women to the processes of peace in the world. Other speakers were Sharifah Zuriah alJeffri, one of the founding members of the Sisters in Islam, and Sister Kala, a member of the Persatuan Brahma Kumaris.

The European Bahá'í Women's Network, which serves to coordinate and stimulate activities by Bahá'í women across Europe, established a Web site in the spring of 2004, at <http://www.ebwn.net>. The site provides an opportunity for European women to publish reports and articles and exchange views on the subjects of moral education, spiritual enhancement, social development, the arts, and academic subjects. The network succeeds the European Taskforce for Women, which for 10 years functioned as the main Bahá'í women's association in Europe.

The Bahá'í International Community, which collaborates with the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), has long been a vocal promoter of the equality of women and men.¹⁴

Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, was recognized this year for her contributions to the advancement of women. Elected to serve for two years as the chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, Ms. Dugal will work with all departments at the United Nations to promote the equality of women and men in countries around the world.

She also received a "Women Helping Women" award from Soroptimist International on 11 February 2004 at the Williams Club in New York City. The award is one of three offered under an umbrella program, "Making a Difference for Women," established in 1986 by the Soroptimists to acknowledge those who work to improve the status of women in society. Linda Stillman, the representative of Soroptimist International to the United Nations, nominated Ms. Dugal for the award, which honors "women who consistently and effectively use their resources, talents, and influence to help other women achieve their potential."



Students at a seminar on "Science, Religion, and Development" given by the Bahá'í-inspired Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Technology, New Delhi, India, October 2003.

Ms. Dugal spoke at her acceptance about the importance of using international mechanisms of human rights to assist women in their advancement, saying, "Many women are unaware of their human rights, and others see them as abstract and unattainable. Thus, while activism in past years has drawn attention to women's rights, the challenge is now to make them more accessible by implementing agreed strategies and commitments made by governments."

Promoting unity among people of all races is another area in which Bahá'í communities are active. Bahá'ís come from more than 2,100 ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but their Faith teaches them that "[d]iversity 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 . . . the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest."¹⁵

In Auckland, New Zealand, Bahá'ís annually honor young people who speak out in support of equality through the Hedi Moani Memorial Speech Award, a competition sponsored jointly by the Hedi Moani Charitable Trust and the New Zealand Bahá'í community. The competition is open to all students in their last three years of high school in New Zealand. This year Dr. Rajen Prasad, the former Race Relations Conciliator for New Zealand, was the chief judge of the competition.

Xavier Black, a 17-year-old woman of Maori descent, received the 2003 award with her speech on the topic "From the head to the heart—beyond tolerance to the celebration of human diversity." Her prize-winning address described her experience facing the challenges of integration and being in a minority as "a gentile in a Jewish primary school, as Maori in descent but not growing up in my iwi [tribe], as a middle-class New Zealand girl with limited Spanish attending a school in a poor part of Madrid."

The ideals expressed in Ms. Black's speech offered the same attitudes outlined in the teachings of the Faith as necessary for overcoming racism and discrimination. She said that people need to see their differences as a cause of celebration rather than as a threat. She urged individuals to face their fears, develop their sense of belonging, and said we should listen with "generosity in our hearts" in a way that "creates a dialogue and a way forward."

The late Mr. Moani, for whom the award is named, was a member of the Bahá'í Faith and a prime mover in the establishment in New Zealand of what is now known as Race Relations Day. It is observed on 21 March, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The Association for Bahá'í Studies in Australia played a role in promoting equality and understanding through its cosponsoring of an international conference on "Indigenous Knowledge and Bioprospecting." Held from 21 to 24 April at Macquarie University in Sydney, the conference attracted more than 150 participants and was called to mark the close of the United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Peoples, as well as to contribute towards social and economic development and the protection of the environment.

The conference addressed bioprospecting, the process by which the knowledge of indigenous people about their environment is explored to develop new resources and commercially valuable products. The practice is increasing around the world in the search for cures for diseases such as HIV/AIDS and cancer, but it carries the risk of trampling on indigenous communities in the pursuit of scientific and commercial progress. The conference drew on the perspectives of a variety of disciplines, such as law, history, science, economics, and education. The university's Center for Environmental Law, its Department of Indigenous Studies, and five other university departments and centers contributed.

The conference opened with a traditional Aboriginal smoking ceremony, symbolizing purification, and participants were welcomed by a representative of the Darug people, on whose traditional lands the event was held. An indigenous member of the Australian Parliament, Linda Burney, gave the opening address, in which she pointed out that Australian Aboriginal culture is the oldest surviving culture on earth.

Henrietta Marrie, formerly of the UN Environment Programme Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, reported on recent developments in the global arena. The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture has been signed by 77 countries. The treaty is regarded as a landmark, placing traditional farmers on the same level as modern ones, thus protecting indigenous knowledge as well as farmers' rights.

Conference organizer Chris Jones referred to the need for new social, legal, and political relationships based on justice. "We are all part of one human family, while we recognize the value and beauty of diversity," he said. "This perspective of 'one family' needs to be applied to the issue of bioprospecting. While relationships between people are unequal, you cannot have a productive outcome."

During the conference, a workshop was held to launch a year-long project to revise university ethics guidelines relating to biodiversity research and benefit sharing with indigenous peoples. Macquarie University has committed AU\$90 million to the project.

Another field in which the Bahá'ís focus energy is cooperation with international groups and nongovernmental organizations. Though the Bahá'í Faith is fundamentally nonpolitical, its aims embrace the whole of humanity, and its involvement with governmental and civil bodies, collaborating on projects and promoting the Faith's social ideals, is a key aspect of its work. Involvement with the United Nations and other international organizations, and dialogue with governments and leaders of thought, are means by which Bahá'ís strive to contribute to the discourse of society and demonstrate how the Bahá'í teachings can create the basis for a civilization founded on peace, unity, and justice.

On 21 September 2003, Bahá'ís in Uganda commemorated the UN's International Peace Day in a gathering at the House of Worship in Kampala. More than 250 people attended the service, which included songs by the Kampala Bahá'í Choir and readings from Bahá'í, Christian, and Hindu holy writings.

Afterwards, participants gathered at the national Bahá'í center to listen to a panel of speakers who addressed questions relevant to peace in Uganda, including the issue of the rebel fighting in the north of the country. Panel speakers included the US ambassador to Uganda, Jimmy Kolker; the Minister of State for the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Program, Grace Akello; and a representative of the United Nations Association, Alice Tabingwa.

Since 1994, through its annual World Citizenship Awards, the Brazilian Bahá'í community has been honoring those who have devoted themselves to supporting human rights. The most recent event, held on 9 September 2003, was covered by major television channels Rede Globo and tv Nacional. The jury that selected the award



A panelist speaks at an event in Uganda organized by the Bahá'ís on the occasion of the UN's International Peace Day in September 2003.

recipients this year included a representative of a major newspaper, *Folha de São Paulo*, as well as members of the National Movement of Human Rights, UNESCO, and the Bahá'í community.

Among the 250 attending were members of the Association of Brazilian Lawyers and representatives of government ministries, the Supreme Court of Labor, and United Nations agencies. Government representative Hildesia Medeiros and representatives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brazil presented the awards in the auditorium of the Ministry of Justice.

Award recipients, including individuals and organizations, were active in areas such as poverty reduction, education, race unity, and the advancement of women. A special posthumous award went to the Brazilian diplomat Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations' special representative who was killed in Iraq in August 2003.

"The creation of this award put a spotlight on the efforts of the Bahá'í community to defend human rights, for world peace, the status of women, and the preservation of the environment," said Washington Araujo, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil.

In Greece, the Bahá'í community once again participated in the National Exhibition of Volunteerism for Humanity and the

Environment, held 25–26 October 2003 at the Zappeion in Athens. The exhibition was held under the auspices of the Department of International Cooperation for Development of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Coalition of Nongovernmental Organizations in Greece.

The display sponsored by the Bahá'ís featured panels with Greek texts and photographs explaining the principles that guide the work of the Bahá'í community in social and economic development projects. This year the text was based on the recent exhibition held by the Bahá'í International Community at the European Parliament.¹⁶ The Greek Bahá'ís also distributed statements in Greek and English prepared by the Bahá'í International Community on subjects including sustainable development, racism, and the advancement of women. More than 2,000 copies of a Greek pamphlet that included the text of the exhibition panels were distributed over the two-day exhibition.

The youth dance workshop Flame of Unity attracted many people to its two performances in support of the event, which drew enquiries about the work of the Bahá'í community and requests for collaboration with it.

Dialogue with educators and students is also important in presenting the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings. Global Discourse, a Bahá'í-inspired discussion forum created at a Finnish university to



Bahá'ís in Greece welcome visitors to a display of books at the 2003 National Exhibition of Volunteerism for Humanity and the Environment, held in Athens.

promote dialogue on global issues, has been holding weekly two-hour seminars that are regularly attended by faculty, students, and the general public.

Global Discourse works as an interdisciplinary academic association at the University of Jyväskylä, and was founded by young Bahá'ís at the university. Since starting in 1998, the association has organized more than 60 seminars, with each drawing between 10 and 30 participants. Past speakers have included ambassadors, a former advisor to the chairman of the EU Commission Romano Prodi, experts in nongovernmental organizations, as well as local students and concerned citizens. The association has attracted not only interest and offers for collaboration from prominent NGOs and the United Nations Association of Finland, but also media interest whenever a high profile guest speaker has been invited to the seminars. The Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Jyväskylä has now also founded a sister organization in another town.

In Manila, a total of 400 hundred students from the University of the Philippines at Los Baños, Laguna, visited the national Bahá'í center in Manila as part of their studies on Asian civilization.

The students came in groups on Sunday mornings during February 2004. Each meeting included prayers and a featured speaker who gave a talk on some aspect of the Faith. Following the talk, the students interacted with the Bahá'ís and asked questions ranging from traditional Christian subjects to the Bahá'í position on a variety of contemporary topics, like world unity in the midst of war and chaos, the role of religion in modern life, and the death penalty, an issue that is currently being debated in legal circles and on national television talk shows.

The Bahá'ís were also invited to a symposium on religions in Asia on 19 February at the university, where Vic Samaniego, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly and university teacher, represented the Faith. Afterwards, several instructors requested permission to continue the inclusion of Bahá'í speakers in the courses and to bring students back to the Bahá'í center during the following semester.

Social and economic development activities are increasingly becoming a part of Bahá'í communities' efforts to make a direct and positive impact on the world. Contributions to development come in a variety of forms and sizes but are united by their aim

to uplift not only the social and material circumstances of people, but their spiritual condition as well, and ultimately to reflect the fundamental purpose of religion: "to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions."¹⁷

ZIPOPO, a moral education program that began in Kazan, Russia, this year celebrated its 10th anniversary. Since its beginnings in 1994, the program has been presented in some 62 countries, with more than 2,000 hosts trained in the course of some 200 training seminars; a total of nearly half a million people have participated worldwide in the project. The word ZIPOPO is the abbreviation of "Zaochniy Institut Pozitivnovo Povedeniya," which translates as "The Academy of Positive Behavior." In English the program is called "The Happy Hippo Show" or "Stop and Act." It has been used by Bahá'í communities in Europe as part of the Stability Pact for Eastern Europe (formerly known as the Royaumont Process).¹⁸

The concept underlying ZIPOPO is to present viewers with an opportunity to look at moral issues through specific dramatic examples and to provide them with the means to approach life problems and find positive solutions. It can be implemented in a variety of formats, including workshops, TV talk shows, and discussion groups. ZIPOPO encourages audiences to express their thoughts and allows them to affect the outcome of situations through discussion of moral principles.

Moral education, specifically the importance of moral values in youth education and moral leadership in family life, was the key to training offered to secondary school teachers by a Bahá'í-inspired NGO in Shillong, India. Sessions held in 2003 brought together 30 participants to focus on issues related to stemming the spread of HIV. Though the sessions, offered by the Foundation for Global Education and Development, had the objective of helping teachers to improve awareness of students about HIV prevention, the inclusion of a moral framework for behavior was seen as vital to changing behavior.

Bahá'ís in Nepal also participated in consultation about the spread of HIV/AIDS. The UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia organized a three-day regional workshop on "South Asia Interfaith

Consultation on Children, Young People and HIV/AIDS," held 4–6 December 2003 in Katmandu. The summit brought together more than 140 representatives of Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim communities.

Participants came from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka to address this pressing issue—close to five million people in South Asia are currently living with HIV, and the region is experiencing one of the fastest growth rates of HIV infection in the world. An estimated five to six million additional people will be infected in the next 10 years.

In Turkey, Bahá'ís took part in an oral hygiene education project with the Prime Minister's Directorate of Social Services and Institution to Protect Children. In the first stage of the project, which took place in April 2003, some 120 children at the Sincan, Ankara, disabled children's dormitory were given tools and training in oral hygiene. Each child received a new toothbrush and toothpaste, and watched a stage show with costumes and music that demonstrated proper use of the brushes and other aspects of proper care for their teeth.

The Bahá'í community afterwards received a certificate of appreciation from the Turkish government, and Ali Riza Sahindokuyucu, the principal of the school, sent a letter to the Bahá'í community, thanking it for its "interest, donations, and involvement with our children."



Participants at health training seminar in Shillong, India, in 2003.



Volunteer educators in Panama at a teacher training session held in 2004 at the Ngabe-Bugle Cultural Center.

The many efforts of Bahá'í social and economic development projects to promote education seek to bring to each particular population educational means that suit its needs. At the Ngabe-Bugle Cultural Center in Soloy, located in the Chiriqui Province of Panama, a group of indigenous schoolteachers attended an intensive two-week training session towards becoming government certified teachers. Though they are currently volunteers, they serve full-time as teachers for the native children who live in the remote mountain communities of Chiriqui.

The training includes classes in curriculum development, lesson planning, teaching strategies for active learning, methods of teaching elementary math, and the production of hands-on materials. FUNDESCU, a Bahá'í-inspired nongovernmental organization in Panama, and the Mona Foundation, a Bahá'í-inspired nonprofit organization based in the United States, sponsor the program.

Most of the teachers are Bahá'ís and are attempting to set instructional goals that not only meet Ministry of Education requirements but are also in harmony with Bahá'í teachings and local cultural values. The teachers have generated a list of topics which they feel are

of high importance, such as moral values, practical skills for useful work, and preservation of traditional culture.

After setting goals, the teachers practice writing educational objectives using an integrated thematic approach. They work in teams to design lessons based on those objectives, and they demonstrate a variety of teaching strategies, including the use of art, music, and drama.

In the math workshop each afternoon, participants use hacksaws, drills, and other tools to craft practical, inexpensive materials that will help their students learn to sort, classify, count, understand the decimal system, and perform basic math operations. These items must be produced using hand tools, since there is no electricity in the area.

Promotion of dialogue, understanding, and cooperation between religions is also a key part of the Bahá'í vision of a united world. In its letter addressed to the world's religious leaders in 2002, the Universal House of Justice wrote that the "danger grows that the rising fires of religious prejudice will ignite a worldwide conflagration the consequences of which are unthinkable. . . . The crisis calls on religious leadership for a break with the past as decisive as those that opened the way for society to address equally corrosive prejudices of race, gender, and nation. Whatever justification exists for exercising influence in matters of conscience lies in serving the well-being of humankind."¹⁹

One of the most widespread of the efforts by Bahá'ís to offer a message of religious harmony is World Religion Day. Established in 1949 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States as a means of emphasizing the spiritual ties that unite the world's religions, the day provides an opportunity to affirm the unity of the world's religions and to demonstrate that despite the divisions that have existed in the past, religion can be a positive, unifying force.

Bahá'ís around the globe celebrate the day on the third Sunday in January by hosting discussions, conferences, and other events that promote understanding and communication among the followers of all religions. Events in January 2004 included programs in Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Canada, the Republic of the Congo, England, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, New Zealand, Peru, Scotland, and the United States.

In some instances, the ties formed through these interfaith gatherings have led to wider collaboration between religious groups, such as in Bolivia, where following an interfaith devotional gathering organized by Bahá'ís, with the participation of representatives from Christian, Islamic, Jewish, and other religious organizations, the religious communities began holding regular interfaith meetings at the national Bahá'í center in La Paz.

In Ukraine, the First Ukrainian Youth Festival of Religions was held on 3 March 2004. The event, which grew out of celebrations for World Religion Day first held in Ukraine in 2003, was hosted by the National Institute of Philosophy, part of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

Participants included the Youth Association of Religious Scientists, the Association of Religious Scientists of Ukraine, the State Committee on Religious Affairs of Ukraine, the Center of Religious Information and Freedom, and the Ukrainian Association of Religious Freedom. The festival serves as evidence of the increasing understanding and dialogue among the different religious groups in the country, a process that has gained support from the scientific and religious communities as well as from the government.

As part of its contribution, the national Bahá'í community of Ukraine presented a film about the terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and a musical performance. The program included presentations from about 20 different religious groups and associations, and addresses by government ministers and religious scholars. Some 400 youth and students participated and together made a decision to have an even larger festival the following year.

At another interfaith event, held in Madrid, Spain, Bahá'ís joined with members of other religious groups to pay tribute to the 191 victims of the 11 March 2004 commuter train bombings in Madrid. The Platform for the Inter-Faith Dialogue of Madrid attracted 500 people to the public event, which was held on 9 May in Alcalá de Henares.

A silent march began from the Atocha railway station, and more people joined the group in Alcalá de Henares to walk to the local university. There, the Vice-Director of the university, the Mayor of Alcalá, and the President of the UNESCO Center welcomed the participants and underlined the need to strive together for peace and to

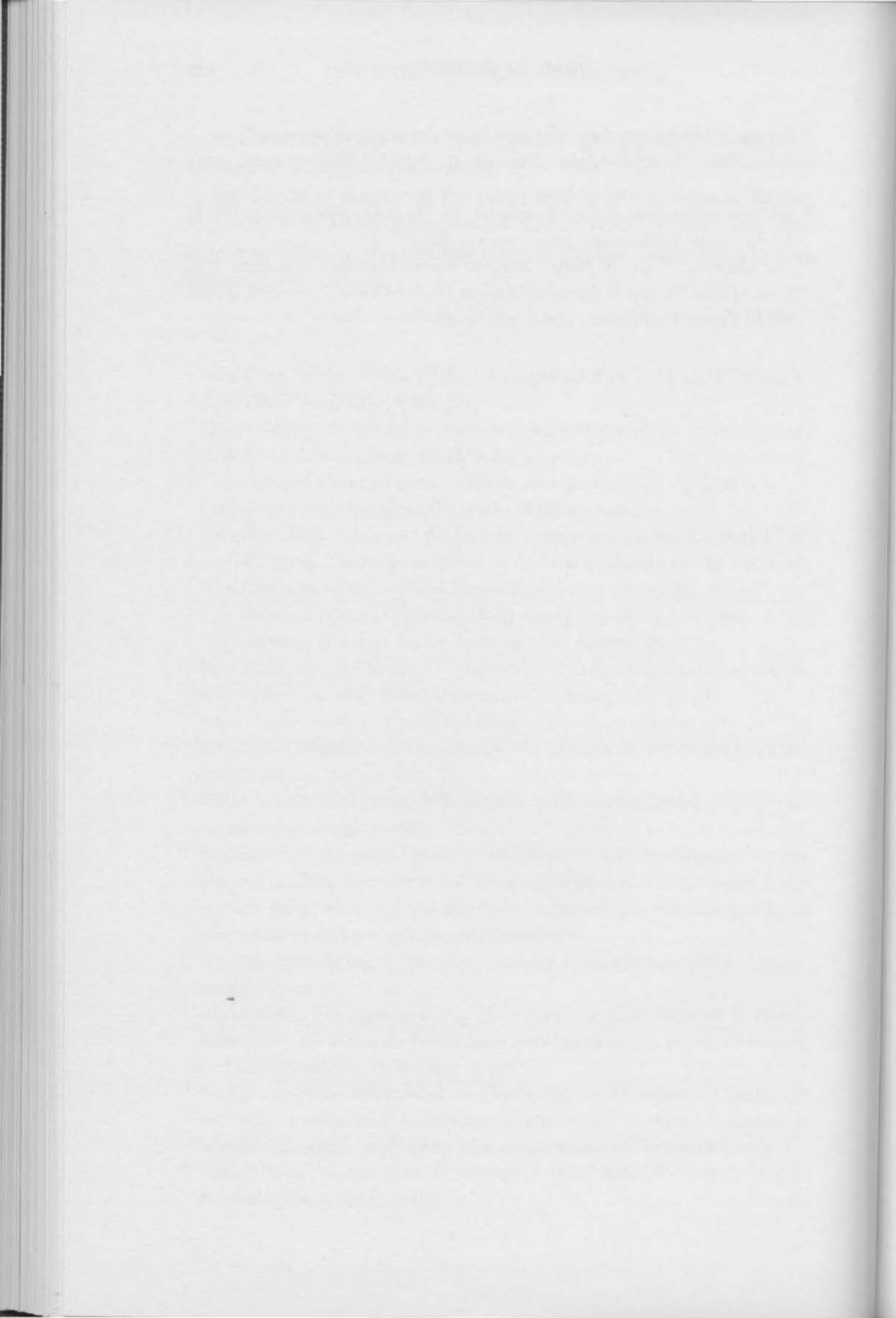
create the roots for tolerance and respect to grow despite ideological, cultural, and religious differences.

Bahá'í youth present at the event read holy writings on themes of peace, love, and forgiveness. A Bahá'í representative was also interviewed live on the midday news of the national television station TVEI.

NOTES

- ¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 27.
- ² Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 88.
- ³ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message 160 BE, 21 April 2003.
- ⁴ For more information about the results of the election, see p. 35.
- ⁵ For more information about the training institute process, see "Creating a Culture of Growth: The Institute Process in the Bahá'í Community," in *The Bahá'í World 2000–2001* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2002), pp. 191–99.
- ⁶ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message 153 BE, 21 April 1996.
- ⁷ The Universal House of Justice, letter dated 22 August 2002.
- ⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, cited in "Youth: A Compilation," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2 (Inglese, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), p. 415.
- ⁹ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 10 October 1932, in "The Arts," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1 (Inglese, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), p. 7.
- ¹⁰ For an account of the many 50th anniversary celebrations held during the year, see the report on pp. 41–76.
- ¹¹ In addition to the seven Houses of Worship currently standing and the one planned in Chile, there was also a Temple in Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan. It was the first Bahá'í House of Worship to be completed but was damaged by an earthquake in 1948 and subsequently torn down.
- ¹² For a directory listing of the various national Associations for Bahá'í Studies, see pp. 245–48.
- ¹³ '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. 375.
- ¹⁴ See pp. 127–29 for more about the Committee on the Status of Women and the Bahá'í International Community's contribution to the advancement of women through its involvement with UN agencies and like-minded NGOs.
- ¹⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), p. 305.

- ¹⁶ For more information about this exhibit, see the article on pp. 113–18.
- ¹⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), p. 240.
- ¹⁸ For more information about this initiative, see *The Bahá'í World 1998–99* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2000), pp. 145–50.
- ¹⁹ The Universal House of Justice, letter to the world's religious leaders, April 2002. For the full text of this statement, see *The Bahá'í World 2002–2003* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2004), pp. 89–98.



Promoting Unity in Europe

The Bahá'í International Community's exhibitions at the European Parliament in France and Belgium offered an opportunity to showcase the Bahá'í Faith's contribution to unity in European society.

The European Union faces its most ambitious expansion in May 2004, and with the addition of 10 new states it will feature the largest economy and the third largest population in the world. But the economic and political alliance is not an easy one. The governments that compose the EU must work hard for compromises, and its people must reckon with a dense conglomerate of languages, cultures, and ideologies. Though there is a great deal of hope for the future, Europe's diversity has historically been a source of conflict, witnessed in the last century as tragedy, upheaval, and unparalleled change, including two world wars and their aftermath.

Considering both the recent past and Europe's more distant history, the merger of nations into the EU is a striking reverse of divisions that have characterized the continent for most of its existence. Though still unsettled by friction and politics, the European Union offers an economic and political unity welcomed by the Bahá'í Faith, whose members—even in the midst of world wars—firmly held that the fissions between nations would be overcome and those wars would give way to peace, as the whole human race began to regard itself as a single entity and the earth its collective home.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, during a visit to London in 1911, addressed a gathering with His hope that "through the zeal and ardor of the pure of heart, the darkness of hatred and difference will be entirely abolished, and the light of love and unity shall shine . . . human hearts shall meet and embrace each other; the whole world become as a man's native country and the different races be counted as one race."¹

At that time, the Faith had only recently been introduced in Europe, but in the years since, the Bahá'í community there has grown in both size and influence. Bahá'ís now reside in more than 7,100 localities throughout Europe, and they have established some 860 Local Spiritual Assemblies, in addition to the National Spiritual Assemblies in 37 European countries. There are well-established Bahá'í communities and National Spiritual Assemblies in all 15 member nations of the European Union, as well as in the new nations scheduled to join the EU.

It is fitting, then, that when the Bahá'í community of Europe wanted to create an exhibit about its activities and members, its chosen theme was "Unity in Diversity," an essential ideal in the Faith, whose members come from thousands of ethnic, tribal, and cultural backgrounds.

The exhibition, titled "The Bahá'í International Community: Promoting Unity in Diversity throughout Europe for over a Century," was created by the Bahá'í International Community to welcome the new states that will join the European Union on 1 May 2004. It opened at the main building of the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, on 11 June 2003, and again on 10 February 2004 at the Winston Churchill Building in Strasbourg, France.

"This exhibition aims to show the degree to which the Bahá'í communities of Europe are involved with the life of society at large, and are seeking to promote and contribute to social progress on a number of fronts," said Silvia Fröhlich, a representative of the Swiss Bahá'í community who assisted the Paris branch of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information in designing the display.

Composed of 14 panels, the exhibit highlighted the contribution to social harmony made by Bahá'í communities in Europe through photographs and text about how the Bahá'í communities of Europe



Member of the European Parliament Jean Lambert (right) opens the exhibition in Belgium. Christine Samandari represented the BIC.

Socrates Maanian, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Greece (right), introduces the exhibition to Greek MEP Efstratios Korakas.



and a variety of Bahá'í-inspired organizations have sought to promote peace, integration, and ethics throughout Europe.

Titles of the panels included: "An Emerging World Identity," "The Bahá'í Vision," "Collaboration with the United Nations," "Corporate Social Responsibility," "Environment and Development," "The Advancement of Women," "Youth in Action," "Peace and Understanding," "Interreligious Dialogue," and "Multicultural Integration." Each panel included a quotation from the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith along with an explanation of the relevant principle and examples of action being taken by Bahá'ís in Europe to promote these principles.

Through the exhibition, visiting members of the European Parliament were able to learn about Bahá'í-inspired projects such as the Institute for Social Cohesion in the United Kingdom and the Bahá'í International Community's innovative collaboration with the Stability Pact for Eastern Europe (formerly known as the Royaumont Process).²

The exhibition also featured the European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF), dedicated to promoting ethical values, personal virtues, and moral leadership in business as well as in organizations of social change. EBBF members from Belgium, France, Great Britain, and Slovakia participated in the exhibition staged by the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community. The EBBF panel and the exhibit brochure described EBBF partnerships and coaching activities with organizations such as business schools and international student organizations, the International Labour Organization, and the ongoing courses in ethical economics taught by EBBF members at Italian universities.³

The exhibition in Brussels ran from 11 to 13 June 2003 and was opened by its sponsor, MEP Jean Lambert. Other notable attendees at the exhibition included Ana de Palácio, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain; Professor Nicolas Dehousse, the former President of the Royal Belgian Academy; MEP Elmar Brok from Germany, chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security, and Defense Policy; Efstartios Korakas, a Greek MEP and member of the same committee; Rytis Martikonis, assistant secretary of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania; Geneviève Tuts, executive assistant to the Vice Prime Minister of Belgium.

Professor Suheil Bushrui, who holds the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland, gave an address on "The Ethics of Globalization," a topic of particular relevance to the expanding EU in its role as the world's major economic power.

In Strasbourg, the exhibit ran from 10 to 12 February 2004. Some 30 members of the Parliament attended the opening reception. Other dignitaries included judges from the European Court of Human Rights, representatives of the Council of Europe, members of the European Commission, ambassadors and diplomats, and prominent personalities from the Strasbourg region.



Baroness Ludford (center) at the exhibition in France, with Ronald Mayer, the Ambassador of Luxembourg to the Council of Europe and the European Parliament (left), and Ulrich Bohner, chief executive of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (right).

Baroness Sarah Ludford, a member of the European Parliament from the United Kingdom, sponsored the event. She addressed the gathering during the opening reception, speaking warmly about the potential of the Bahá'í Faith to influence Europe's course in the world. "I believe this little-known religion of global reach is of interest to people like ourselves who work in an international context in this expanding and enlarging European Parliament," said the Baroness.

She said that Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, "warned of the dangers of unconstrained nationalism and called for a system of global governance, which has led Bahá'ís to be particular supporters of the United Nations. He would have applauded the success of the European Union in ensuring collective security and protecting human rights."

"Over the years, the Bahá'í communities of Europe have sought to engender and encourage social harmony and progress, through a wide range of activities," said Lucien Crevel, Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of France. "It is this

experience, which the exhibition seeks to highlight, that we hope will be helpful to the Parliament and its members.

"The idea of social harmony, which this exhibition seeks to promote, is of critical importance as the European Union becomes larger."

The EU's ongoing plans to expand its membership will undoubtedly increase not only its influence but also its complexities. The new states that will be admitted in 2004 will raise new issues to be addressed collectively, as the new and old member states work to integrate into a cohesive whole. Throughout that process, the Bahá'ís will be working in their own communities and in the wider society to bring into practice the principles of unity that animate their Faith.

NOTES

- ¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London: Addresses, and Notes of Conversations* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 38.
- ² For more information about the Institute for Social Cohesion, see *The Bahá'í World 2002–2003* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2004), pp. 113–16. For more about the Bahá'í involvement in the Royaumont Process, see *The Bahá'í World 1998–99* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2000), pp. 145–50.
- ³ For more information about the European Bahá'í Business Forum, see *The Bahá'í World 2001–2002* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2003), pp. 149–54.

World Summit on the Information Society

Representatives of the Bahá'í International Community contributed to the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva, Switzerland, 10–12 December 2003.

From mobile phones to online universities, the “information age” is one in which the dominant questions become those of access: where is the information, and who can get to it? But the broader question of who will get to decide those answers when it comes to information and communication technologies (ICTs) is still unsettled. The needs of both governments and individuals must be weighed, and the potential benefits are often offset by problems such as an imbalance in resource distribution and the impromptu governance of Internet standards.

To address these and other challenges, and to explore opportunities presented by the rapid growth of ICTs, the United Nations organized the World Summit on the Information Society (wsis). The summit was hailed by many participants and observers as a change of direction for the United Nations, owing to the gathering's broad focus on emerging technologies, which cut across many issues in the global arena.

Scheduled as a two-phase event, the first part of the summit took place in Geneva, Switzerland, 10–12 December 2003; the second phase is planned for 2005 in Tunisia.

At the opening in Geneva, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke about the scale of change that the conference encompassed. "We are going through a historic transformation in the way we live, learn, work, communicate, and do business," he said. "We must do so not passively, but as makers of our own destiny. Technology has produced the information age. Now it is up to all of us to build an information society."

Fifty-four government leaders and 83 ministers from some 176 countries came together for the summit, in addition to thousands of members of civil society, whose participation represented a dramatic shift in operation from previous conferences.

Members of NGOs and other civic organizations have always played a part at UN conferences, but for the first time participants focused their energies on lobbying and interaction at the summit venue itself instead of being relegated to a separate NGO forum. More than 11,000 civil society representatives collaborated in negotiating sessions at preparatory committee meetings and were given a chance to address items under discussion on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis. Governments were willing to allow civil society representatives into their negotiating sessions because of a *de facto* compromise that defined civil society as collaborators instead of critics in the summit's process.

The structure of the conference also forced civil society to distill its comments and present an operational consensus. "For governments, instead of 3,000 interlocutors, they had one," said Louise Lassonde, coordinator of the Civil Society Division of the WSI Secretariat. "And so the governments were more willing to say to civil society that we recognize you as a partner, that we recognize that you have good advice, and so we accept that you can sit in the governmental meeting."

Central Issues

Interactions between civil society and governments were important in expanding the initial focus of the summit from concentrating on technical issues to including ways that the technologies might be used for social and economic advancement.

One of the summit's major issues was the way in which the Internet is governed and whether the United Nations should be more active in legislation and regulation. There is currently no real governance over the Internet. Management is carried out by a loose network of nonprofit corporations and boards that set technical standards, though compliance constitutes little more than politeness for most of these.

The interests of nations differed greatly in their desires for greater Internet governance. The Minister of Information for China called for action to "prevent the use of information technologies and resources for pornographic, violent, and terrorist purposes as well as for criminal activities endangering national security so as to ensure the healthy development of information and networks."

Meanwhile, other countries stressed freedom of expression. Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva said in an official statement, "We want the global information society to be based on universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Among those, freedom of opinion and freedom of expression are clearly fundamental and underlie the creation, communication, and use of information and knowledge."

Another highly discussed topic was the so-called "digital divide" that separates the haves and have-nots when it comes to resources and infrastructure dealing with ICTs. Many at the summit called for the establishment of a "digital solidarity fund," whereby developed countries would pay into a special fund to finance infrastructure improvements in poor nations.

Some Western nations, however, said there was no need for a special fund for ICTs, concerned that it would draw resources away from other necessary programs and would not adequately deal with underlying issues, such as poverty.

In the end, conclusions on many of these key issues were deferred until the second phase of the conference in 2005.

Bahá'í International Community Delegation

The Bahá'í International Community assembled a delegation of Internet and communications specialists for the summit headed by Canadian Bahiyyih Chaffers, who was appointed in August 2003 as



The Bahá'í delegation to the conference (from left to right): Michael Quinn, Bahiyyih Chaffers, Laina Raveendran Greene, and Karanja Gakio.

a permanent representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations.

Ms. Chaffers chaired the Ethics and Values Caucus, an ad hoc civil society group that sought to ensure that moral and ethical values were included in the summit's deliberations. The caucus issued a statement to the summit that called on participants to recognize the "ethical dimension of the Information Society . . . at the individual, community, national, and international levels, that protects the dignity of every human life. This ethical dimension is where the oneness of humanity is recognized and respected and where each human being born into the world is acknowledged as a trust of the whole."

The "oneness" that is an essential teaching of the Bahá'í Faith was evident in the members of the BIC delegation, who not only represented years of experience with ICTs but were also a culturally diverse group: Karanja Gakio, cofounder of Africa Online, from Botswana; Laina Raveendran Greene, a top-ranked entrepreneur and Internet consultant from Singapore; and Michael Quinn, a Cisco

Systems vice-president from the United States, who is of Native American origin.

"Our delegation was composed of people who are both highly regarded experts in information and communication technologies—and active members of a religious community that promotes world citizenship," said Ms. Chaffers.

"Bahá'ís believe that the emergence of a global information society is an aspect of the inevitable coming together of humanity in the construction of a new, just, and peaceful global civilization," Ms. Chaffers said. "It is important that the growing information society be as inclusive as possible, so that every human being has an opportunity to participate in shaping global society."

Bahá'í representatives worked with other civil society organizations on the summit's issues and presented the results of various Bahá'í-inspired projects in the Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) global village that was associated with the WSIS. Mr. Gakio participated in a roundtable discussion of Internet security in developing countries that was held at the ICT4D forum.

The European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF), a Bahá'í-inspired organization, sponsored a workshop at the summit titled "Toward a Knowledge-based, Sustainable World Information Society: The Role of Good Governance and Business." It featured a panel composed of Dr. Augusto Lopez-Claros, economist and Director of the World Competitiveness Report of the World Economic Forum; Dr. Arthur Lyon Dahl, President of the International Environment Forum and a former senior advisor to the United Nations Environment Programme; and Dr. Ramin Khadem, Chief Financial Officer of Immarsat, London.

Declaration and Plan of Action

Governments adopted a major new declaration of principles and an accompanying plan of action as a result of the first phase of the summit. Though both documents were viewed by some as limited, the increased influence of civil society was apparent in the outcome: as much as 60 percent of the language and/or ideas in the final documents originated with civil society.

The conference's conclusions echoed those of the former global UN conferences of the 1990s, such as the "universality, indivisibility, interdependence, and interrelation of all human rights" and the "achievement of sustainable development."

Among other things, the action plan adopted by governments at the summit seeks to encourage governments, in partnership with the private sector and civil society, to connect villages, health centers, and educational institutions with ICTs. "The effective participation of governments and all stakeholders," it says, "is vital in developing the Information Society, requiring cooperation and partnerships among all of them."

The declaration also sought to establish a new vision for a global "information society" that is "people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented" and laid out a vision that positioned "education, knowledge, information, and communication" at "the core of human progress, endeavor, and well-being." It continued: "Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have an immense impact on virtually all aspects of our lives. . . . The capacity of these technologies to reduce many traditional obstacles . . . makes it possible to use the potential of these technologies for the benefit of millions of people in all corners of the world."

Used properly, the declaration said, these new technologies "can be a powerful instrument, increasing productivity, generating economic growth, job creation and employability, and improving the quality of life of all."

Bahá'í International Community - ACTIVITIES

The Bahá'í International Community (BIC) represents, at the United Nations and at international gatherings, the more than five million Bahá'ís living in some 246 countries and dependent territories around the world. Its 183 national and regional administrative bodies are engaged in a wide range of activities aimed at creating a just and peaceful society. In recent years, Bahá'í International Community activities at the local, national, and international levels have centered on four major themes—human rights, the advancement of women, global prosperity, and moral development.

The Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office and its Office of Public Information play complementary roles in this work. The United Nations Office offers Bahá'í perspectives on global issues, supports UN programs, and assists its national affiliates to work with their governments and other organizations in their own countries to shape policies and programs that will foster peace and prosperity. The Office of Public Information coordinates and stimulates the public information efforts of national Bahá'í communities, and disseminates information about the Bahá'í Faith around the world through print and Web-based publications.

United Nations

The Bahá'í International Community has consistently supported the social and educational objectives of the United Nations since its inception and has been formally affiliated with the UN since 1947. The BIC was granted special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1970, the first year such status was granted to international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Consultative status with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) was accorded in 1976, and with the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 1989; that same year, the BIC established a working relationship with the World Health Organization (WHO). The BIC has United Nations Offices in New York and Geneva and maintains representations to United Nations regional commissions in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, and Santiago, and to the UN offices in Nairobi, Rome, and Vienna. Its Office for the Advancement of Women, established in 1992, functions as an adjunct of the United Nations Office.

This year the Bahá'í International Community added a new representative to the United Nations in New York, Bahiyyih Chafers, an attorney from Canada.

Human Rights

In keeping with the principles of its Faith, the Bahá'í International Community is committed to justice and the belief that without a profound emphasis on human rights and responsibilities the cherished goal of creating a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world order will remain beyond our grasp. Human rights and responsibilities were, in fact, the subject of the first formal Bahá'í statement to the UN, delivered in 1947. It is this continuing commitment that has motivated its active participation in the NGO Committees on Human Rights, Racism, and Religious Freedom, serving as chair and vice-chair of two of those committees.

The Bahá'í International Community is active in the defense of its own community and protecting the rights of Bahá'ís everywhere to practice their faith, working through the United Nations' human rights machinery and meeting personally with diplomats on behalf

of Bahá'ís experiencing difficulties in their countries. The role of National Spiritual Assemblies, which liaise with their governments on behalf of the Bahá'ís of Iran, is particularly important now that some governments are considering dialogue with Iran as a way of encouraging that country to improve its human rights record.

The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution expressing concern over continuing human rights violations in Iran this year, the 16th such resolution in the past 19 years that makes specific mention of the "continuing discrimination faced by Bahá'ís and other religious minorities." After the absence of a similar resolution for the past two years, this step represented a sign of hope and confirmation that the international community stands behind its words on human rights. A combined effort at UN headquarters in New York on the part of the Bahá'í International Community and external affairs representatives from Canada and the United Kingdom, along with the support of external affairs officers in capitals around the world, helped to secure the resolution's passage by a wider margin than in recent years.¹

Advancement of Women

In June 2003, Bani Dugal, the Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, was elected by acclamation to chair the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, the main committee of NGOs concerned with women's issues at the United Nations. The committee is one of the largest of the Conference of NGOs and is the NGO committee that interfaces with the Division for the Advancement of Women and other agencies at the UN regarding issues related to gender equality. In its role as chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, the Bahá'í International Community gave direction and focus to the organization and the preparation of NGO involvement at the 48th UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) that was held in March 2004. The BIC was primarily responsible for facilitating the highest level of participation of NGOs at the commission to date—2,200 representatives from more than 400 NGOs.

As the chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, Ms. Dugal worked to focus the committee on promoting partner-

ship between women and men and the role of men and boys in the advancement of women and girls. This focus on the role of men and boys on achieving gender equality was one of the two main themes of this year's CSW. This was the first time that the CSW addressed the issue of men and boys with regard to the advancement of women. In addition to presenting a statement that stressed the importance of involving men in the process of women's advancement, the Bahá'í International Community sponsored a workshop entitled "The Role of Men in Overcoming Challenges to the Advancement of Women."² The other main theme of the commission concerned women's "equal participation" in conflict prevention and peace building.

The committee also hosted a working luncheon with experts from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that works on the implementation and monitoring of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This year, in coordination with the Bahá'í International Community, Leila Rassekh Milani, a spokesperson for women's issues for the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, spoke about the American Bahá'í community's initiative as chair of the Working Group on Ratification by the United States of the CEDAW Convention, as well as a soon-to-be-published handbook on the Convention that she coauthored, *CEDAW: Rights that Benefit the Entire Community*.

To celebrate International Women's Day, the Bahá'í International Community arranged a one-woman show entitled "Pure" with actress Shirin Youssefian-Maanian about the events surrounding the life and death of nineteenth-century Persian poet Táhirih, at the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium. The audience included representatives of member states, UN staff, and NGOs.

In December 2003, the Bahá'í International Community cosponsored, with UNICEF, the "South Asia Regional Conference on Education: The Right of Every Girl and Boy." The National Spiritual Assembly of India organized the conference, which took place at the national Bahá'í center in New Delhi and was held to assist in maintaining the momentum created at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children. More than 150 governmental officials, international agency representatives, nongovernmental activists, academics, and other civil society representatives participated in

the event. Five South Asian countries were represented at the conference: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Many sent government representatives, and all were represented by organizations of civil society, including the Bahá'í communities of each of the five countries.

With its special focus on education, the conference was organized to strengthen and establish networks and partnerships among organizations at every level that are committed to accelerating the goals of eliminating gender disparity and providing universal, quality-based education to every child in the region. The conference was supported by a number of agencies including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Vision India, National Foundation for India, Save the Children UK, the Commonwealth Education Fund, and India Alliance for Child Rights.

The Office for the Advancement of Women has also continued to encourage National Spiritual Assemblies to establish and develop national offices for the advancement of women. These offices assist their respective Bahá'í communities in promoting the full participation of women both in the life of the Bahá'í community and in the world at large. There are currently more than 70 such offices, committees, and task forces throughout the world. The Bahá'í International Community supports them with materials, advice, and guidance, and draws on those who have gained experience at the national level to help represent the BIC at such UN events as the CSW.

In December 2003, in advance of the "South Asia Regional Conference on Education: The Right of Every Girl and Boy," the Bahá'í International Community cosponsored an external affairs training session on the advancement of women for representatives from eight National Spiritual Assemblies in Asia: Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The training provided the participants with tools and skills for engaging with other NGOs and like-minded groups to influence the policies of their governments on issues related to gender equality.

World Summit on the Information Society

In recognition of the global nature and tremendous impact and opportunities presented by the explosive growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs), the United Nations held the first part of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva, Switzerland, 10–12 December 2003. The Bahá'í delegation was headed by Canadian Bahiyyih Chaffers and included one of the founders of Africa Online, a top-ranked entrepreneur and Internet consultant from Singapore, and a CISCO Systems vice-president.³

Meetings

The Bahá'í International Community held offices on five NGO consultative bodies during 2003–04. In addition to chairing the NGO Committee on Religious Freedom in Geneva, cochairing the Global Forum of the NGO Committee on UNICEF in New York, serving as Vice-Chair of the NGO Committee on Racism in Geneva, and serving as the Secretary of the NGO Committee on Social Development, the Bahá'í International Community was elected chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women. Continuing its engagement on a broad range of issues, the Bahá'í International Community also served on five other NGO committees working at the United Nations.

The Bahá'í International Community's expertise and involvement have been actively sought out by UN agencies to support numerous initiatives. During the past year, the BIC has participated in panels and programs including "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality" conference, sponsored by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, the ILO, and UNAIDS in Brasilia, Brazil, in October 2003; and "Clash or Consensus? Gender and Human Security in a Globalized World," sponsored by the Women's Learning Partnership and Global Fund for Women, Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC, in October 2003.

At the 11th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in New York, the Bahá'í International Community spearheaded the planning of a reception in anticipation of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–14). The event was held

in cooperation with UNESCO and more than 20 cosponsors. More than 100 attendees took advantage of this opportunity to exchange information and build a coalition supporting the Decade. Among the information booths was one that featured the numerous articles from the Bahá'í International Community's newsletter *One Country*.

Other meetings and UN sessions monitored by the Bahá'í International Community this year included the 58th session of the UN General Assembly, the 60th session of the Commission on Human Rights,⁴ and the 42nd session of the Commission for Social Development; the Substantive Session of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); the 56th session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); the 55th session of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights; the 29th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and meetings of the Human Rights Committee, the UNICEF/WHO Joint Committee on Health Policy, and the UNICEF Executive Board; the 54th session of the Executive Committee of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' Program; and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

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. From Riqvân 2003 to 2004, the office arranged 253 special visits for some 2,291 dignitaries, leaders of thought, and prominent people from 81 countries. The visitors covered a broad range of professions and included diplomats, religious leaders, military officials, educators and students, journalists, business people, and members of civil society and nongovernmental organizations.

The office received 16 ambassadors from 15 countries as well as government ministers from Australia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lithuania, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela.

The office also received film crews, reporters, journalists, producers, and photographers from both local and international television and radio stations. Media coverage centered greatly on the Shrine of the Báb and surrounding terraces.

The terraces have continued to attract attention since they were opened to the public in June 2001. More than two million people have come to the gardens, making them one of the most visited sites in Israel. On average, more than 3,200 people per week take guided tours of the terraces.

The gardens on Mount Carmel were also one of six recipients of the Society of American Travel Writers' Phoenix Awards in 2003. The awards honor individuals or groups that "have contributed to a quality travel experience through conservation, preservation, beautification, or environmental efforts."

The award citation noted, "At the turn of the last century (19th), historic Mount Carmel, sacred to Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Baha'is, was nothing more than another desolate hill, rock, and scrub brush. But with the creation of the garden terraces, the once barren face of the mountain that overlooks the city is now a magnificent floral jewel."

The Office of Public Information's Paris branch contributes to the work of the Bahá'í International Community by assisting in public information efforts in Europe and the francophone world. This year OPI-Paris created an exhibit titled "Unity in Diversity" that showcased the work of the Bahá'í Faith in promoting unity in Europe. The exhibit was displayed for the European Parliament on two occasions, in June 2003 in Brussels, Belgium, and in February 2004 in Strasbourg, France.⁵ Parts of the exhibit traveled to the UK in March 2004, where they were displayed by the National Spiritual

Assembly as part of a Naw-Rúz reception at the British Parliament's House of Commons. The exhibit's next stop will be Barcelona, Spain, for the Parliament of the World's Religions in July 2004.

Another ongoing aspect of OPI-Paris' work is its support of the BIC's involvement with the EU, UNESCO, and Eastern Europe's Stability Pact (formerly the Royaumont Process).⁶ OPI-Paris supports the Stability Pact through its continuing involvement with the project "Promoting Positive Messages in the Media." This year, activities included launching a new "Happy Hippo" project in Bulgaria. The current initiative will run from March to June 2004 and will include 20 performances in 10 Bulgarian towns.

The Office of Public Information's publications, both 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 50,000 visitors monthly.⁷ 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 mankind. Links to Web sites of national Bahá'í communities are also available.

The Bahá'í World News Service continued its fourth year of publication via its Web site, receiving more than 60,000 visits per month.⁸

One Country, the official newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community, entered its 15th year of publication. Published quarterly in English, French, German, Chinese, Spanish, and Russian, it reached more than 53,000 readers in at least 180 countries and maintained a presence on the World Wide Web.

During 2003-04, many of *One Country's* stories focused on social and economic development and education, with an emphasis on innovative approaches to providing moral education. The January-March 2004 issue carried a report on the APRODEPIT project in Chad, a Bahá'í-inspired project that promotes fish farming and community development.

The July-September 2003 issue carried a feature profile of Russian authors Maria Skrebtsova and Alesia Lopatina, who have published a series of textbooks on moral education that are widely used in Russian public schools. The October-December 2003 issue

carried a report on a conference in India, sponsored by the Bahá'í International Community and UNICEF, that examined the right of girls and boys to receive an education; one emerging theme of the event was the importance of moral education. Editorials during the year discussed Bahá'í approaches to issues such as the family and development, the ethics of globalization, education as a right of all children, and the individual and social action.

One Country also won three awards during the year. In March 2004, the Religion Communicators Council presented the newsletter with an Award of Excellence for the story, "In Vanuatu, a proving ground for coconut oil as an alternative fuel." The story, which ran in the April–June 2003 issue, told of Bahá'í entrepreneur Tony Deamer's successful efforts to perfect an automobile capable of running on home-grown coconut oil instead of diesel fuel. Communications Concepts also gave *One Country* two Apex Awards for Publication Excellence for 2004. The periodical won in the "Newsletters: Printed" category, and the perspective piece entitled "The Modern Malady," which ran in the January–March 2004 issue, won an award in the "Columns and Editorials" category.

NOTES

- ¹ For more information about the current situation of the Bahá'í community in Iran, see the article on pp. 135–40 and the statement by the Bahá'í International Community on pp. 213–19.
- ² See pp. 211–12 for the Bahá'í International Community's statement "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality."
- ³ For a report of this conference, see pp. 119–24.
- ⁴ The Bahá'í International Community presented statements to the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Egypt, which can be read on pp. 213–23.
- ⁵ For more about the presentation to the European Parliament, see the article on pp. 113–18.
- ⁶ For more information, see *The Bahá'í World 1998–99* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2000), pp. 145–50.
- ⁷ The site can be found at <http://www.bahai.org/>.
- ⁸ The site can be found at <http://news.bahai.org/>.
- ⁹ The site can be found at <http://www.onecountry.org/>.

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

While the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran proclaims its willingness to engage in a human rights dialogue with the West and to safeguard the rights of Bahá'ís—even while denying them recognition as a religious minority within the country's constitution—events tell another story. During the year in review, the officially sanctioned oppression of Iran's 300,000-member Bahá'í community continued, without any monitoring by international agencies.

In the spring of 2004, the grave of the foremost follower of the Báb, Mullá Muḥammad-'Alí Bárfurúshí, known as Quddús ("the most holy"), was destroyed, with the approval of Iranian authorities. The razing, which began in February, was temporarily stopped when local Bahá'ís asked to see the necessary legal permit for the demolition. The dismantling continued, however, in a covert manner, in spite of the Bahá'ís' appeal to national authorities and efforts of the international Bahá'í community. Bahá'ís were also prevented from retrieving the remains of Quddús, to inter them with respect elsewhere.¹

By the end of the year in review, one Bahá'í, Zabihullah Mahrami, remained imprisoned on account of his belief. Mr. Mahrami

was arrested in Yazd in 1995 and is serving a life sentence. Three other prisoners were freed during the year. Manuchehr Khulusi, whose four-year sentence had commenced the previous March, was released conditionally in December 2003 after he posted bail equal to US\$62,800. However, he is still required to appear before the appeals court at an unspecified future date. Bihnam Mithaqi and Kayvan Khalajabadi, both imprisoned since April 1989 on charges based completely on their membership in the Bahá'í Faith, were released in February 2004. Their original sentence of eight years had been commuted to three years plus 50 lashes, but when they appealed the Islamic Revolutionary Court condemned them to death. Eventually their sentences were reduced to 15 years for "association with Bahá'í institutions." They both served this term in full.

Early in 2003 the Iranian government's passage of a new ruling concerning equal compensation in "blood money," or money paid to victims of crimes, to recognized religious minorities received international media attention. However, Bahá'ís have been excluded from this legislation, in spite of being the largest religious minority, because their Faith is not "recognized" by the government.

Other recent repressive actions taken by the Iranian government are detailed in the Bahá'í International Community's written statement to the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, held in Geneva from 15 March to 23 April 2004. These actions include injunctions against the operation of two Bahá'í-owned businesses—specifically because the owners are Bahá'ís; rejection of the appeal of an individual Bahá'í for the return of his confiscated property, which had been seized because of the property's alleged use as a venue for teaching the Bahá'í Faith and for holding classes of the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), established for Bahá'í students who are denied access to Iran's universities because of their religious beliefs; similar rejections of individuals' appeals for restoration of seized pensions; denial of inheritances; and continuing arbitrary arrests and imprisonments. The poisoned climate being fostered by the government is evident in a series of newspaper articles that incite hatred of Bahá'ís and are based on clear falsehoods. Furthermore, questions remain concerning the exclusion of Bahá'í students from university entrance examinations, in spite

of what appears to be a change in the registration form requiring identification of religious affiliation.²

International agencies and governments around the world continued to show their concern for Iran's Bahá'ís.

In November 2003 Abdelfattah Amor, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, submitted an interim report to the 58th session of the UN General Assembly, which stated, in part:

While noting some promised improvements in treatment of the Baha'i minority, the Special Rapporteur is of the view that the measures taken by the Iranian authorities to end the persecution of Baha'is, including by non-State entities, and to guarantee them the same rights as any other Iranian citizen are still inadequate. He again reminds the Iranian authorities of the need to ensure respect for the relevant provisions of international law, including article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. In addition, as a religious minority, Baha'is are entitled to the respect due to all other religious minorities.

Also in November, the United Nations' Third Committee passed a resolution, initiated by Canada, expressing its concern regarding the human rights situation in Iran. The following month the General Assembly adopted a resolution with identical wording, which made reference to the Bahá'ís in three paragraphs. The resolution expressed "serious concern at . . . the continuing discrimination against persons belonging to minorities, including against the Bahá'ís, Christians, Jews, and Sunnis, including cases of arbitrary arrest and detention; denial of free worship or publicly carrying out communal affairs and disregard of property rights." It called upon the Iranian government "to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religious grounds or against persons belonging to minorities, including the Bahá'ís, Christians, Jews, and Sunnis, and to address this matter in an open manner, with the full participation of the religious communities and minorities themselves." Finally, the General Assembly resolved "to continue the examination of the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, paying particular attention to further devel-

opments, including the situation of the Bahá'ís and other minority groups, at its 59th session, under the agenda item entitled "Human Rights Questions," in the light of additional elements provided by the Commission on Human Rights." The resolution was adopted with a vote of 68 in favor, 54 against, and 51 abstentions. It was cosponsored by 29 countries.

During the 60th session of the Commission on Human Rights, which met in Geneva from 15 March to 23 April 2003, Professor Amor, serving his final year as the United Nations' Special Rapporteur, gave a special report, in which he mentioned the situation of the Bahá'ís in both Iran and Egypt, citing these two among countries that violate freedom of religion or belief.

In its oral statement to the commission, the Bahá'í International Community spoke of the effectiveness of international support in protecting Iran's Bahá'ís. With the lack of international monitoring in Iran over the past two years, only small steps have been taken in this regard; nevertheless, the Bahá'í International Community expressed its appreciation to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) "for their condemnation of Iran," pointing out that it led to the modification of the university entrance form requiring students to state their religious affiliation. Whether or not this will, in fact, give Bahá'í students full access to higher education remains to be seen, the Bahá'í representative continued, "But we have no reason to believe that the authorities would have taken even this first step, if the international community had not insisted upon it."³ The representative also credited the action of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention with the release of one Bahá'í prisoner, and noted, "Another Bahá'í prisoner was conditionally released just after the General Assembly adopted a resolution expressing 'serious concern' over continuing violations of human rights in the Islamic Republic and specifically mentioning the Bahá'í community."

Unfortunately, however, for the second year in a row the Commission failed to adopt a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran. Conditions in that country have not improved for the Bahá'ís who live there, and while lip service has been paid to addressing the human rights issues that have plagued the Bahá'í community since

the 1979 revolution, persecution has not abated; in fact, in some ways it has intensified.

Arising on the national front to voice their support for the Bahá'ís, both the US Senate and House of Representatives passed their ninth congressional resolution on the human rights situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran, and in April 2004 the US State Department issued a brochure entitled "Iran: Voices Struggling to be Heard," which includes mention of the Bahá'í Faith. In the United Kingdom, a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Friends of the Bahá'ís took action to promote the idea of "benchmarks" in human rights dialogues attempting to assess Iran's progress in improving its human rights record with regard to the Bahá'ís.

The situation of Egypt's Bahá'ís also continues to be of grave concern to the Bahá'í International Community. In December 2003 a *fatwa* was issued by the Islamic Research Academy of Al Azhar University, not only denouncing the Bahá'ís as heretics—unfortunately, a familiar allegation in Egypt—but also accusing them of being active enemies fighting Islam. Ironically, it appears that this focus on the Bahá'í Faith was a response by Egyptian Muslim clerics to a letter written by the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders in 2002, urging them to take decisive action to eliminate religious intolerance.⁴

Egyptian newspapers were quick to publish the *fatwa*. In fact, they have often been vigorous in their denunciation of Bahá'ís as apostates, and some journalists have even written that Bahá'ís deserve to die. The government has done nothing to halt such inflammatory rhetoric, leaving Bahá'ís exposed to the hatred and violence of the misinformed masses. Speaking to this problem in an oral statement to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Bahá'í International Community said, "The international community needs to consider how to address such situations, when those who benefit from the right to freedom of expression overstep its bounds—in public statements that incite the public to violate other human rights, such as the right to practice one's religion, or the rights of citizenship regardless of religious affiliation."

In his final report to the United Nations General Assembly, Special Rapporteur Professor Amor detailed the situation of the Bahá'ís of Egypt, noting in particular their inability to obtain identity papers

since the Egyptian constitution recognizes only three religions. He commented that “to exclude any mention of religions other than Islam, Christianity, or Judaism would appear to be a violation of international law.” Yet the Egyptian government has not heeded any of the recommendations of either the Special Rapporteur or the United Nations Human Rights Committee regarding discrimination practiced against Bahá'ís in that country.⁵

It is clear that the informed response of international agencies such as the United Nations and of national governments has played a vital role in preventing the worst abuses of the human rights of Bahá'ís in both Iran and Egypt. Yet more must be done if Bahá'ís in these countries are ever to see the formal recognition of their right to exist as a peaceful, law-abiding religious community and the restoration of their basic human rights.

NOTES

- ¹ Quddús was killed by Islamic religious leaders in 1849 for refusing to recant his beliefs. His gravesite, along with many other historic and holy places, was confiscated by Iranian authorities during the Islamic revolution.
- ² For the full text of the Bahá'í International Community's statement, which contains more information on these instances of oppression, see pp. 213–19 of this volume.
- ³ See pp. 213–19 for more on these reports.
- ⁴ For the full text of this statement, see *The Bahá'í World 2002–2003* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2004), pp. 89–98.
- ⁵ See pp. 221–23 for the complete oral statement of the Bahá'í International Community to the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights regarding the situation of the Bahá'ís in Egypt.

ESSAYS, STATEMENTS,
AND PROFILES

The first part of the history of the United States is the period from the discovery of the continent by Christopher Columbus in 1492 to the establishment of the first permanent settlements. This period is characterized by the exploration of the continent by Spanish, French, and English explorers, and the establishment of the first permanent settlements by the English in 1607.

THE FOUNDING OF THE NATION

The second part of the history of the United States is the period from the establishment of the first permanent settlements to the adoption of the Constitution in 1787. This period is characterized by the growth of the colonies, the struggle for independence from Britain, and the establishment of the new nation.

The third part of the history of the United States is the period from the adoption of the Constitution to the present. This period is characterized by the growth of the nation, the expansion of territory, and the development of the federal government.

The fourth part of the history of the United States is the period from the present to the future. This period is characterized by the continued growth of the nation, the expansion of territory, and the development of the federal government.

Inner Enlightenment, Moral Refinement, and Justice

ANTIDOTES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

*Dr. Michael Penn offers a Bahá'í
perspective on the global problem of
interpersonal violence within the home.*

In his foreword to the World Health Organization's *World Report on Violence and Health*, Nelson Mandela made the following observation:

The twentieth century will be remembered as a century marked by violence. It burdens us with a legacy of mass destruction, of violence inflicted on a scale never seen and never possible before in human history. But this legacy—the result of new technology in the service of ideologies of hate—is not the only one we carry, nor that we must face up to. Less visible, but even more widespread is the legacy of day-to-day individual suffering. It is the pain of children who are abused by people who should protect them, women injured or humiliated by violent partners, elderly persons maltreated by their caregivers, youths who are bullied by other youths, and people of all ages who inflict violence on themselves. This suffering—and there are many more examples that I could give—is a legacy that reproduces itself, as new generations learn from the violence of generations past, as victims learn from victimizers, and as the social conditions that nurture violence are allowed to continue. No country, no city, no community is immune.¹

Notwithstanding the unprecedented levels of violence recorded in the twentieth century, it was during the latter half of this same century that people around the world, using principally the instrumentality of the United Nations, began to consult across traditional lines of culture, race, religion, and political alliances in the hope that solutions to the problem of violence, and particularly the widespread problems of state-sponsored, cultural, and domestic violence, might be found. And although the Bahá'í community has been a part of this global dialogue since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, it was in 1985, when the Universal House of Justice addressed to the peoples of the world its statement, *The Promise of World Peace*, that the Bahá'í community offered itself as a model for study in the global search for viable solutions to the problem of violence and other threats to the peace and prosperity of humankind. This essay explores Bahá'í-inspired contributions to the global campaign to eradicate interpersonal violence within the context of the home.²

What empowers the Bahá'í community to contribute to this global undertaking is its network of world-embracing institutions that enjoy the respect and support of millions of men, women, youth, and children of every ethnic, religious, racial, and cultural background who have committed themselves to actualizing the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. These teachings denounce all forms of exploitation and abuse, have affirmed in unequivocal language the oneness and interdependence of all humankind, have promoted a consciousness of the equality of women and men for more than 150 years, and call the entire human race to strive to attain levels of psychological, social, and spiritual maturity never before achieved by large numbers of people on earth. And although Bahá'ís do not regard themselves as experts in this endeavor, Bahá'u'lláh's visionary teachings have begun to inspire new modes of thought and behavior that are in contradistinction to ways of life that tolerate and nurture violence. Chief among these contributions is the emphasis placed on the importance of learning, inner enlightenment, self-mastery, and justice.

Knowledge and learning are highly praised among Bahá'ís—not only because they render the individual a more effective servant to the needs of the world, but because they contribute to the refinement of character and inoculate against the propensity for cruelty and inhu-

manity. The Bahá'í writings encourage the acquisition of the various branches of knowledge, both spiritual and secular, and urge that we "take into consideration not only the physical and intellectual side" of human life, but also the "spiritual and ethical aspects."³ Thus, from a Bahá'í point of view, whether learning takes place in a remote village, in the suburbs of a city, or in an urban metropolis, it should be as comprehensive as circumstances will allow; it should address the pressing needs of the times, be transformative in its influence, and not be such as "begin[s] with words and end[s] with words."⁴

The goals of education are realized not only in the creation and advancement of the arts, sciences, and branches of philosophy upon which civilization depends, but are manifested in a people's acquisition of noble qualities. However magnificent it may be in arts and industries, no civilization can long endure if it neglects this aspect of human learning. For this reason, the Bahá'í teachings stress an approach to education that encompasses knowledge and refinement of the self as much as it stresses knowledge and refinement of the world. Bahá'í-inspired approaches often reflect an appreciation of these two dimensions of learning by seeking to combine the academic/scholastic tradition of the West with the wisdom/enlightenment tradition of the East. While the former has emphasized knowledge and mastery of the environment, the latter has emphasized knowledge and mastery of the self. The complementary nature of these two traditions has been captured succinctly in the Chinese classical work, *The Great Learning*:

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the empire, first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.⁵

With respect to the acquisition of qualities of perfection, the Bahá'í writings support a developmental and evolutionary point of view. Thus, while all creation is said to possess the capacity to

manifest the “names and attributes of God” (or what the Greek philosophers referred to as that which is “true, beautiful, and good”), these capacities are latent and become revealed only as a result of a long and gradual process of biological, psychological, social, and spiritual evolution and development. And while the evolution of the biosphere, like the early development of a child, may be fueled largely by unconscious, natural processes, later stages of psychosocial and spiritual development require the conscious use of powers and capacities that are unique to human beings. These powers are encompassed in the notion of the “human spirit” and include inexhaustible moral and intellectual powers, volitional powers, and aesthetic sensibilities. The role of education is the cultivation of these capacities to the extent made possible by an individual’s innate endowments.

Cultivation of the human spirit begins in the family. The early training of children is so vital to the humanizing process that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, eldest son of the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá’í Faith and one of the earliest champions of women’s rights, affirmed that failure to educate the son and the daughter, to the extent made possible by a family’s resources, “is a sin unpardonable.”⁶ Note that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes such failure as though it were among the most pernicious forms of family violence:

[T]he beloved of God and the maid-servants of the Merciful must train their children with life and heart and teach them in the school of virtue and perfection. They must not be lax in the matter; they must not be inefficient. Truly, if a babe did not live at all it were better than to let it grow ignorant, for that innocent babe, in later life, would become afflicted with innumerable defects, responsible to and questioned by God, reproached and rejected by the people. What a sin this would be and what an omission!

The first duty of the beloved of God and the maid-servants of the Merciful is this: They must strive by all possible means to educate both sexes, male and female; girls like boys; there is no difference whatsoever between them. The ignorance of both is blameworthy, and negligence in both cases is reprobable. . . .

The command is decisive concerning both. If it be considered through the eye of reality, the training and culture of daughters

is more necessary than that of sons, for these girls will come to the station of motherhood and will mould the lives of the children. The first trainer of the child is the mother. The babe, like unto a green and tender branch, will grow according to the way it is trained. If the training be right, it will grow right, and if crooked, the growth likewise, and unto the end of life it will conduct itself accordingly.

Hence, it is firmly established that an untrained and uneducated daughter, on becoming a mother, will be the prime factor in the deprivation, ignorance, negligence, and the lack of training of many children.⁷

A sound, early education benefits the individual, enriches the community, and prepares the next generation to assume responsible stewardship of an ever-advancing civilization. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "Thus shall these tender infants be nurtured at the breast of the knowledge of God and His love. Thus shall they grow and flourish, and be taught righteousness and the dignity of humankind, resolution and the will to strive and to endure. Thus shall they learn perseverance in all things, the will to advance, high-mindedness and high resolve, chastity and purity of life. Thus shall they be enabled to carry to a successful conclusion whatsoever they undertake."⁸ Inasmuch as success in the pursuit of these noble goals is seriously threatened by exposure to family violence, a special responsibility to work towards its eradication rests upon individual Bahá'ís, as well as Bahá'í-inspired institutions, at all levels of society.

As individuals, Bahá'ís are encouraged to strive on two levels: first, to labor conscientiously, consistently, and earnestly to liberate themselves from any propensity they may have towards aggression and violence; and second, to promote social justice and the implementation of laws and standards that will protect others from tyranny, exploitation, and abuse. In addition, for more than a century and a half the Bahá'í writings have placed a special responsibility upon men to work towards the eradication of those socially constructed attitudes and practices that sustain the abusive treatment of women and girls within and outside the home.

Since most people who enter the Faith do so as first generation Bahá'ís, many are likely to bring to their new faith community

interpersonal habits that are incongruent with the standards and values that animate the Bahá'í teachings. In light of this very real possibility, the Universal House of Justice, which serves as the elected body of trustees of the worldwide Bahá'í community, provides the following counsel:

Among the signs of moral downfall in the declining social order are the high incidence of violence within the family, the increase in degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse. It is essential that the members of the [Bahá'í] community . . . take the utmost care not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence. They must ever be mindful of their obligation to exemplify a new way of life distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression and from all forms of abuse.⁹

The Bahá'í writings contain volumes of sacred texts that urge and inspire individuals forward in their effort to respond to the high moral standards that are called for in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. In the Tablet of Wisdom, for example, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

O ye beloved of the Lord! Commit not that which defileth the limpid stream of love or destroyeth the sweet fragrance of friendship. . . . Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures. . . . Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful, and your heart enlightened. . . . Set your reliance on the army of justice, put on the armor of wisdom, let your adorning be forgiveness and mercy and that which cheereth the hearts of the well-favored of God.¹⁰

At the grassroots level, democratically elected governing bodies known as Local Spiritual Assemblies have primary responsibility in their work with communities and institutions of civil society to create the conditions necessary for the elimination of domestic violence. In several countries efforts are underway to develop the capacity of Local Spiritual Assemblies to carry out this function more effectively. For example, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States has recently released a policy statement on domestic violence. It seeks to provide education on the nature and prevalence

of the problem, as well as the responsibilities that rest upon Local Spiritual Assemblies to ensure that such violence is not allowed to continue once it has been uncovered. A program developed to train local community leaders to be more effective in using spiritual principles, law enforcement, and social service intervention in domestic violence situations supplements the National Spiritual Assembly's policy statement.

Through its Office of External Affairs, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States has also played an active role in pursuing continued support for the Violence against Women Act (passed by the US House and Senate in 1994) and ratification by the US Senate of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Women's Convention).¹¹ The Office of External Affairs, and/or the Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women in several countries, including, but not limited to, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, India, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Uganda, and the United Kingdom, have also played important roles in promoting passage of the Women's Convention.

The spirit and objectives of the Women's Convention, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979 and entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981, are animated by the same vision and goals that gave birth to the United Nations: "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women." As an international treaty, the Women's Convention accomplishes two major objectives. First, it establishes an international bill of rights for women and specifies a set of actions to be taken by the nations of the world to ensure that these rights are enjoyed. Second, it mandates the establishment of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is charged with ensuring that the provisions of the Convention, which include provisions that proscribe violence against women and girls, are observed. Since its adoption, 175 nations have agreed to be bound by its provisions. The effort of the National Spiritual Assembly to win US ratification of the Women's Convention is rooted in the conviction that a woman's right to be protected against all forms of violence and discrimination must be secured by universally

agreed upon principles and enforceable laws. Many of the National Spiritual Assemblies around the world, and there are at present 183 of them, are similarly engaged in efforts to bring an end to gender-based violence.

An affirmation that runs throughout Bahá'í-inspired discourse on domestic violence is that no serious attempt to eradicate it can be effective if the sociocultural roots of the problem do not receive sustained attention. For many forms of domestic violence derive implicit, and sometimes explicit, legitimacy from the cultures and societies in which families are embedded. Rigid adherence to parental rights and the insistence in many societies that what happens within the family is and ought to be private often preclude effective intervention when vulnerable family members are exposed to abuses that they are unable to escape or prevent; the multibillion dollar pornography industry—which jeopardizes efforts to secure greater protection from sexual violence and is especially pernicious in its degradation of the poor—enjoys the legitimacy conferred by corporate sponsorship and popular consumption; and cultural practices such as female circumcision, honor killings, dowry murders, virginity tests, and female infanticide are sustained by age-old traditions with roots that reach deep into the past.

In justifying failure to ratify a document so essential to the protection of children as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, some have argued that ratification would threaten the preservation of family privacy. Arguing in defense of pornography, civil libertarians point to the value of freedom of speech, and in seeking to protect rites and practices that are known to do physical and psychological harm to women and girls, the sanctity of culture is commonly invoked. And while respect for privacy, freedom of speech, and due regard to the preservation of cultural diversity are all important values, from a Bahá'í perspective, these claims must be balanced against the realization that “the body of humankind is one and indivisible,” that “each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole,”¹² and that the community of nations thus has an inescapable moral responsibility to define and implement a common set of human rights that (1) recognize the immutable link between the private and social dimensions of life, (2) uphold and defend the dignity of the human person against assaults that are both ancient

and modern, and (3) demonstrate intolerance of violence on account of nationality, religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, or degree of material civilization or economic standing.

As has been noted by a growing number of scholars and human rights activists, cultural processes are implicated in family violence in a variety of ways. Cultures provide rationales and justifications for violence; they prepare young people to become participants in its perpetuation; they determine what forms of violence will be sanctioned and punished, and which forms will be tacitly approved; and cultures embody the social and economic pressures that give rise to maltreatment and neglect of particular groups within the home.¹³

In this regard, it is promising to note that efforts to protect individuals against human rights abuses within the family are gaining momentum. Notwithstanding some resistance, and despite the difficulties that attend the translation of human rights laws into practice, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights convention in history.¹⁴ Furthermore, a little more than a decade ago, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the General Assembly at its 48th session on 20 December 1993, became the first international human rights instrument designed exclusively to deal with gender-based violence.

Among the most significant contributions embodied in the Declaration are the obligations imposed upon the state both to "condemn" gender-based violence and to pursue all "appropriate means" and "without delay" to ensure the elimination of violence directed against women within their national borders. Commenting on state responsibility in this regard, the UN's Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women observed,

The problem of violence against women brings into sharp focus an issue that has been troubling the international community—State responsibility for the actions of private citizens. In the past, a strict judicial interpretation had made the State responsible only for actions for which it or its agents are directly accountable. In this case it would relate to issues such as women in custody and women in detention and perhaps the problem of women during armed conflict. The question of domestic

violence, rape and sexual harassment, etc., were seen as the actions of individuals and thus beyond the “human rights” responsibility of the State.¹⁵

By specifying a proactive role for the state in all situations in which women are more likely than men to be victims of violence, the Declaration makes it possible to conceptualize even private acts of violence against women as violations of women's human rights. The Bahá'í community supports movement in this direction. In November 2000, Bani Dugal, currently the Principal Bahá'í Representative to the United Nations and the Director of the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women at the UN, made the following observation at a United Nations Panel Discussion on the Eradication of Violence against Women:

As long as violations of human rights are condoned in people's close personal relationships, between spouses and parents and children, these will play out and carry over to human rights violations outside the family. It is within the family that a child learns principles of justice and equity and learns to apply them to relationships later on in life, so it is imperative that the family and its members are protected from human rights violations. If the structure of the family is that of dominance and subordination, the attitudes learned within the home will ultimately be amplified and projected on the world scene.¹⁶

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the Fifth World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, affirms the indivisibility of all human rights and advances recommendations intended to further secure protections from violence. Among these is the right to protection from private and public forms of gender-based violence, protection from domestic violence, and protection from harmful cultural and religious practices. These rights were further advanced at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, which culminated in the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Beijing Declaration calls for international, national, and regional efforts to address physical, psychological, and sexual violence against women and girls and has accorded the prevention of family violence the highest priority among women's

rights movements. As has been noted by Professor Roger Levesque, author of *Culture and Family Violence: Fostering Change through Human Rights Law*, these formal treaties "express a global standard of the manner in which individuals must be treated" and "mark the universal transition to a human rights agenda that includes family violence."¹⁷

In contrast to these developments, the spread and growing acceptance of pornography as a legitimate form of entertainment is of considerable concern to the Bahá'í community. Substantial bodies of research point to the fact that pornography plays an important role in contributing to sexual violence against women and girls and to sex discrimination and inequality. In a comprehensive treatment of the subject, Professor Catharine Itzin and her colleagues show that as a major global enterprise, there can be no doubt that the pornographic industry plays a significant role in socializing men and boys in their attitudes and behaviors towards women and girls.¹⁸ Pornography represents women *as sex*,¹⁹ contributes to sexual addictions that are played out in the home and elsewhere, commodifies intimate relationships, and, as many sex offenders have themselves reported, plays an important part in legitimizing and initiating sexual abuse.²⁰

Nearly two decades ago the Surgeon General of the United States organized a panel of clinicians and researchers to examine what we know about the way that pornography affects people's physical and mental health. They were especially concerned about its impact on children and youth. After a review of available research, these experts gathered for a weekend workshop to discuss their findings. They were able to reach general consensus on five points, as summarized by the Surgeon General:

- 1 Children and adolescents who participate in the production of pornography experience adverse, enduring effects. The participants were thinking of the sexual victimization of young people and the pathway that takes them from involvement in the production of pornography to their subsequent involvement in child prostitution.
- 2 Prolonged use of pornography increases beliefs that less common sexual practices are more common. This is similar to the

conclusions reached elsewhere concerning violence and other antisocial activities. Repeated exposure to depictions of such activities tends to build up the impression in the exposed person's mind that people are doing such things more often than is actually the case.

- 3 Pornography that portrays sexual aggression as pleasurable for the victim increases the acceptance of the use of coercion in sexual relations. . . . this kind of pornography is at the root of much of the rape that occurs today. Impressionable men—many of them still in adolescence—see this material and get the impression that women like to be hurt, to be humiliated, to be forced to do things they do not want to do, or to *appear* to be forced to do things they really *do* want to do. It is a false and vicious stereotype that leads to much pain and even death for victimized women.
- 4 Acceptance of coercive sexuality appears to be related to sexual aggression. . . . In other words, if a man sees a steady stream of sexually violent material in which the victim seems to enjoy the treatment, he begins to believe that coercion and violence are acceptable in sexual relations. And then he may well take the next step: He may convert this attitude into behavior and himself become the perpetrator he has been watching or reading about in pornography.
- 5 In laboratory studies measuring short-term effects, exposure to violent pornography increases punitive behavior toward women. This statement is obviously impossible to prove by controlled ethical experiments. However, the workshop participants felt that this fifth and final consensus statement could be safely drawn from the experimental and survey data already available.²¹

In addition to these untoward psychosocial consequences, exposure to pornography, disrespecting as it does the role of the human body in advancing the development and refinement of the human soul, represents a significant breach of sacred trust. Concerning the exalted character of the soul, Bahá'u'lláh has written that the soul is "a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however

acute, can ever hope to unravel." He goes further to note, "It is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him. If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto Him. If it fail, however, in its allegiance to its Creator, it will become a victim to self and passion, and will, in the end, sink in their depths."²² Commenting on the honor and respect that should be accorded the human body because of its relationship to the soul, the Bahá'í writings affirm:

As this physical frame is the throne of the inner temple, whatever occurs to the former is felt by the latter. In reality that which takes delight in joy or is saddened by pain is the inner temple of the body, not the body itself. Since this physical body is the throne whereon the inner temple is established, God hath ordained that the body be preserved to the extent possible, so that nothing that causeth repugnance may be experienced. The inner temple beholdeth its physical frame, which is its throne. Thus, if the latter is accorded respect, it is as if the former is the recipient. The converse is likewise true.²³

And while the Bahá'í teachings are neither prudish nor disdainful of the proper and full expression of the sexual impulse, the Bahá'í writings do express continual concern for the preservation of human dignity and respect for the body as the mirror upon which the powers of the human spirit are made manifest.

For the millions of women and girls who are vulnerable to men's sexual demands but lack the negotiating power necessary to secure protected sex, the AIDS virus may well embody one of the deadliest forms of domestic violence. A report released at the UN-sponsored AIDS conference held in Bangkok in July 2004 revealed that 48 percent of all adults now living with HIV are women. This figure is up from 35 percent two decades ago. The report went further to note that in sub-Saharan Africa, women make up 57 percent of those living with HIV, and young African women aged 15–24 are three times more likely to be infected than their male counterparts. "Without AIDS strategies that specifically focus on women," the report noted, "there can be no global progress in fighting the disease. Women know less than men about how to prevent the infection and what

they know is rendered useless by the discrimination and violence they face.”²⁴

The impact of the AIDS epidemic on families poses what the United Nations called “a looming threat to future generations.” During the last decade, the proportion of children who are orphaned as a result of AIDS rose from 3.5 percent to 32 percent. This percentage, the UN estimates, will continue to increase exponentially as the disease spreads unchecked. The disease is “making orphans of a whole generation of children,” wrote the UN, “jeopardizing their health, their rights, their well-being and sometimes their very survival, not to mention the overall development prospects of their countries.”²⁵

Although medicine and technology provide indispensable resources in our effort to respond to the AIDS crisis, it would be naïve and irresponsible for us to suppose that the AIDS epidemic can be adequately addressed without frank examination of the ethical dimensions of the problem. And while it is undoubtedly clear that millions of people contract HIV and AIDS through legitimate medical procedures and natural birth-related processes, it is equally clear that many millions are also vulnerable to the disease because of high rates of marital and relationship infidelity. Notwithstanding the fact that many consider sexual fidelity an old-fashioned concern, it is recognized among Bahá'ís as one of the most important safeguards in the development of healthy families and communities.

Many people have observed that the Bahá'í marriage ceremony is often quite simple. It consists, fundamentally, of the recitation of a single verse, by each of the marriage partners, in the presence of two witnesses: “We will all, verily, abide by the will of God.”²⁶ The sincere commitment of each marriage partner to “abide by the will of God” creates, in the Bahá'í view, the spiritual and social conditions that are most conducive to a family's material and spiritual development. In this way a family becomes “a fortress for well-being,” and an ideal context for inculcating qualities of character into the next generation. Viewed, therefore, from a Bahá'í perspective, marital infidelity represents a grave breach in the marital covenant and poses a potentially lethal threat to a family's ability to fulfill its primary function.

Looking beyond the impact of infidelity on the immediate family, it is also apparent that inasmuch as the family is the bedrock

of the social order, when infidelity or sexual promiscuity becomes commonplace, it may well jeopardize the progress and prosperity of an entire community or nation. The urban anthropologist Professor Elijah Anderson has done a remarkable job of documenting the social causes and consequences of sexual promiscuity among poor African American youth. His paper "Sex Codes and Family Life Among Northton's Youth" is an illuminating exploration of the subject. In the introduction Anderson writes:

The sexual conduct of poor Northton adolescents is creating growing numbers of unwed parents. Yet many young fathers remain strongly committed to their peer groups. They congregate on street corners, boasting about their sexual exploits and deriding traditional family life. These interconnected realities are born of the difficult socioeconomic situation in the local community. The lack of family-sustaining jobs denies many young men the possibility of forming an economically self-reliant family, the traditional American mark of manhood. Partially in response, the young men's peer group emphasizes sexual prowess as proof of manhood, with babies as evidence. A sexual game emerges as girls are lured by the (usually older) boys' vague but convincing promises of love and marriage. When the girls submit, they often end up pregnant and abandoned, yet they are then eligible for a limited but steady welfare income that may allow them to establish their own households and at times attract other men who need money. This situation must be viewed in its social and political context. It is nothing but the cultural manifestation of a persistent urban poverty. It is the mean adaptation to blocked opportunities and profound lack, a grotesque form of coping by young people constantly undermined by a social system that historically has limited their social options and, until recently, rejected their claims to full citizenship.²⁷

Anderson's analysis places the whole issue of human sexual conduct within a larger social context, and situates the individual's sexual behavior within an integrated cultural framework. Indeed, one can readily imagine how the sexual conduct of individuals is likely to be shaped by socioeconomic circumstances and by the cultural attitudes and practices that characterize the social space. Anderson's

research, and other scholarly investigations like it,²⁸ are important because it is only when we appreciate the influence of social processes on shaping current patterns of sexual relations that we can hope to adequately assess their consequences, or be effective in establishing new patterns that are consistent with our individual and collective goals. It is a consciously chosen, spiritually and ethically informed new pattern of relating that the Bahá'í teachings seek to inspire in the generality of humankind. At the core of this new pattern is a commitment to the spiritualization of human relationships.

In the simplest terms, spirituality requires the cultivation of what some have called virtues; a virtue may be understood as the manifestation of one of the attributes of God in human behavior. Since, in the Bahá'í view, God is the source of all life, whenever the attributes of God are manifested in human relationships, the vital spirit of life is also present. To the degree that these attributes are missing, we experience relationships that do not promote life and growth but, rather, thwart it.

Of the many virtues that are prescribed in the scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith, few are as highly regarded as trustworthiness. The Bahá'í writings describe trustworthiness as "the goodliest vesture in the sight of God," as "the chief means of attracting confirmation and prosperity," as the "greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people," and as "the door of security for all that dwell on earth."²⁹ Inasmuch as trustworthiness requires fidelity to the promises and covenants that have been entered into, marital infidelity embodies a violation of a sacred trust. But trustworthiness is not an easy virtue to develop. To acquire this capacity in a social context characterized by moral laxity may be particularly difficult. To be successful, one will have to overcome many challenges. When trustworthiness is challenged in a sexual way, other virtues, which may be closely allied with trustworthiness, come into play. Referring to these virtues in a letter addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada in December of 1938, Shoghi Effendi wrote:

Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations.

It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. . . . It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses.³⁰

The capacity to regulate and give noble expression to human sexuality requires self-mastery, concern for the good of others, and the exercise of wisdom. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "a power above and beyond the powers of nature must needs be brought to bear."³¹ Only humans can bring their behavior into conformity with a consciously chosen value structure. It is in using and thereby developing this capacity that inner freedom—which is the hallmark of true liberty—is acquired, and all forms of fidelity, including marital fidelity, can be achieved.

In a letter addressed to a Bahá'í in the early part of the twentieth century, Shoghi Effendi observed, "We must reach a spiritual plane where God comes first and great human passions are unable to turn us away from Him. All the time we see people who either through the force of hate or the passionate attachment they have to another person, sacrifice principle or bar themselves from the Path of God."³² Thus, when a couple endeavors to "abide by the will of God," the two partners seek to create within themselves those spiritual qualities and moral capabilities that are necessary for success in both marriage and life. Their success, in turn, will redound to the development of their children, as well as the community and society of which they are a part. Thus, efforts to reduce vulnerability to AIDS among families would be enhanced by further reflection and application of those ethical principles that are bound up with human sexuality.³³ Proceeding in this way need not be in opposition to the use of other

prevention and protective strategies—such as the use of condoms where indicated, the distribution of syringes where intravenous drug use might be involved, and so forth.

Concerns for the cultural roots of domestic violence will have to acknowledge the role that religions continue to play in legitimizing violence against children, promoting the subjugation of women, and fostering an oppressive and authoritarian atmosphere within homes and communities around the world. Thus, this brief discussion on domestic violence will close with a word about the role of religion.

According to the Bahá'í Faith, achieving the prosperity of humankind depends upon the harmonious interplay of science and religion. The Bahá'í writings state, "Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine."³⁴ In an enumeration of the consequences of the eclipse of religion, the Bahá'í writings note that the "perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves . . . in their worst and most revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of joy and of hope is gradually extinguished."³⁵ On the other hand, the Bahá'í writings affirm that religion must be guided by reason and must be animated by respect for the power of science, and an unbiased search for truth, to lead the world forward. In a talk delivered in Paris on the misrepresentation of religion by religious leaders and the benefits to humanity that would accrue were science and religion to be in harmony, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

Many religious leaders have grown to think that the importance of religion lies mainly in the adherence to a collection of certain dogmas and the practice of rites and ceremonies! Those whose souls they profess to cure are taught to believe likewise, and these cling tenaciously to the outward forms, confusing them with the inward truth.

Now, these forms and rituals differ in the various churches and amongst the different sects, and even contradict one another;

giving rise to discord, hatred, and disunion. The outcome of all this dissension is the belief of many cultured men that religion and science are contradictory terms, that religion needs no powers of reflection, and should in no wise be regulated by science, but must of necessity be opposed, the one to the other. The unfortunate effect of this is that science has drifted apart from religion, and religion has become a mere blind and more or less apathetic following of the precepts of certain religious teachers, who insist on their own favorite dogmas being accepted even when they are contrary to science. This is foolishness, for it is quite evident that science is the light, and, being so, religion *truly* so-called does not oppose knowledge. . . .

Much of the discord and disunion of the world is created by these man-made oppositions and contradictions. If religion were in harmony with science and they walked together, much of the hatred and bitterness now bringing misery to the human race would be at an end.³⁶

The relevance of this discourse to domestic violence is that many practices that have been shown by science to be harmful to human health and development, but derive their legitimacy by reference to religious teachings, can be overcome as religious leaders invite followers to abandon the outer form of such practices while preserving the moral or spiritual principles that the practices are believed to embody. A few communities in Africa, for example, have begun to replace coming-of-age rituals that jeopardize health (such as female circumcision) with rituals that serve as symbolic equivalents of the ritual without actual cutting. The alternative rites of passage project, known in Swahili as "Ntanira na Mugambo" (circumcision by words), for example, has been undertaken with notable success in the community of Tharaka in Kenya. Having suffered the female genital mutilation (FGM) ritual themselves, the village mothers were all too familiar with the physical and psychological dangers that attend the practice. These include infections, blockage of menstrual flow, urethral or anal damage, infertility, HIV/AIDS, depression, anxiety, and, for some, death. Led by a young mother, Annicetta Kiriga, the women of Tharaka solicited financial and logistical support from local and national NGOs. The Programme for Appropriate Technology

in Health (PATH), along with one of the nation's oldest grass roots organizations, the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO), funded a research project that first sought to document the extent of the problem and then to understand why the practice has persisted for centuries. Armed with this knowledge a group of women from Tharaka, PATH, and MYWO designed a program that embraces the life-affirming festivities associated with the ritual, such as dancing, singing, feasting, and gift-giving, but replaces circumcision with education for girls in self-esteem, health, and women's empowerment. And while transformation of the ritual has engendered resistance among some village residents, overall the project has led to significant changes in the health, education, and well-being of women in Tharaka.³⁷ Similar efforts throughout the world would take us far in the global campaign to eradicate domestic violence.

To be frank, however, there may be many other practices that so threaten human life, health, and development that they are not likely to be preserved in any form. Despite considerable evidence that corporal punishment is linked to numerous other forms of violence, for example, its use in the home continues to be justified by reference to sacred scripture. In addition, in India a significant percentage of child prostitutes are females who have been initiated as *devadasi*, or Hindu temple servants. And while this tradition had once served to elevate a low-caste girl into a devotional career of temple singing and dancing, today this practice, though officially outlawed, is one of the primary sources of child prostitution in the southern regions of the country.³⁸

In some regions of Africa, women and girls commonly serve as mediums of exchange. Since their reproductive labor is thought to belong to the family, families may give away young female virgins as *gifts* to oracles and shrines in order to pacify gods for offenses alleged to have been committed by other family members.³⁹ In one case that received worldwide attention, a twelve-year-old girl was given to an Ewe priest in Ghana to serve as a slave in order to atone for the rape that led to her birth.⁴⁰ It is becoming increasingly clear that practices of this sort, and other practices linked to religion that violate human rights and retard or preclude the full development of human capacities, will have to be abandoned.

Addressing the urgent need for change in its 1985 letter directed to the peoples of the world, the Universal House of Justice asked, "Will humanity continue in its waywardness, holding to outworn concepts and unworkable assumptions? Or will its leaders, regardless of ideology, step forth and, with a resolute will, consult together in a united search for appropriate solutions?" The Universal House of Justice went on to note that those who care for the future of the world would be wise to ponder this advice, citing Shoghi Effendi:

If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.⁴¹

Despite traditional and emerging threats, the Bahá'í community's commitment to the eradication of family violence has remained firm for well over a century. Its commitment is embodied in its design and implementation of community-based violence reduction and prevention programs; in its sponsorship of local, regional, and high-level conferences, panel discussions, and workshops; in its support in pursuit of the ratification, adoption, and implementation of covenants, conventions, and declarations that are designed to protect human rights; by its production of a range of books, statements, training manuals, and other documents that raise awareness of the suffering, costs, and loss of human potential that are the result of family violence; by its collaborations with other local, national, and international agencies that are animated by similar concerns; and by the sincere striving of individual Bahá'ís—living in more than 100,000 localities worldwide—to bring their lives into harmony with the noble vision for human life that is enshrined in the teachings of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

One highly praised initiative undertaken by the Bahá'í International Community to reduce family violence was the Traditional Media as Change Agent project, funded by UNIFEM and executed by the Bahá'í International Community in Bolivia, Cameroon, and Malaysia beginning in 1992. An important goal of the project was to contribute to the reduction of violence throughout all three communities by engaging the willing involvement of men in improving the status of women and girls. The specific goals of the project were to empower the people directly involved in analyzing and solving their own problems (first by training them in the use of modern analytic techniques, such as focus groups, community surveys, and a nonadversarial approach to group decision making known as consultation); by communicating the results of analyses using traditional media—such as locally produced skits, dances, and songs; and by providing moral direction to the implementation of change by stressing the moral value of the principle of the equality of women and men. The distinctive approach employed in this project has been praised for the way that it enlisted the participation of men, illustrated in a manner that all could appreciate how the lack of women's equality relates to local problems, and inspired in large numbers of participants at all three sites a motivation to change.

In addition to the legal support, human rights advocacy, social services, and health care provided to female victims of violence by the Tahirih Justice Center in Washington, DC (see this volume, pp. 203–09), other Bahá'í-inspired projects around the world that are designed to contribute to the reduction and prevention of family violence include the Bayan Association of Honduras, the Authenticity Project which offers programs in Russia and the United States, the Marriage Transformation Project based in the US, Bahá'í youth workshops that use the arts to promote peace and the eradication of violence in more than 40 countries, Parent University of Savannah, Georgia, USA, the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women in India, the Varqa Foundation's Youth Can Move the World project working with Guyanese youth, and the Denver Metro Bahá'í Center in the US, which works with FindtheGood.org, among others.

These efforts, small as they are, are encouraged by the progress that has been made over the last several decades in particular in advancing the cause of human rights, in lifting the standard of the

equality of women and men, and in promoting a consciousness of the oneness of humankind. Bahá'ís are fully confident in the belief that "a new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth"⁴² and that "the potentialities inherent in the station of man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God."⁴³ Bahá'ís invite the peoples of the world to examine whether the teachings of the Faith, or the experience of the Bahá'í community, can make additional contributions to the global campaign to eradicate violence within and outside the home.

NOTES

¹ World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health: Summary* (Geneva: WHO, 2002), p. v.

² The World Health Organization defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has the high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation." Violence against intimate partners, which includes physical aggression, forced intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion, and psychological abuse (including intimidation, humiliation, social isolation, restricted access to information, and economic deprivation), occurs in every country and culture on earth. Other forms of violence, such as dowry deaths, acid attacks, infanticide, and honor killings, tend to occur in particular regions of the world. And while women are sometimes violent towards their male partners and the occurrence of violence between partners of the same sex has been well documented, the vast majority of partner violence consists of violence perpetrated by men against women. In addition to violence against and between intimate partners, physical, psychological, and sexual violence against children, perpetrated by parents and other caregivers, continues to be a global problem. Furthermore, a growing dimension of domestic violence around the world is related to the abuse and exploitation of domestic workers and the elderly. A myriad of qualitative and quantitative studies have established the ubiquity and pernicious effects of such violence; they will not be reviewed again here. See Michael Penn and Rahel Nardos, *Overcoming Violence against Women and Girls: The International Campaign to Eradicate an International Problem* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

³ Shoghi Effendi, "The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith," in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1 (Inglewood, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), p. 214.

- ⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), p. 52.
- ⁵ Confucius, *The Great Learning*. The Four Books: The Chinese-English Bilingual Series of Chinese Classics, translated by publisher (Hunan, China: Hunan Publishing House, 1992), p. 3.
- ⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 3 (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1908), p. 578.
- ⁷ Ibid., pp. 579–80. Notwithstanding the fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá made these observations from the Middle East approximately one century ago, girls in nearly every country on earth continue to lag far behind boys in access to education. For example, two thirds of the more than 120 million children who have never attended school are girls; two thirds of the world's 880 million illiterate adults are women, and in Afghanistan, as one report recently notes, two generations of girls "have never seen the inside of a classroom." UNICEF, *Rebuilding Hope in Afghanistan* (New York: UNICEF, November 2003), p. 30.
- ⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), p. 125.
- ⁹ Universal House of Justice, 24 January 1993, letter to an individual.
- ¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, pp. 138–39.
- ¹¹ See Leila R. Milani, Sarah S. Albert, and Karina Purushotma, eds., *CEDAW: The Treaty for the Rights of Women, Rights that Benefit the Entire Community* (Washington, DC: Working Group on Ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2004).
- ¹² Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point for All Nations: A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations* (New York: Bahá'í International Community, 1995), p. 1.
- ¹³ See Roger Levesque, *Culture and Family Violence: Fostering Change through Human Rights Law* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press, 2001).
- ¹⁴ The Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms a child's right to protection from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation . . . while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s), or any other person who has the care of the child."
- ¹⁵ Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Preliminary Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences*. UN Doc. E/CN. 4/1995/42 (1994).
- ¹⁶ Notes from Bani Dugal's remarks delivered in November 2000 as communicated in an e-mail correspondence to the author dated 22 October 2004.

- ¹⁷ Levesque, p. 8.
- ¹⁸ Catharine Itzin, ed., *Pornography: Women, Violence and Civil Liberties, A Radical New View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- ¹⁹ See Susanne Kappeler, "Pornography: The Representation of Power" in Itzin, pp. 88–101.
- ²⁰ See Ray Wyre, "Pornography and Sexual Violence: Working with Sex Offenders" in Itzin, pp. 236–47.
- ²¹ C. Everett Koop, "Report of the Surgeon General's Workshop on Pornography and Public Health," *American Psychologist* 42 (1987), p. 945. For the full report see E.P. Mulvey and J.L. Haugaard, *Report of the Surgeon General's Workshop on Pornography and Public Health* (Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, 1986).
- ²² Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994), pp. 158–59.
- ²³ The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 95.
- ²⁴ Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNIFEM & UNFPA, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*. 14 July 2004 Press Release.
- ²⁵ See: UNICEF, *Children Orphaned by AIDS: Frontline Responses from Eastern and Southern Africa* (New York: UNICEF, 1999); UNICEF, *A UNICEF Fact Sheet: Orphans and Other Children Affected by AIDS* (New York: UNICEF, September 2003).
- ²⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1993), Questions and Answers, no. 3, p. 105.
- ²⁷ Elijah Anderson, "Sex Codes and Family Life among Northton's Youth," in *Street Wise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community*, Elijah Anderson, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 112–37.
- ²⁸ See, for instance, Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- ²⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, cited in "Trustworthiness," in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2 (Ingleside, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), pp. 327, 335, and 329.
- ³⁰ Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 30.
- ³¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, p. 53.
- ³² From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 4 October 1950, in "Living the Life," *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, p. 22.
- ³³ A 2004 Fact Sheet of UNAIDS (11–16 July), titled *Women and AIDS—A Growing Concern*, reports: "Marriage and long-term monogamous relationships

do not protect women from HIV. In Cambodia 13 percent of urban and 10 percent of rural men reported having sex with both a sex worker and their wife or steady girlfriend. In Thailand a 1999 study found that 75 percent of HIV-infected women were likely to be infected by their husbands. "In some settings," the report went further to note, "it appears marriage actually increases women's HIV risk. In some African countries adolescent, married 15–19 year-old young women have higher HIV infection levels than unmarried sexually active females of the same age." It is thus clear that monogamy serves as a safeguard only when both partners observe it. The Bahá'í teachings impose the moral obligation of sexual fidelity on both men and women before and during marriage.

³⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, p. 125.

³⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 2nd rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), p. 187; cited in the Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985), p. 5.

³⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 143–44.

³⁷ See Cheywa Spindel, Elisa Levy, and Melissa Connor, eds., *With an End in Sight: Strategies from the UNIFEM Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women* (New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2000).

³⁸ Penn and Nardos, p. 49.

³⁹ Levesque, p. 78.

⁴⁰ Howard French, "The Ritual Slaves of Ghana: Young and Female," *New York Times*, 20 January 1997, A5.

⁴¹ Shoghi Effendi, cited in the Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 8.

⁴² Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 196.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

World Watch

Ann Boyles looks at the history, the present condition, and the future prospects of the nuclear family, from a Bahá'í perspective.

In 2004, the United Nations marks the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, and many governments, nongovernmental organizations, and UN agencies will be holding events or undertaking studies to reflect on the current state of the family—at the same time that long-standing notions about it are being revisited.

One barometer of change is language. To accommodate current social realities, the authors of a respected family therapy volume have made significant revisions to their terminology in the recently published third edition, replacing “nuclear family” with “immediate family,” which they see as “more comprehensive,” encompassing not only the nuclear model, but also a variety of other arrangements. Further, in the growing absence of formal, recognized marriage, the authors refer to the family bond simply as “commitment.”¹

With these revisions, it is clear that the authors are seeking to be more inclusive. But the relationship between language, perception, and reality is intricate. Do such changes in terminology also alter our expectations and standards? And that question, in turn, raises others, such as whether the traditional nuclear family is dead, how we should define family in this age, and what its future might be.

Until relatively recent times, and across many cultures, the family encompassed several generations and extended relations. However, at some point—possibly as early as the sixteenth century, according to some sociologists—European families experienced a radical shift, when marriages began to be contracted on the basis of affection rather than for economic or other advantages, and couples were no longer so closely intertwined with their clans. Families then began to depend to an unprecedented degree on the continuation of the husband's and wife's affection for each other. The family's traditional "economic, protective, educational, religious, and recreational functions" were supplanted by "affectional and cultural" ones.² With the support of religion and state, the nuclear family evolved to epitomize "the goal of human sexuality combined with romantic love" and became "the only socially acceptable form of adult pair-bond."³

By the late nineteenth century, what Christopher Lasch calls the "bourgeois family system" had evolved to rest on four pillars: "companionate marriage," "the child-centered household," "the emancipation or quasi-emancipation of women," and "the structural isolation of the nuclear family from the kinship system and from society in general." The family became "an emotional refuge in a cold and competitive society" in which privacy was highly valued, while work was simply the means by which breadwinners made that refuge more comfortable.⁴ By the midpoint of the twentieth century, this "structural differentiation"⁵ was championed as making the family more effective in delivering its emotional goods; therefore, the thinking went, it should limit itself to that role, while the other functions previously in the family's domain would best be left to more efficient social institutions.

As the family's arena of responsibility has shrunk, however, the emotional weight it bears has grown heavier and heavier. As Suanne Kelman argues in *All in the Family: A Cultural History of Family Life*, marriage partners in Western society are now expected to be "financial associates, co-parents, passionate lovers, best friends, constant companions *and* even exercise partners." How realistic are these expectations? Kelman observes, "In cultures with lower divorce rates, marriage is often less demanding."⁶ And indeed, many sociologists contend that for these sorts of reasons the ideal of the isolated nuclear family has never been terribly successful.

While we have loaded more and more emotion onto the family, other factors have also worked changes on it. These include radical shifts in norms of sexual behavior, which have led to greater numbers of non-married couples and couples of the same sex cohabiting openly, for example. Established ideas about what constitutes a family are continually being challenged. At the same time, throughout the past century we have seen "an increase in standards for what constitutes a successful marriage," accompanied by "a weakening commitment to the norm of lifelong marriage."⁷ The result is a large jump in the rate of divorce and in the number of single-parent families. A more general acceptance of sexual equality constitutes another transformative factor. On the positive side, domestic violence has been widely condemned and criminalized, but on the negative side, expectations regarding gender roles have become increasingly confused. And one further factor changing the family springs from the development of reliable means to limit family size: cultural norms have now shifted to the point where smaller families are not only acceptable but also desirable. This, in turn, has resulted in a radical change in attitudes towards children.

While these factors are particularly evident in families in "advanced" societies, other developments affect families on a global scale. Even where there is no conscious desire to turn away from established models, families are disrupted by economic deprivation, war and conflict, and diseases such as HIV/AIDS. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, many children orphaned by AIDS are left either to fend for themselves or to be raised by grandparents or other relatives. And these problems appear to be increasing exponentially. The United Nations estimates that by 2010, 25.3 million children around the world will have lost either one or both parents to AIDS—20.1 million of these in sub-Saharan Africa.⁸ The resulting social disruption will be extreme. Upon what model will these children, who are deprived of life with their mothers and fathers, establish their own families when they grow up?

In spite of such catastrophic factors, and in spite of numerous predictions of its demise, the ideal of the nuclear family endures. Yet it is clear that in its current form, it is not in tune with the needs of a changing society. So what is the future of this beleaguered institution? Is it, as some have suggested, simply a revival of the traditional

nuclear model, or is it, as others have advocated, the abandonment of marriage and family altogether? Or, as still others contend, should the ideal of marriage and family be reconceptualized to accommodate shifting social mores?

Since many sociologists argue that the concept of Western society's traditional nuclear family has been in decline for at least a hundred years, the desirability of reviving it seems questionable—assuming it were even possible. After all, that family ideal arose in a world significantly different from the one we now inhabit.

First, the situation of women was disadvantaged. Basically, they were prisoners of the household with no choice but to stay home, unless they were forced to work in menial jobs to try to keep the family from starvation—in which event there was no (or, at best, small and demeaning) government assistance. Domestic violence was tacitly accepted, and if women were brutalized within the marriage they had little recourse. Divorce was an impossibility for the vast majority of them. In that world, public education was not widely available, so parents with means educated their children at home, while families lacking resources had few opportunities for children to acquire knowledge and skills in order to make better lives for themselves. Nor was there any social safety net. Individuals with disabilities, for example, were excluded from the work force and were entirely the responsibility of their families, which were also the sole caregivers of elderly, dependent relatives.⁹

Families that grew in this matrix can be categorized generally as patriarchal and authoritarian. In *The Violence Free Family: Building Block of a Peaceful Civilization*, Hossain Danesh describes such power-based families as exhibiting the following characteristics: unequal access to knowledge (with women being denied education), lack of truthfulness and trust in the relationships of the various members, and conditionality of the expression of parental love on children's efforts to conform to their parents' wishes.¹⁰

It is clear that the context in which the traditional nuclear family functioned was not an ideal world to which we should hasten back. In any case, how could families provide adequate education for their children in today's society? And how could they possibly remain self-sufficient enough to gainfully employ all their members? The material and social inequalities perpetuated by the powerful, self-

sufficient family model have also been reduced, over time, through income and inheritance taxes; now laws and social agencies curtail wife and child abuse and provide women with the option of leaving bad marriages. On the whole, advantages outweigh the disadvantages attached to the changes in the family's situation, even if the present situation is far from ideal.

If looking backwards is not a solution to the dilemma of the modern family, neither is the prospect of abandoning marriage and family altogether. Except in rare instances, communal experiments in family life and child rearing have not proved to be enduring, and they do not appear to be an emerging model.

What, then, about refashioning the ideal of marriage to accommodate a wider range of commitments? That is the tack taken by many contemporary sociologists and family therapists. Carter and McGoldrick, for example, state, "It is high time we gave up on our traditional concept of family and expanded our very definition of the term," continuing, "[t]he backlash forces in our society use code terms such as 'family values' to imply that traditional nuclear families are the only valid families. We must resist such insidious definitions and insist on a more inclusive definition of family and family values." They include in theirs not only the traditional nuclear model but also heterosexual unmarried partners, homosexual couples, divorced parents who live alone, single unmarried parents, families composed of remarried adults (with or without children), single adults, and widowed partners. In any of these arrangements, family members such as children may live with them or in other households, visiting periodically.¹¹

However, many challenges and concerns arise from the continual revision of the ideal of marriage and family to suit changing norms and practices, ranging from the emotional and psychological well-being of partners and children to their legal status and protection. If, as some sociologists have suggested, both "the psychological 'anchorage' of adults"¹² and child rearing remain the most important functions served by the nuclear family structure, providing a sense of identity and belonging to its members, how can the family cope with the stresses it faces so as to better perform these functions?

One stress that demands attention is society's response to the entry of women into the workplace. In her book *The Second Shift*,

Arlie Russell Hochschild argues that while the entrance of both men and women into the industrial economy changed relations between the sexes, especially within marriage, “the entrance of men into industrial work did not destabilize the family whereas *in the absence of other changes*, the rise in female employment has gone with the rise in divorce.”¹³ Hochschild contends that women who have entered the economy have largely been absorbed into the existing culture of the workplace, but no evolution has occurred in the “cultural understanding of marriage and work.”¹⁴ Employers have largely refused to adapt to meet employees’ family demands, and most husbands and fathers have not compensated for changes in family life that have resulted from women’s entry into the workplace.

A major factor in this “stalled revolution,” as Hochschild calls it,¹⁵ is the tension between the family’s need for care and the way our society has devalued work that has traditionally been done by homemakers, passing it on “to low-paid housekeepers, baby-sitters, and daycare workers,”¹⁶ while other responsibilities previously handled by families—care of disabled or elderly family members, for example—have been taken over by the state. Meanwhile, families “emotionally downsize,” devoting less time and energy to the home environment, the spouse, and the children.¹⁷ The whole process eventually leaves the family in a state of emotional impoverishment, and we have the inverse of Talcott Parsons’ vision: the family is no longer capable of effectively delivering its emotional goods.

Looking at the child-rearing function of the family, authors Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth observe that, in healthy families, parental care and encouragement give children a sense of security and self-worth, and that parents play an important part in helping their children acquire skills, form goals, learn about limits and social boundaries, and become self-regulating—all while conveying a sense of caring about their children’s future.¹⁸ However, like Arlie Hochschild, David Popenoe warns that “social and cultural forces” are “subtly corroding the parent–child relationship.” He contends that the movements throughout the twentieth century that championed individual rights, freedoms, and the pursuit of self-fulfillment (particularly the sexual, feminist, therapeutic, welfare, and consumer revolutions) have also contributed to “growing disin-

vestments in family life" and "the increasing dissolution of families with children."¹⁹

Other scholars concur with this view. Amato and Booth note that while young people expect "companionship, personality development, and emotional security" in marriage, they no longer see it as necessarily meeting needs for "children, a steady sexual relationship, and maintenance of a home." Thus, partners may be quicker now than in previous eras to give up on marriage and parenting.²⁰

The family model that has flourished in such a climate is what Hossain Danesh calls the permissive or indulgent family, which focuses primarily on personal fulfillment, to the exclusion of all else. Danesh writes, "In such families pursuit of knowledge and truth do not have relevance except for personal gain. Love in indulgence-based families is viewed as identical to gratification," and children raised in such an atmosphere become "self-centered, intolerant, and undisciplined."²¹

With the increase in marriage and relationship breakups, the absence of fathers in many contemporary families has become a matter of serious concern. Even as we give lip service to the idea that fathers should be more involved in raising their children, the reality is that with the increase in divorce and in "nonmarital birth," the role of fathers has diminished in the lives of many children. More men are spending fewer years living with their offspring, and those who aren't living with their children often have little contact with them—and contribute little or nothing to their support. Not surprisingly, studies show that children benefit when fathers manage to maintain "close and supportive relations" with the mothers of their children, and that children suffer "to the extent that fathers create discord in their marriages."²²

The situation in which the modern family finds itself, then, is in many respects far from ideal, and remedies need to be sought on a variety of fronts. First and most fundamentally, perhaps, we need to revisit our expectations of marriage and family life. The difference between previous generations and ours, writes Suanne Kelman, is our expectation that the world owes us uninterrupted happiness.²³ In short, our vision of the family is not realistic. Instead of "models of couples making their way through each stage of life," we have "enormous concentration on courtship and romance," as popularized

in Hollywood movies and television shows, for example. She laments, "I wish that Westerners would renounce their delusion that they can be happy all the time, and learn to deal with the less-than-perfect families they have," living with "restraint and kindness and intelligence" within their choices.²⁴ Another necessary attitudinal change is the very "notion of manhood," so that men will be encouraged "to be active parents and share at home."²⁵

At the policy-making level, many commentators recommend that governmental policies adversely affecting families with children receive closer scrutiny before their adoption and implementation. Workplace policies also need what Hochschild calls "humane" adaptation to the reality that in most families two parents work outside the home and are also responsible for domestic duties, including childcare. Policies supporting greater involvement of fathers in their children's care would include flexible working hours, permanent part-time work and job-sharing, a compressed work week, work based in the home, and paid family leaves for the birth of children or care of sick ones, and other situations. More ambitious plans might include convenient, affordable housing and even community-based laundry and meal services. In short, policies supporting marriage, including the provision of marriage and family counseling, need enhancing.²⁶

But many of these suggestions are reactive means for dealing with the crisis; while they are certainly needed, a constructive, proactive approach is also imperative. As David Popenoe puts it, "public facilities and services alone . . . cannot halt the decline of families . . . the family must also be nurtured and sustained as a thing of value through the moral suasion of cultural, intellectual, and political leaders." While governments should certainly safeguard the rights of all of their citizens, they should not "downgrade the ideal of the nuclear family," because "[i]n an egalitarian society the protection of minority life-styles is important, but good family life is something on which every society depends for its very existence."²⁷

It now appears that hard scientific data are bearing out such calls for strong family life. Evidence published in a recent report titled *Hardwired to Connect*, by the Commission on Children at Risk,²⁸ cites findings in the field of neuroscience that children are born needing (or "hardwired" for) deep connections with others and

seeking moral meaning in their lives. The report attributes increasing emotional and mental problems in American children and youth, including rising suicide rates, to a lack of connectedness to other people and a lack of "moral and spiritual meaning" in their lives. The rather unusual consequence of this study is that scientists and experts on children's health have joined forces to urge that serious attention be given to "young people's moral, spiritual, and religious needs."

In its report, the Commission stresses the importance in children's development of what it terms "authoritative communities"—"groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life." Lacking these—which begin with the family, but also include religious and civil groups—children's development is warped.²⁹

Bahá'í families live in this same difficult environment and are coping with the same stresses that other families face. Their advantage, however, is a distinct vision of the nature, purpose, and functioning of the family.

From a Bahá'í perspective, the importance of the family lies primarily in the fact that it is the basic building block of society. The Bahá'í writings state that "human evolution . . . had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life"³⁰ and eventually expanded to encompass the tribe, the city-state, and the nation-state. Because of its role as the basic social unit, the family's health has a direct impact on the well-being of the wider community and the state as a whole.

Bahá'ís, then, regard the cohesion of the family as vitally important and believe that this condition develops in a marriage that is built on harmony and unity. While a couple's relationship should spring from attraction and affection ('Abdu'l-Bahá says, "first thou must choose one who is pleasing to thee"³¹), there must be more. 'Abdu'l-Bahá continues, "Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart." In preparing to build a lasting commitment, the couple must "become thoroughly acquainted" with each other's character, finding common purpose in the goal of becoming "loving companions and comrades" throughout their earthly lives and beyond.³²

Thus, the couple begins marriage on a unified spiritual basis, taking them beyond the ephemeral notions of romantic love and courtship that are popularized in the Western media, and away from practices of arranged marriages common in other cultures.

Furthermore, in order for Bahá'í marriage to take place, the partners must receive their parents' consent. It is a law designed "to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of the children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator."³³ Thus, the importance of family unity is stressed from the outset of a couple's life together, providing them with a wellspring of support from their extended family.

For Bahá'ís marriage is both a social and a moral relationship. While marriage is not obligatory, it is beneficial; Bahá'u'lláh has called it "a fortress for well being and salvation"³⁴ and has indicated that this commitment is the basis of a sound family life that will, in turn, form the foundation for the structure and perpetuation of society in this day. Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh has provided clear and explicit guidance about the parameters of this institution.

First, He identified one of the primary purposes of marriage as procreation. "Enter into wedlock, O people," He said, "that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves."³⁵ For this reason, Shoghi Effendi elaborates: "Marriage is thus, according to the Bahá'í Teachings, primarily a social and moral act. It has purpose which transcends the immediate personal needs and interests of the parties."³⁶ While "self-fulfillment" within marriage is certainly not disparaged by Bahá'ís, it is not seen as the relationship's primary purpose, and both partners recognize that there may well be times within their married life when they must sacrifice their individual wants and desires for the good of the entire unit.

The Bahá'í teachings state explicitly that the institution of marriage serves as a place for "the proper use of the sex instinct," which is "the natural right of every individual,"³⁷ that marriage should take place only between men and women, and that men and women should confine their sexual relationship to marriage—"Before marriage absolutely chaste, after marriage absolutely faithful to one's chosen companion. Faithful in all sexual acts, faithful in word and

in deed."³⁸ The trust that is established between the couple through this fundamental expression of loyalty adds tremendous strength to their relationship.

'Abdu'l-Bahá placed great importance on parenting, urging mothers and fathers to guide their children "unto those things which lead to everlasting honor"³⁹ and to strive after high ideals. Parents are responsible for educating their children not only materially, so that they will be equipped to earn a living and contribute to the progress of humanity, but also morally, so that they will grow to live upright lives. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "All the virtues must be taught the family."⁴⁰ In particular, the aspiration to serve others permeates both Bahá'í community and family life; service is considered to be the highest station one can attain, and parents attempt to inculcate this value in their children from an early age.

In the "very special kind of community" that is a family,⁴¹ all members have rights and responsibilities, but the family's unity must also be preserved. 'Abdu'l-Bahá urges:

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister, and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.⁴²

Achieving and maintaining this delicate balance between individual rights and family unity is crucial.

We have previously seen Hossain Danesh's classifications of the authoritarian or power-based and the permissive or indulgent models of family life. The Bahá'í family ideal could be described as the integrated or unity-based model of family life. Danesh characterizes this model as being constructed on the basis of unity, promoting equality and mutuality between husband and wife, and observing the rights and responsibilities of all family members. He writes, "In

these families, the power- and indulgence-based practices of control, competition, and excessive individualism and independence give way to those of equality, cooperation, universality, and interdependence."⁴³

Danesh sees the necessity of humanity evolving to the point where this type of family becomes the norm. The benefits of such functioning, and the perils of the opposite, are captured in the following words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will advance, become illumined and spiritual; but if enmity and hatred exist within it, destruction and dispersion are inevitable."⁴⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá also outlines the material benefits, as well as the moral and spiritual ones, that accrue to the family if it is unified:

Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honor, as day succeedeth day.⁴⁵

An important element contributing to family unity and its successful functioning is the principle of the equality of men and women. Equality of the sexes is manifested through the practice of consultation, adherence to the principle of justice, respectful behavior, and striving to embody high moral standards. Violence against and abuse of women and children is condemned in the strongest terms.⁴⁶ Bahá'u'lláh writes that just as men "do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God."⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Universal House of Justice has explicitly stated, "No Bahá'í husband should ever beat his wife, or subject her to any form of cruel treatment; to do so would be an unacceptable abuse of the marriage relationship and contrary to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh."⁴⁸ And with regard to the protection of children in the Bahá'í community, the House of Justice writes, "Bahá'í institutions must be uncompromising and vigilant in their commitment to the protection of the children entrusted to their care."⁴⁹ Neither beating

nor vilifying a child is permissible, because it is a violation of his rights and, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, his character "will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse."⁵⁰

In Bahá'í families, parents are enjoined to educate their children. Girls are to receive the same education as boys—and, furthermore, they are to be given priority, should it prove impossible for the parents to provide for the education of both their sons and daughters. Bahá'u'lláh clarifies that this preference is due to the mother's role as the primary educator of the children. Clearly, if she is ignorant, she will raise ignorant children, and if she is educated, she will not perpetuate ignorance and superstition in the next generation.

This teaching indicates the high value accorded to mothering in the Bahá'í writings, but it does not preclude the role of the father in child rearing; both parents are enjoined to be actively involved in the training of their children and in family life. The principle of equality demands that husband and wife share the work and duties within the home.⁵¹

Because of the close relationship between the family and society as a whole, the principle of equality of the sexes holds wide-ranging significance. Identifying full equality as a prerequisite for the achievement of world peace, the Universal House of Justice has stated, "The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations."⁵²

Recognizing the interconnectedness of the actions within the family and in the wider society, Bahá'ís certainly do not see the nuclear family functioning in isolation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "Consider the harmful effect of discord and dissension in a family; then reflect upon the favors and blessings which descend upon that family when unity exists among its various members." He then broadens the view, exclaiming, "What incalculable benefits and blessings would descend upon the great human family if unity and brotherhood were established!"⁵³ Bahá'í families seek to promote this ideal at both the micro and the macro levels, with support from Bahá'í institutions, the Bahá'í community itself, and in partnership with other "authoritative communities." In the process they share learning about healthy family life and child-rearing practices, with the knowledge that in time

the children they raise will grow up and exert an effect on society, for good or for ill, with the attitudes they have acquired.

It is clear, then, that, for Bahá'ís, the effort to create harmonious family life carries significance far beyond the confines of the family itself. In the world, as in the family, unity is imperative for progress to occur. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families.⁵⁴

The Bahá'í community is vitally concerned with nurturing strong families that base their actions on the Faith's spiritual principles and teachings, in the conviction that this will lead eventually to a healthier, more vibrant culture. Everywhere in the world, whether in developed or developing societies, robust families are equipped to contribute more effectively to both the social and the economic development of the entire community and to pursue the goal of prosperity in its most complete sense—the full development of each family and community member's God-given capacities, to contribute to the good of all. In this way, Bahá'ís believe, families will mold the sturdy, durable building blocks of an “an ever-advancing civilization.”⁵⁵

NOTES

¹ Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick, *The Expanded Family Life Cycle: Individual, Family, and Social Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), pp. xv–xvi.

² Ernest W. Burgess, cited in Christopher Lasch, “The Family as a Haven in a Heartless World,” in *Family in Transition: Rethinking Marriage, Sexuality,*

- Child Rearing and Family Organization*. Arlene Skolnick and Jerome H. Skolnick, eds., 3rd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1980), p. 87.
- ³ David Popenoe, *Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Societies*. Social Institutions and Social Change Series. Peter H. Rossi, Michael Useem, and James D. Wright, eds. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988), p. 329.
 - ⁴ Lasch, pp. 81–82.
 - ⁵ Talcott Parsons, cited in Lasch, p. 89.
 - ⁶ Suanne Kelman, *All in the Family: A Cultural History of Family Life* (Toronto: Viking, 1998), p. 296.
 - ⁷ Popenoe, pp. 218–19. See also Kelman, p. 282, and Lasch, p. 83, for a discussion of the factors contributing to the decline of the modern family.
 - ⁸ See Dawn K. Smith, "Facing the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic: A Bahá'í Perspective," in *The Bahá'í World 2002–2003* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2004), pp. 179–97.
 - ⁹ See Popenoe, p. 308, and Carter and McGoldrick, p. 3.
 - ¹⁰ Hossain B. Danesh, *The Violence Free Family: Building Block of a Peaceful Civilization* (Ottawa: Bahá'í Studies Publications, 1995), pp. 12–13.
 - ¹¹ Carter and McGoldrick, p. 10.
 - ¹² Popenoe, p. 309.
 - ¹³ Arlie Russell Hochschild, with Anne Machung, *The Second Shift* (New York: Viking, 1989; Quill, 2002), p. 12.
 - ¹⁴ Ibid.
 - ¹⁵ Ibid.
 - ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 215.
 - ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 282.
 - ¹⁸ Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 18.
 - ¹⁹ Popenoe, p. 330. One indicator of this development, Popenoe contends, is that there is no ideological antithesis for individualism. To fill the vacuum, he proposes the term "familism" (Popenoe, pp. 328–29).
 - ²⁰ Amato and Booth, p. 12.
 - ²¹ Danesh, p. 16.
 - ²² See Amato and Booth, pp. 20 and 228–30.
 - ²³ Kelman, p. 297.
 - ²⁴ Kelman, pp. 298–99.
 - ²⁵ Hochschild, p. 13.
 - ²⁶ For a full discussion of these points, see Amato and Booth, pp. 234–37 and p. 239, and Hochschild, pp. 12–13.
 - ²⁷ Popenoe, pp. 340–41.
 - ²⁸ The Commission on Children at Risk was cosponsored by the YMCA of the USA, the Dartmouth Medical School, and the Institute for American Values.

The objectives of the Institute for American Values, as stated on its Web site at <http://www.americanvalues.org/>, are as follows:

To offer proposals for strengthening marriage and to help lead a marriage renewal movement. Through a new journal, *Family Scholars*, to critique and improve scholarly research and writing on the family. To examine the social and moral-spiritual foundations of child well-being. To examine the economic and moral-spiritual consequences of divorce. To put the status and future of motherhood on the public agenda. To offer leadership for a movement for responsible fatherhood. To develop, with Muslim and other scholars, an international public appeal on the human person and civil society.

See <http://www.americanvalues.org/html/hardwired.html> for the Executive Summary of *Hardwired to Connect*.

- ²⁹ Another recent volume, titled *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*, by Juliet B. Schor, concludes that consumer involvement is a direct cause of unprecedented levels of anxiety and depression in children. In fact, Schor found that children and youth today score, on average, as high on anxiety scales as children with psychiatric disorders back in 1957. Through media advertising and sponsorship partnerships with public schools and trusted social organizations, advertisers now target children as young as three years of age. (See "Are hip tots heading for trouble?" in the *Globe and Mail* [Toronto], 25 September 2004, F8.) Such findings as those of Schor and the Commission on Children at Risk can only provide a catalyst for bolstering support of the family and other social organizations to support children's healthy development.
- ³⁰ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 2nd rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), p. 43.
- ³¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), p. 125.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), Notes, no. 92, pp. 207–08.
- ³⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003), p. 105.
- ³⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 63, p. 41.
- ³⁶ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 14 October 1935; in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, compiled by Helen Hornby, 6th ed. (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 345.

- ³⁷ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 5 September 1938, cited in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 233.
- ³⁸ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 28 September 1941; cited in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 233.
- ³⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 134.
- ⁴⁰ Cited in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, 28 December 1980, in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 218.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² '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. 168.
- ⁴³ Danesh, p. 19.
- ⁴⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 144-45.
- ⁴⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 292.
- ⁴⁶ See Michael Penn's essay, "Inner Enlightenment, Moral Refinement and Justice: Antidotes to Domestic Violence," on pp. 143-68 of this volume.
- ⁴⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, cited in a letter from the Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, to an individual, 24 January 1993, on the subject of violence against women and sexual abuse.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 132.
- ⁵¹ See, for example, *The Bahá'í World 1996-97* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1998), pp. 294-97, for a report on Bahá'í efforts to promote equal participation by men and women in family life in the "Traditional Media as Change Agent" project in Cameroon.
- ⁵² The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985), pp. 11-12.
- ⁵³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 230.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 157.
- ⁵⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 215.

The first of these is the fact that the United States is a young nation, and its history is therefore a history of growth and development. The second is the fact that the United States is a large nation, and its history is therefore a history of expansion and conquest. The third is the fact that the United States is a diverse nation, and its history is therefore a history of conflict and compromise. The fourth is the fact that the United States is a nation of immigrants, and its history is therefore a history of assimilation and adaptation. The fifth is the fact that the United States is a nation of pioneers, and its history is therefore a history of exploration and discovery. The sixth is the fact that the United States is a nation of entrepreneurs, and its history is therefore a history of innovation and invention. The seventh is the fact that the United States is a nation of reformers, and its history is therefore a history of social and political change. The eighth is the fact that the United States is a nation of idealists, and its history is therefore a history of high aspirations and noble goals. The ninth is the fact that the United States is a nation of pragmatists, and its history is therefore a history of practical solutions and realistic policies. The tenth is the fact that the United States is a nation of optimists, and its history is therefore a history of hope and faith in the future.

Towards a Purposeful Beauty

REFLECTING ON AND LEARNING FROM THE HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Charles Boyle offers a perspective on the significance of Bahá'í Houses of Worship and their relationship to other sacred architecture.

The French writer Stendhal defines beauty as “the promise of happiness.” It is an evocative idea, and one entirely resonant with the architecture associated with the Bahá'í community, for Bahá'u'lláh declares His interest in the “happiness of the nations,”¹ and His is a religion concerned at its very essence with beauty.

Notable among the titles given to Bahá'u'lláh was “the Blessed Beauty”—Jamál-i-Mubárák, a title in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá cojoined the traditional title of Persian nobility with the Arabic word for beauty to create a new expression for the way His Father and the Author of the Faith should be regarded. And it must be remembered that at the outset of His Revelation, when Bahá'u'lláh lay in chains in the loathsome depths of the Síyáh Chál (the Black Pit) in Tehran, the figure of “the Maid of Heaven” appeared to Him with the first intimations of His mission as the Promised One of all the ages, describing Him to humanity as “the Beauty of God amongst you, . . . could ye but understand.”²

'Abdu'l-Bahá once remarked that “Divine things are too deep to be expressed by common words.”³ If we reflect in this context on the French author and philosopher Ernest Dimnet's statement that “Architecture, of all the arts, is the one which acts the most slowly,

but the most surely, on the soul," it becomes clear that the Houses of Worship erected by the Bahá'í community are designed to attract the heart and stir the soul. They stand as physical embodiments of purposeful beauty.

"O people of the world!" is Bahá'u'lláh's call in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, "Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions. Make them as perfect as is possible in the world of being, and adorn them with that which befitteth them, not with images and effigies. Then, with radiance and joy, celebrate therein the praise of your Lord, the Most Compassionate. Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light."⁴

The House of Worship, also known as the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*,⁵ will in time include the following satellite bodies: a hospital, schools and a university, a home for the poor, an orphanage, and a guesthouse.⁶ Collectively these institutions express a commitment to prayer and community service. As yet, the Bahá'í community is still in its infancy, and the other dependencies have not yet emerged. When Shoghi Effendi was occasionally asked to respond to suggestions that it was time to build a university or a school, he would generally decline on the basis that the time was not yet right; the community and its institutions required building up first. Perhaps in like manner the House of Worship must precede the other "dependencies," for when communities have established appropriate patterns of regular worship, they will also have matured to the level where such institutions can be made a reality.

The seven Temples thus far constructed, together with an eighth whose design work is presently underway, will complete Shoghi Effendi's original plan to provide, initially, a Bahá'í House of Worship, or "Mother Temple," on each continent. While sites have been secured for some 120 additional Houses of Worship around the globe,⁷ these will serve the progressively more parochial needs of the community. Most recently, sites for Houses of Worship have been secured in Vanuatu and Hungary.

Sometimes described as "gifts" to the wider community, being open for the purpose of worship to people of all faith traditions and to those with none, they are "signature" buildings: they are iconic, representative of the Faith, and serve as a public interface between the

wider community and the Faith itself. They thus achieve a broader purpose than serving simply as venues for communal worship.

As outwardly comparable as their functions may be, there are fundamental differences between the Bahá'í House of Worship and the church, mosque, synagogue, or temple. Notwithstanding that all provide venues for communal worship, the House of Worship sets aside the altar and axial requirements for the liturgical rituals of many Christian churches; it does not provide the point of focus of the minbar in the Islamic mosque or the ark in the Jewish synagogue; and it hosts neither altar nor objects intended as the focus within Buddhist, Hindu, and other temples. Rather than guiding the visitor towards a more inward-looking meditation through rituals intended to reinforce an exclusive association with that particular Faith, the Bahá'í House of Worship encourages spiritual reflection rather than congregational practice. Indeed, many visitors are surprised to find no altar or other familiar object upon which they can center their devotion.

Buildings communicate their purpose in part through familiarity: we expect a house to be a house because it looks like a house, and not a shop or a factory. Likewise we expect a House of Worship to be a House of Worship because it looks to us how we think one ought to look. This does not mean that one cannot say prayers in a factory, or that there is a fixed idea of how such a building should look, but rather that conditions are better suited for worship in a place purposefully so designed, and that knowledge of its purpose and anticipation of the venue help to prepare one for worship.

A place of worship must, of course, provide a suitable space for the worshiper to reach a state of communion, however that may be defined. While it is possible to do this outside, generally some form of shelter is provided, and while that shelter will likely have a roof, walls, and a floor, we can envision one form of shelter to be "better" than another. Therefore, we can seek to create the "best" form of our own choosing for it.

The oldest known definition of what might constitute "best" in architecture is that put forward in the first century BC by the Roman engineer and architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, known to history as Vitruvius. Vitruvius' *De Architectura*, translated in the seventeenth century and known today as the *Ten Books of Architecture*, states that

the quality depends on the social relevance of the artist's work, not on the workmanship of the work itself, and that "well building hath three conditions: firmness, commodity, and delight"—qualities referring respectively to strength, correct planning, and appearance.⁷

It is the third of these qualities, the "delight," that distinguishes architecture from mere building, for architecture (in this case "religious" architecture, the term by which it is collectively referred to) can elicit an emotional response—be it through soaring cathedral columns that draw one's thoughts heavenward, the call to silence that accompanies the cavernous volume of the mosque, the tranquil elegance and repose of a Renaissance chapel, or a shaft of glorious light that penetrates even the most stygian gloom—and so inspire the thoughts, cheer the heart, and uplift the spirits of the worshiper.

Returning to Dimnet's statement about architecture acting slowly but surely upon the soul, one can also see this idea in the beautifully elegiac words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "The blessings of Bahá'u'lláh are a shoreless sea, and even life everlasting is only a dewdrop therefrom. The waves of that sea are continually lapping against the hearts of the friends, and from those waves there come intimations of the spirit and ardent pulsings of the soul, until the heart giveth way, and willing or not, turneth humbly in prayer unto the Kingdom of the Lord."⁸ What, then, is the particular form that these Houses of Worship have taken, to act upon the soul?

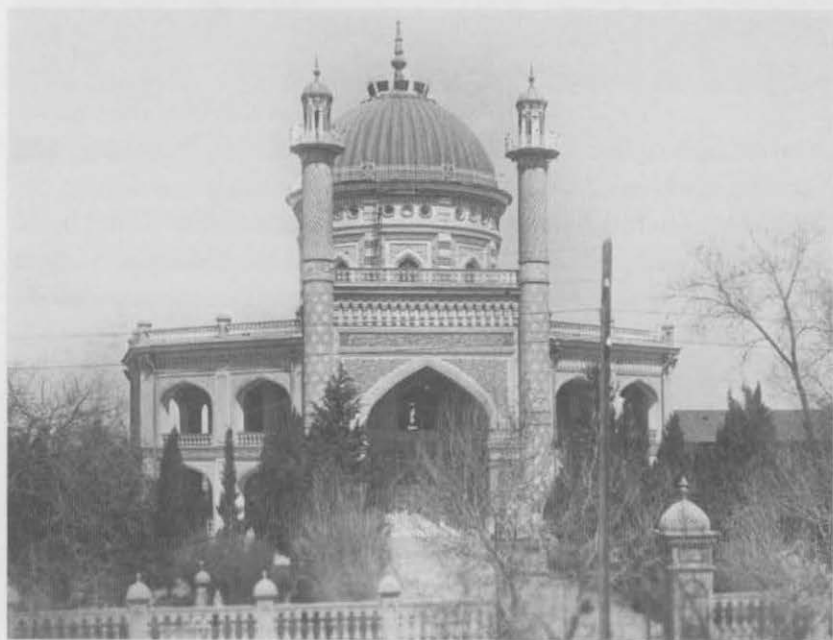
The first Bahá'í House of Worship, built in Ashkhabad, Russian Turkestan, was completed in 1903. With a design overseen by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it emulated the form of a mosque with a central prayer hall with a dome and minarets. However, the main prayer hall had nine sides, rather than the usual eight. The need for nine doors was not paramount at Ashkhabad; the floor plan indicates that there was one principal entrance. There were, however, nine avenues, nine gardens, and nine fountains.⁹

Later taken over by the Soviet authorities and damaged in an earthquake in 1948, this first Bahá'í House of Worship was subsequently demolished. But in its short life, news of its existence had reached the Bahá'ís in the Chicago area, who then sought the approval of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to construct a similar building there.

In the spring of 1907, Corrine Knight True returned from the Holy Land carrying the blessings and instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

that such a structure should be circular in plan, with nine sides.¹⁰ No explicit reference was made to a dome, and indeed guidance was subsequently received from the Guardian that "there is nothing in the teaching requiring *one dome* for the building, in fact, any dome. It is of course more beautiful, generally to have a dome, or even domes, but that is not a necessary requirement of the Temple." As to the question of doors, the letter went on to state clearly, "Likewise the Guardian indicates, it is not essential that there be nine doors. The real requisite is that the building should be circular in shape, having nine sides; that there should be nine gardens, walks, etc."¹¹

Aside from these few requirements, the architect of a Bahá'í House of Worship is free to design a structure he or she sees as befitting "the dawning place of the remembrance of God." Nevertheless, the composition of dome, drum, and plinth has been central to the development of some of the most highly regarded examples of later classical architecture of the Renaissance, so it is not surprising that this has formed a starting model on which most of the Houses of Worship to date have been developed.¹²



The House of Worship in Ashkhabad, Russian Turkestan.

In simple terms, a dome is an efficient and economic way to provide a roof over as large a floor area as possible. The Hagia Sofia church built by the Roman emperor Justinian in the sixth century AD in Istanbul was, in its time, the largest church in the world, with its vast floor below a giant dome. Eight hundred years later it was taken over by Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II and, just as the mosque would serve as a model for Ashkhabad, Hagia Sofia became a model for future mosques including that of Suleiman, also in Istanbul, which was begun in 1550 by his prodigious architect Sinan.

The earliest Christians typically met in their own homes and other small buildings, but as the faith grew, so, too, did their need for larger buildings. Limited as they were to barrel-vaulted and trussed roofs, it was initially easier to extend along the axis and then provide another axis at right angles to the first, satisfying the need for additional space and imitating the plan form of the cross. Where the two axes crossed became a large space with a dome above. The technical difficulties of imposing a round dome over a square box below were not really resolved until Sinan developed the triangular shaped "pendentive" for the Mosque of Suleiman; with this, the main technical hurdles were overcome. Thus the dome became a major architectural feature of both Christian and Islamic religious structures. The church did not evolve into that shape deliberately as an emulation of the cross, but gradually because of technology and planning solutions, and the mosque, in part, through emulating the church. In Hinduism, temples typically recreate stories from Hindu mythology, with Angkor Wat in Cambodia, for example, being a recreation of Mount Meru, while Buddhist temples commonly take the form of a "stupa,"¹³ which has gradually evolved into the pagoda in China and Korea and is the domed form of temple associated with that faith.

The first Bahá'í House of Worship in the West was designed by French-Canadian architect Louis Bourgeois. Though intricate in its details, it is at heart a relatively conservative building: an ornate and richly embellished dome, drum, and plinth on a platform in the classic model, which would have been adopted as the epitome of architectural taste at the time. The structure's ornamentation incorporates icons and motifs from many of the world's religious traditions, reflecting Bourgeois' goal to create a symbol of the Bahá'í



The House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, USA.

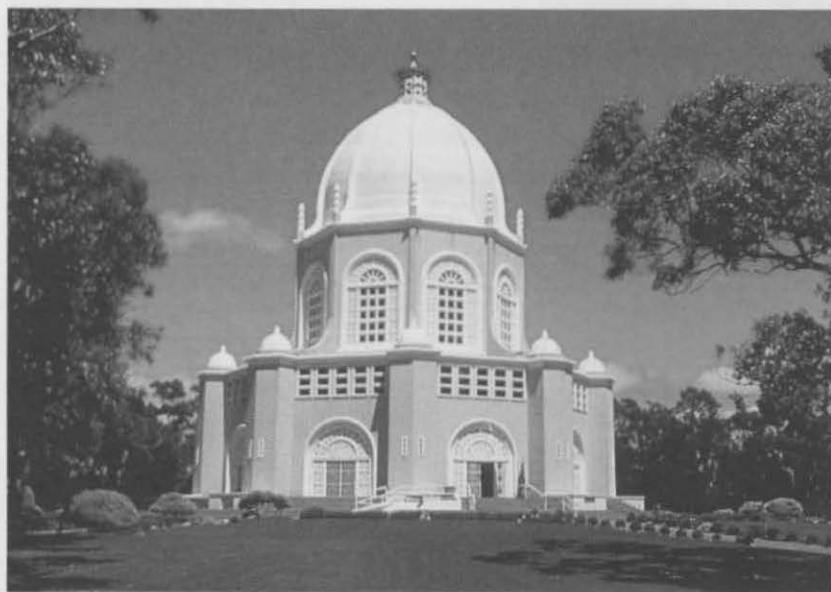
Faith and a building that welcomed people of all backgrounds. In explaining his inspiration for the design, he drew a parallel between architecture and religion:

All the teachings that have held the minds of men and ennobled them are found to be very much alike in essence. . . . As religion, so it is with architecture. If you resolve the different architectural systems to their idealistic basis, laying aside all extreme forms, you will see they harmonize so perfectly that they can be blended without one discordant note.¹⁴

Located near Chicago, in Wilmette, Illinois, USA, the House of Worship is also notable as the first building in the United States to be built using precast concrete technology, and it innovated new techniques and working relations between architect and builder. Taking



The House of Worship in Kampala, Uganda.



The House of Worship in Sydney, Australia.

some 50 years to complete, its construction was itself a barometer of the development of the Faith in the United States, giving weight to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words that it was "the greatest affair and the most important matter" before the Bahá'í community of that day.¹⁵

The Bahá'í House of Worship in Kampala, Uganda, is sometimes viewed as echoing the form of the traditional houses of the region, though this is perhaps to understate its design, which was developed from an outline prepared by Shoghi Effendi and Charles Mason Remey by an architect familiar with the climatic conditions of Hawaii. However, a wide portico was added around the base to provide additional and effective shelter from the occasional driving rains across its hilltop site. Because this porch overshadows the ground level windows and doors, it creates a darker interior at the floor level, which reminds one of the feeling of the deep shelter and protection within the traditional round houses of the region—a feeling enhanced by the shafts of light streaming down through the colored glass and the blue, green, and gold decorations of the drum and dome above.

Working from an outline design prepared for the Sydney, Australia, House of Worship by Charles Mason Remey, project architect John Brogan explored the idea of incorporating various familiar icons in the work as had Louis Bourgeois, but set them aside in favor of allowing the shape of the building itself to establish its own identity.¹⁶ Other than the tracery windows and doors, the building presents an understated addition to the skyline. Mr. Brogan innovated a method to include a crushed white quartz into the surface of the precast concrete panels used for the dome and drum to meet expressed requirements for a useful life of 1,000 years, with low maintenance. The building remains a brilliant white in contrast to the lush green of the surrounding forest, the brilliant blue of the ocean beyond, and the rich tan color of the earth.

The last of the Temple designs overseen by the Guardian was that for the Temple in Langenhain, Germany. A more modern concept than its sister Temples, its sleek lines and minimal ornamentation reference the architecture of post-War Europe. Though the project faced initial delays due to opposition from church groups, the building has been so well accepted that in 1987 the State Government

of Hesse listed the House of Worship as a building of “cultural significance.”

In Panama, meanwhile, the building deliberately incorporated decorative motifs from the Mayan people into the radial walls of the plinth to tie the building to the architectural traditions of the region, that it might more easily be integrated into the cultural landscape.

Local architecture is a direct point of reference in Apia, Samoa, where the tall, rounded roofs of the local “fale”¹⁷ are raised above open-sided walls framed by supporting columns that maximize air-flow. Hossein Amanat employed a crushed white aggregate, available only from the tiny island of Niue, mixed with a white cement from Japan to ensure the dome would require minimal maintenance and would form a strong impression against the land, sea, and sky. The entrances are decorated above with local timber panels inscribed with quotations from the Bahá'í writings.



The House of Worship in Langenhain, Germany.



The House of Worship overlooking Panama City, Panama.

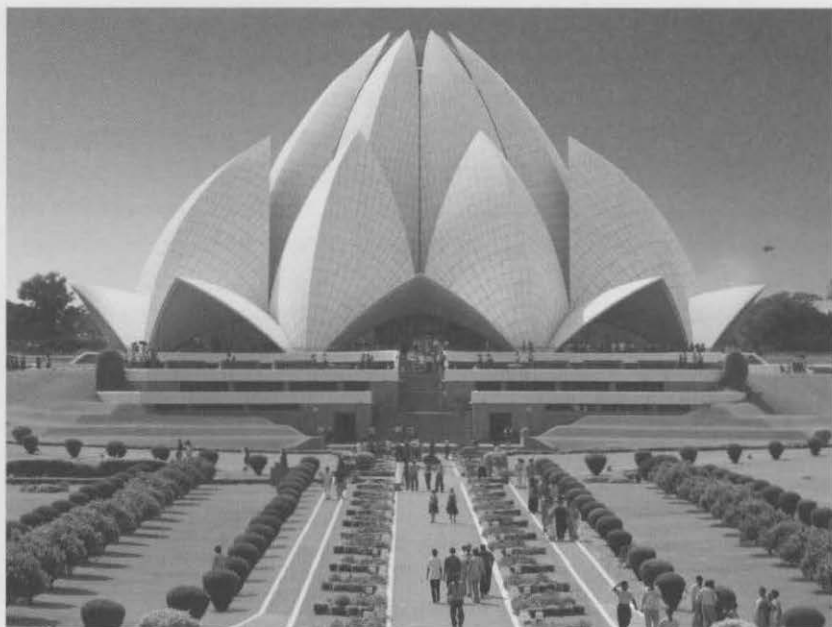
In New Delhi, India, the architect has created a highly emblematic building which is in itself an entire icon—a lotus, symbol of spiritual truth and purity in Hindu and Buddhist scriptures and mythology—and one that is immediately recognizable as a place of spiritual import. Here the dome and drum have been replaced by the form of a lotus flower seemingly floating on pools of water and a plinth the color of the earth. It is not surprising that the building now attracts more visitors every year than the Taj Mahal, itself a building which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarded as a model of refined beauty.¹⁸

We can observe from these examples a pattern of emergence and development: from the direct emulation of the mosque at Ashkhabad to the classic model and beaux arts embellishments at Wilmette; from there via the understated and culturally nonthreatening structures in Sydney and Langenhain to the statements of cultural participation in Kampala, Panama, and Samoa, to the more assertive contributions to the cultural and spiritual landscape in New Delhi. And now the Bahá’í community is ready to embark on the construction of a House of Worship in Chile.



The House of Worship in Apia, Samoa.

To this point, the architectural achievements within the Bahá'í community borrowed from the past, augmenting, developing, and updating familiar icons in an evolutionary way. But the design proposed for Santiago can be seen to reflect another stage in the development of the Faith, marking a step from childhood into at least young adulthood. As children grow, their experience of the world is largely that which is taught and explained to them by those around them, but as they leave childhood and enter their teens, they become self-aware and gradually learn to reflect and rely on their own experiences. So, too, the Bahá'í Faith may be seen to be setting aside its childhood. Increasingly, individuals and institutions no longer refer to experiences from the wider community, but rather look to their own experience within the Bahá'í community itself to inform their actions and growth, whether in the development of study circles, social and economic development projects, consultation, or organizational methodologies. We are gradually becoming a reflective and learning community, moving away from the more conventional notion of a congregational community of leader and followers towards a community that embodies the ideal of universal participation.



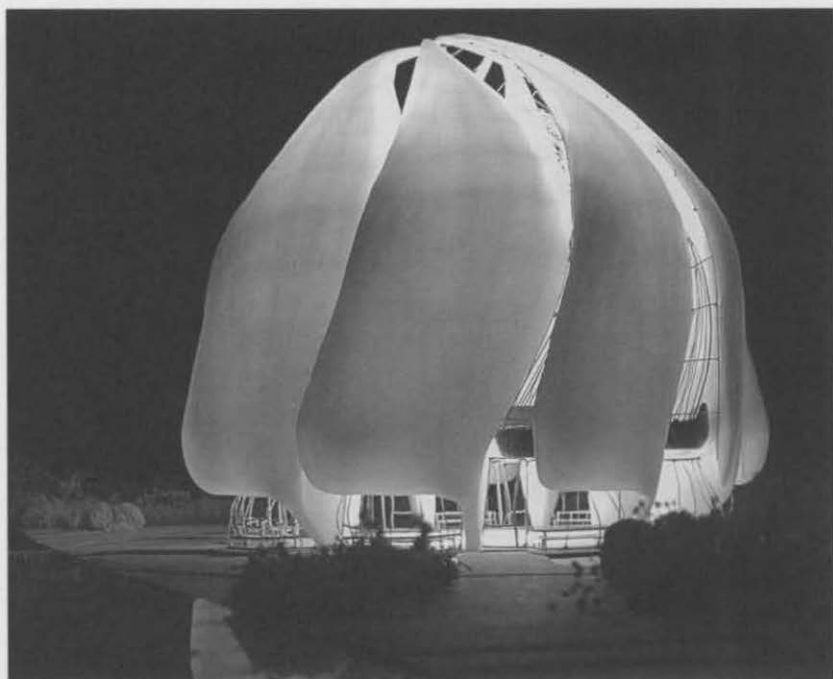
The House of Worship in New Delhi, India.

As an illustration of this development, the design of the House of Worship for Chile both acknowledges some of the ideas of previous Houses of Worship and yet also strikes out on its own. In this design, as in previous temples, the idea of light serves as an allegory for spiritual truth and bestowal. In Kampala, light takes the form of a robust technicolor resonant with the richness of Africa; in Sydney, it falls as gentle lace onto the floor; in Langenhain, it is highly structured; in Panama, it hovers like a mysterious canopy overhead; in Samoa one can actually look up and see the sky itself through the dome; in New Delhi, it enters in great slabs from hidden planes and openings concealed within the geometry; and in Wilmette, the dome itself was designed to emulate the movement of the stars. In Chile, however, the classic model of a dome atop a plinth is gone. Gone, too, are the didactic symbols of Wilmette and a recognizable emblematic form; instead, the entire structure is to be one of translucent light passing through the walls themselves, intimating a blurring between the interior and the exterior, and conveying a proximity to the spiritual world. Giving form to such an allegory is only possible as a result of advances in computer technologies, as it

was previously impossible to document such design and the required components using conventional orthogonal methods.¹⁹

Interestingly, the building embodies little if any association to the lineage of Chilean or South American culture. It is a remarkable design both for the complexity of its structure and its expression of what it might mean to stand at, or within, the interface between the spiritual and material planes of existence. It has entirely shrugged off any reference to the past, other than conforming with the requirements outlined by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Once again a Bahá'í House of Worship is innovating new technologies and breaking new ground in collaboration between architect, engineer, and builder.

The late historian Lord Kenneth Clark said that "we can tell more about a civilization from its architecture than from anything else it leaves behind." We may thus look back on these past 100 or so years and observe, through the architectural development of the various Bahá'í Houses of Worship, the emergence of the Faith from obscurity, its gathering confidence, and increasing indications of its future contribution to civilization.



Model of the House of Worship to be built in Santaigo, Chile.

NOTES

- ¹ Words spoken to E.G. Browne, from his pen portrait of Bahá'u'lláh, in J.E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 5th rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), pp. 39–40.
- ² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 102.
- ³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London: Addresses and Notes of Conversations* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 80.
- ⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), para. 31, p. 29.
- ⁵ Literally "the dawning-place of the praise of God."
- ⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), p. 20.
- ⁷ It is fascinating to note that these qualities mirror the three cardinal virtues of power, truth, and beauty as found in particular at the heart of both the Hindu and Buddhist faiths.
- ⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), p. 202.
- ⁹ Hippolyte Dreyfus, *Une Institution Béhaïe Le Machreqou'l-Âzkâr' D' Âchqâbad* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, Editeur, 1909), cited from <http://www.bahaindex.com/documents/Ashkabad/world.html>.
- ¹⁰ The question of how a nine-sided building can be circular in shape is semantic, for the intention of 'Abdu'l-Bahá can be seen to relate to the overall form.
- ¹¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol. 1 (Hofheim, Germany: Bahá'í Verlag, 1982), p. 232. See also Julie Badiie, *An Earthly Paradise: Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the World* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1992).
- ¹² In fact, although a dome is not an essential element, the requirements specified by the Universal House of Justice for the House of Worship in Chile included a dome of at least thirty meters in height.
- ¹³ Sanskrit: lit. "burial mound."
- ¹⁴ Louis Bourgeois, quoted in "Timeline: 1912–1921," *The Dawning Place: 50th Anniversary of the House of Worship*, available at <http://www.bahaitemple.org/>.
- ¹⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1909), p. 17. For further details, see Bruce Whitmore, *The Dawning Place: The Building of a Temple, the Forging of the North American Bahá'í Community* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984).
- ¹⁶ Personal correspondence with John Brogan, son of the architect.
- ¹⁷ Samoan: lit. "house."

- ¹⁸ For more about the Bahá'í House of Worship in India, see Lady Sabiha Foster, "Geometry and the House of Worship" in *Architectural Design* (November–December 2004).
- ¹⁹ The design team had to travel to California to learn how to document such a complex structure at Frank Gehry's 3-D modelling studios, which he set up in response to the needs of projects such as his museum in Bilbao.

PROFILE:

Tahirih Justice Center

"Thanks to you I can sleep without fear." So wrote one client of the Tahirih Justice Center (TJC) in the Washington, DC, area after the center had assisted her to obtain asylum in the United States. The letter continued, "Thanks to all your staff for your humanitarian support to help justice triumph in favor of women and girls throughout the world who are victims of rape, genital mutilation, domestic violence, etc. May God bless you all!" Such heartfelt responses are regular fare for the workers at the Tahirih Justice Center, which has helped some 4,000 people since opening in 1997—and has won 98 percent of its cases to date. One mark of its success is that not one of its immigration clients has been forced to leave the US.

The center was born of pressing need. In 1997 a young student attorney, Leili Miller-Muro, took on the case of Fauziya Kassingja, a 17-year-old woman who ran away from her family in Togo before being forced to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) in preparation for a forced polygamous marriage. Upon arrival in the US, Ms. Kassingja was placed in detention for more than 17 months by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS); her eventual granting of asylum on appeal revolutionized asylum law in the US,

through its recognition of FGM as gender-based persecution. *Do They Hear You When You Cry?*, the 1998 book based on Ms. Kassingja's story, was a best-seller, and Ms. Miller-Muro used funds from it to establish the Tahirih Justice Center in order to assist others.

At the basis of the center's work is the conviction that society will not progress until full equality between women and men is achieved. Its logo is an illustration of a bird in flight, inspired by the following utterance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized; humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment. When the two wings . . . become equivalent in strength, enjoying the same prerogatives, the flight of man will be exceedingly lofty and extraordinary.¹

The specific mission of the center is "to enable women and girls who face gender-based violence to access justice." It is named for a Persian woman who lived during the nineteenth century and was a champion of women's rights as well as a renowned poet and Bahá'í religious scholar. She traveled throughout her country, promoting women's emancipation and encouraging women to oppose their own oppression. Perhaps her most dramatic act was to remove her veil—the symbol of that systematized oppression—in front of a conference of men in 1848. Only four years later, she was killed by the authorities. Her final words were, "You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women."

Leili Miller-Muro has worked hard in the light of Tahirih's vision. The center takes a holistic approach that encompasses three broad areas of support for women: legal representation for individual cases, public policy advocacy, and education and public outreach. In the first area, the TJC provides *pro bono* legal representation for women to protect them from international human rights abuses and to champion their rights. The center also arranges medical, social, and psychological counseling services for its clients, thus leading them towards community resources that will help them to live

independent, safe, and healthy lives. In the second area of focus, staff and volunteers work to transform policies, develop regulations, and set precedents to promote systematic change that will protect women from violence. This can involve litigation and statutory and regulatory development as well as collaboration with government agencies and like-minded organizations. The third focus area involves public outreach activities to educate the general public on issues such as FGM, US immigration policy, and women's rights, via media coverage and lectures at universities and conferences around the world.

The Tahirih Justice Center has initiated several specific legal programs, notably a campaign to end exploitation of women by international marriage brokers, international projects to promote legal protection for women and girls, advocacy projects for battered and refugee women and girls, and a program to provide legal protection from gender-based persecution.

The center's campaign to end exploitation by international marriage brokers (or IMBs) arose from the case of an immigrant woman from Ukraine that was taken on by the TJC. She was brutally abused by a husband arranged through a broker. Because most women who come as "mail-order brides" do not speak English and are not familiar with the US system, they are often not able to find help if they end up in violent marriages. The woman from Ukraine, for example, was both physically and emotionally abused over two years; her husband broke her ribs and once threatened her with a gun as she breastfed the couple's infant daughter. In response, the IMB did nothing, wishing to keep her in the contracted marriage. Minimizing the abuse, the president of the agency neglected to inform her about her legal rights—behavior that is all too characteristic of these brokers. When it investigated the situation, the Tahirih Justice Center found that, in fact, this unfortunate woman was not the first one placed by the IMB with this abusive man.

The majority of the center's clients come from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—the most underserved of immigrant populations. Statistics from the United Nations provide a context for the needs of these and women from other countries. For example, throughout Africa, each year two million women are forced to undergo FGM; in Pakistan, some 850 women die at the hands of male relatives in family honor killings; in Brazil, one in four women experiences domestic

violence; and some 50,000 women and children are brought under false pretenses from Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe and forced into prostitution, captive labor, or servitude in the US. Those who apply for asylum—in 2001 the number was over 23,000—rarely have access to an attorney.

To address these issues, the center undertakes international projects to promote legal protection for women and girls who face gender-based persecution, including domestic violence, FGM, forced marriage, rape, torture, trafficking, honor crimes, widow rituals, and sexual slavery. Working with government officials and NGOs in Australia, Brazil, the Gambia, Germany, and Ghana, for example, the Tahirih Justice Center has trained adjudicators and legal advocates, has promoted the development of legislation and regulations, has fostered grassroots empowerment of women's rights organizations, has worked with local firms to promote a culture of *pro bono* advocacy, and has engaged in media and public policy advocacy. In Brazil, the center met with the Minister of Justice and with NGOs to encourage better collaboration regarding the application of laws to protect women from domestic violence. In Ghana, the center worked with government officials and NGOs to see how application of the law in remote areas can be more effective in protecting young girls from a form of ritual sexual slavery in which they are given to priests in reparation for crimes committed by their family members.

One success story from the center's initiative to protect women and girls facing gender-based persecution involves a four-year-old girl in Nigeria, whose father died unexpectedly. Although he had been opposed to FGM, after his death his family threatened to perform the ritual on his daughter. She and her mother sought asylum in the US, where they were assisted by the Tahirih Justice Center. When the girl, who testified on her own behalf, signed her own asylum grant, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service staff applauded. Her mother, who would be forced to endure widow rituals if she returned home and feared death or, at the least, physical abuse from her in-laws (who accused her of causing her husband's death), was also granted asylum.

The center's Battered Immigrant Women Advocacy Project was launched in 2002 with funding from a federal grant from the Violence against Women Office. Abused immigrant women, who do

not have accurate information about their rights or legal remedies to their situation, often stay in abusive relationships thinking that the alternative is deportation. The TJC helps them access accurate information and legal protection to break free from the cycle of violence, through giving presentations that focus on immigrants' rights and needs, training for people who work with clients who have limited proficiency in English, and the kinds of immigration relief available to abused noncitizens through social service organizations. For example, under the Violence against Women Act an immigrant woman who is abused by a spouse who is a US citizen or permanent resident does have the ability to self-petition for legal permanent resident status. Many immigrant women are not aware of this, and so the center's information sessions address a real need.

The Refugee Women and Girls Advocacy Project has worked with Afghan women and their families to improve the refugee processing system and to assist women who are at risk of violence during their application for resettlement and admission to the United States. In this effort, the project collaborates with the White House, the US Department of State, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the United Nations to promote the expedient defense of refugee women and girls.

The Tahirih Justice Center is also working to change the system through public policy advocacy, including the following initiatives:

- In connection with the IMB issue, the center has proposed federal legislation requiring disclosure of marital history and criminal background information to prospective brides before the contracting of marriage.
- It has offered insights based on its extensive experience with victims of trafficking to press the US Department of Justice for new legislation to deal with this problem. As a result of the lobbying undertaken by coalitions of immigrant rights organizations, new visas for trafficking victims were promulgated in 2002.
- The TJC has advocated for the utilization of the U-visa, which is available to immigrant victims of crime but requires cooperation of law enforcement officials, which is not always forthcoming.

The TJC acquainted government officials with this resistance and, as a result, was able to obtain the first recommendation for an affirmative U-visa deferred action request.

- Through drafting regulation comments, participating in sign-on letters, coalition meetings, press conferences, and other initiatives, the TJC vigorously opposed the restructuring of the Board of Immigration Appeals, which would limit the ability of immigrants to receive fair appellate review of their cases.
- The center has advocated for the passage of a resolution calling on Japan to acknowledge its role in—and issue an apology for—the sexual enslavement of “comfort women” during the Second World War.
- The TJC has supported the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by leading meetings with Congressional representatives, participating in coalition meetings, helping to organize press conferences, and drafting letters to the editors.

In its work, the center has recognized the importance of collaborating with like-minded organizations who are also seeking justice for women and girls who are fleeing violence. The TJC has developed working relationships with some 40 such organizations.

The TJC's work has not gone unnoticed. In March 2002 CNN's *World Report* covered the center's work in defending the rights of Afghan women and children and also mentioned its programs that seek changes in policy, systems, and law in order to protect women facing violence. National Public Radio in the US also aired an interview with center staff, who discussed how infrequently fraud is practiced by women seeking asylum for gender-based persecution. (This was in response to allegations by the INS against a woman who had fled Ghana in fear of FGM.) *Glamour* magazine did a feature on several Afghan women assisted by the center, and the *Legal Times* interviewed a center client about his request for asylum to protect his daughter from FGM. The TJC has also been interviewed by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, BBC, PBS, ABC's *Nightline* and CNBC.

To meet the increasing demands on it, the Tahirih Justice Center relies on the willingness of law firms and independent attorneys to take cases on a *pro bono* basis, with collaboration and support from the center. The TJC Washington Lawyers' Network mobilizes and sustains a philanthropic network of Washington area lawyers who promote awareness of and provide funding for the center. Other funding support comes through philanthropic donations and grants. In 2002, for example, the center was awarded a grant by the Washington Area Women's Foundation, in recognition of its efforts to protect immigrant women and girls in that area from violence.

The Tahirih Justice Center believes that, ultimately, in order for women to achieve justice, laws and societal institutions must be transformed. Only then will they become more effective in protecting women from violence. In the meantime, the center also helps women to attain freedom from persecution and to begin to deal with the abuse they have suffered as first steps towards achieving not only a sense of well-being but a larger sense of justice in their lives.

NOTES

- ¹ '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. 375.

The first of these is the fact that the United States is a young nation. It is only about 150 years old, and its history is therefore a history of rapid growth and change. The second is the fact that the United States is a large nation. It covers a vast area of land, and its population is one of the largest in the world. The third is the fact that the United States is a diverse nation. It is made up of many different peoples, languages, and customs, and this has led to a rich and varied culture. The fourth is the fact that the United States is a powerful nation. It has a strong economy, a powerful military, and a significant influence on the world stage. The fifth is the fact that the United States is a democratic nation. It is a country where the people have the right to elect their leaders, and where the government is accountable to the people. These are the five main features of the United States, and they are the ones that have made it a great nation.

The United States is a country of many firsts. It was the first country to be founded on the principles of liberty and democracy. It was the first country to have a written constitution. It was the first country to have a federal system of government. It was the first country to have a two-party system. It was the first country to have a president. It was the first country to have a Supreme Court. It was the first country to have a Bill of Rights. It was the first country to have a Declaration of Independence. It was the first country to have a national anthem. It was the first country to have a national flag. It was the first country to have a national holiday. It was the first country to have a national motto. It was the first country to have a national seal. It was the first country to have a national coat of arms. It was the first country to have a national emblem. It was the first country to have a national symbol. It was the first country to have a national flag. It was the first country to have a national anthem. It was the first country to have a national holiday. It was the first country to have a national motto. It was the first country to have a national seal. It was the first country to have a national coat of arms. It was the first country to have a national emblem. It was the first country to have a national symbol.

The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality

Written statement prepared by the Bahá'í International Community for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its 48th session in New York City, 1–12 March 2004.

The 1995 Beijing Platform of Action underlined the indispensability of the contribution of men and boys to achieving gender equality. Recent years have witnessed considerable advances in women's attainment of political and civil rights, but the implementation of full gender equality requires a profound shift in individual values, outlook, and conduct, which will ultimately transform the underlying ethos of social institutions, making them more welcoming to women.

The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith offer a model of gender equality based on the concept of partnership between the sexes and the active support of men and boys for the achievement of equality. Three basic elements underpin the Bahá'í approach:

- Bahá'ís are committed to an evolutionary social transformation of fundamental values, even in regions of the world where cultural traditions impose obstacles to women's development. Enduring change comes through cooperative activity of men and women rather than through confrontation. Hence, we call upon all members of society to encourage and support women to develop their full potential and to strive for their equality and human rights

and we recognize that much more can be accomplished in the long run if men and women work together. Within the family, therefore, boys and girls alike are taught respect for all females and within the Bahá'í community, programs are conducted to educate men and boys concerning the status of women, and a variety of practical measures are instituted to foster their involvement in promoting gender equality as a shared community goal.

- The full development of men and boys is inextricably linked to the advancement of women. A society characterized by gender equality serves the interests of both sexes. It enables men and women to develop in a more balanced and multifaceted way and to discard the rigid role stereotypes so crucial to shifting family dynamics, and to accord women full access to the world of work. It also enables both sexes to recognize each other's needs, building an awareness vital to the resolution of issues associated with women's health. It also enables the replacement of unequal relationships and tendencies towards domination and aggression with genuine partnerships between the sexes characterized by collaboration and the sharing of resources and decision making.
- Bahá'ís view the advancement of women as an ongoing organic process aligned with forces of social transformation and the movement towards the recognition of the oneness of humanity. We recommend making a start, however modest, by educating boys from the earliest stage of their social development in initiatives along the lines of those outlined above, and by engaging the support of men in this process, in order to foster a more conscious awareness that the interests of men and boys are linked to those of women.
- In light of the experience and contribution of the Bahá'í community in 183 countries towards the implementation of these principles, Bahá'ís remain optimistic about the achievement of gender equality and the progressive involvement of men and boys in achieving this goal.

Bahá'ís in Iran

CURRENT SITUATION

The Bahá'í International Community's written statement to the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, held in Geneva from 15 March to 23 April 2004.

In the following statement, the Bahá'í International Community would like to present the most recent evidence¹ that Bahá'ís in many different localities in Iran continue to be subjected to persecution, including arbitrary arrest and short-term detention, and that patterns of harassment, intimidation, and discrimination against them persist. Officials still confiscate their homes, deny their rightfully earned pensions, benefits, and inheritance, deny them access to employment, and block their private business activities, interfere with classes that they give to their own children in private homes, and ban the institutions that perform, for Bahá'ís, most of the functions reserved to clergy in other religions.

International bodies have again recognized these facts in 2003, e.g.:

- In December, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution expressing "serious concern" over continuing violations of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran and specifically mentioning the Bahá'ís.
- In August, Iran presented its report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). In its Concluding

Observations, CERD noted with concern “the reported discrimination faced by certain minorities, including the Bahá'ís, who are deprived of certain rights,” and specifically recommended that Iran “permit students of different origins to register in universities without being compelled to identify their religion.”

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) referred to the ongoing discrimination at its Conference in June, and the ILO Global Report 2003 stated that in Iran: “the situation of members of the Bahá'í faith, an unrecognized religious minority, continues to be a source of concern. The barriers that these people face in access to higher education and to employment in public institutions are still high (para. 102).”

As a result of international pressure, the Iranian government has taken a small step towards lifting the restrictions on access to higher education for Bahá'í students. Recently, a question on the university entrance examination was modified such that it no longer requires all applicants to explicitly state their religious affiliation as one of the four recognized religions. It remains to be seen whether this measure will, in practice, allow Bahá'í students full access to universities in Iran.

Historical and Legal Context

Since 1979, Bahá'ís in Iran have been subjected to attack, harassment, and discrimination solely on account of their religious beliefs, and have repeatedly been offered relief from persecution if they were prepared to recant their Faith. The extent and systematic nature of the persecution—and the fact that it constitutes deliberate government policy—have been documented in reports issued by the UN Special Representatives.

As stated in previous years, the Bahá'í community poses no threat to the authorities in Iran. It is not aligned with any other government, ideology, or opposition movement. The principles of the Faith require Bahá'ís to be obedient to their government 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 covenants to which their State is party.

Government initiatives promoting the rights of religious minorities in Iran do not apply to the Bahá'ís. The Iranian Constitution stipulates that Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only *recognized* religious minorities; therefore some 300,000 Bahá'ís—the country's largest religious minority—do not benefit from such initiatives. Classified as “unprotected infidels,” Bahá'ís have no legal recourse.

Executions, Death Sentences, and Imprisonment

Since 1979, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been killed, and 15 others have disappeared and are presumed dead. The last Bahá'í executed was hanged on 21 July 1998. During the past few years, all the Bahá'ís sentenced to death have either been released or had their sentences reduced. As of February 2004, three Bahá'ís were still being detained solely because of their religious beliefs.

The Iranian authorities now use arrest, interrogation, and short-term imprisonment to harass and intimidate Bahá'ís. In 2003, we received information concerning 23 Bahá'í residents of 18 different localities who were arbitrarily arrested and detained during that year. Subjected to indignity and humiliation while being questioned about their beliefs, they were all eventually released.

Denial of the Right to Organize as a Peaceful Religious Community

Since 1983, the Iranian Bahá'í community has been denied the right to assemble officially and to maintain its democratically elected sacred institutions, which perform many of the functions reserved to clergy in other religions and are the foundational element of Bahá'í community life.

Iranian Bahá'ís worship in small groups, conduct classes for children, and take care of other community needs in private homes. Still, the authorities harass them, arresting teachers, disrupting meetings, and giving participants suspended sentences to be carried out should they again commit the “crime” of attending such activities.

Denial of Access to Education

An entire generation of Bahá'ís has been barred from higher education in legally recognized institutions in Iran. They established their own program in 1987, but intelligence officers raided the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) in 1998, arresting faculty members and confiscating textbooks, papers, records, computers, and furniture. In 2001 and 2002, officials also interfered with instruction being given to Bahá'í youth. Then, in July 2002, authorities disrupted BIHE qualification examinations in eight different locations, videotaping proceedings, interviewing students, confiscating papers and books.

International pressure has finally resulted in one positive measure, as the government recently announced that applicants would no longer be required to state their religious affiliation on the official registration form for national university entrance examinations. However, it remains to be seen whether this provision will, in practice, allow Bahá'í students full access to higher education in Iran.

Confiscation and Destruction of Property

Bahá'í cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centers, and other assets were seized after the 1979 revolution. No community properties have been returned; many have been destroyed. Seizure of cemeteries has been particularly difficult for Bahá'ís, who are only given areas of wasteland for this purpose and are not allowed to mark the graves of their loved ones.

The property rights of *individual* Bahá'ís are also disregarded: officials have arbitrarily confiscated many private and business properties, homes, and farms. Evidence of recent judgements proves that the properties were confiscated because the owners were Bahá'ís. One document states:

In principle, the foundation for the Ministry of Intelligence taking legal and serious action against the cultural activities of the misguided sect of Baha'ism has been on the order of His Excellency the Supreme Leader . . . the action taken by Court 49 regarding the seizure and confiscation of the properties

belonging to the misguided sect of Baha'ism is legally and religiously justifiable.

Denial of Employment, Pensions, and Other Benefits

In the 1980s, over 10,000 Bahá'ís were dismissed from positions in government and educational institutions; many remain unemployed and receive no benefits. Many Bahá'ís have had their pensions terminated or denied. Evidence in four of the most recent cases (2001–02) where Bahá'ís were denied access to their own, rightfully earned pensions, explicitly states: “payment of pension to those individuals connected with the Baha'i sect is illegal.”

When Bahá'ís find employment in the private sector, officials try to force companies to fire them, and when they start a private business, authorities attempt to block these activities. For example, in the two most recent cases:

- in Tehran, a court verdict (dated 29 September 2003) rejected an appeal by a Bahá'í against an injunction requiring him to cease his business operations, and rejected his petition for a business license, citing information it had received “about the plaintiff's being associated with the perverse Baha'i sect”;
- in Isfahan last year an administrative injunction, issued to impede a Bahá'í-owned company from doing business, stated that “the link between the company . . . and the perverse Baha'i sect is established to be true; therefore it is advisable to adopt measures to prevent any collaboration with the . . . company.”

Denial of Civil Rights and Liberties

Although it is now easier for Bahá'í couples to be registered as husband and wife and to register their children, Bahá'í marriage and divorce are not legally recognized in Iran, and Bahá'ís are denied the right to inherit. A court judgement in June 2002 dispossessed a Bahá'í from inheritance, stating:

Since the religious minorities, according to the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, are only Christian, Jewish, and

Zoroastrian, and Baha'ism is a misguided sect and is not recognized as a religion or as a religious minority, the issue of the probate of the will as the sole beneficiary of the deceased is not religiously allowed, and is against the law.

Official Incitement of Hatred and Suspicion

The Bahá'í International Community recently expressed concern about articles published in August 2003 in *Jam-e-Jam*, a newspaper funded by the government of Iran and distributed nationwide (with a circulation of half a million copies and a presence on the Internet). The content of these articles was defamatory and designed to misinform the Iranian public about the Bahá'í Faith. This incident is important because it belies statements made by Iranian officials to their counterparts in other countries, claiming that the government could do more to uphold the rights of Bahá'ís, if only the Iranian people did not have such an age-old animosity against them. Here was direct evidence that the government incited hatred and suspicion, vilifying the Bahá'ís as enemies of Islam and the Islamic Republic in one of its officially controlled newspapers. The authorities were thus generating the atmosphere that they then used as an excuse for inaction.

Factions struggling for political ascendancy in Iran have repeatedly used the Bahá'í community as a scapegoat, based on hostility and prejudice generated by ecclesiastical propaganda. For over 150 years, in every medium of public information—pulpit, press, radio, television, even scholarly publication—an image of the Bahá'ís and their beliefs has been created that is grossly false, generating public hatred and contempt. At no point have the victims of these attacks been given an opportunity to defend themselves and communicate the facts.

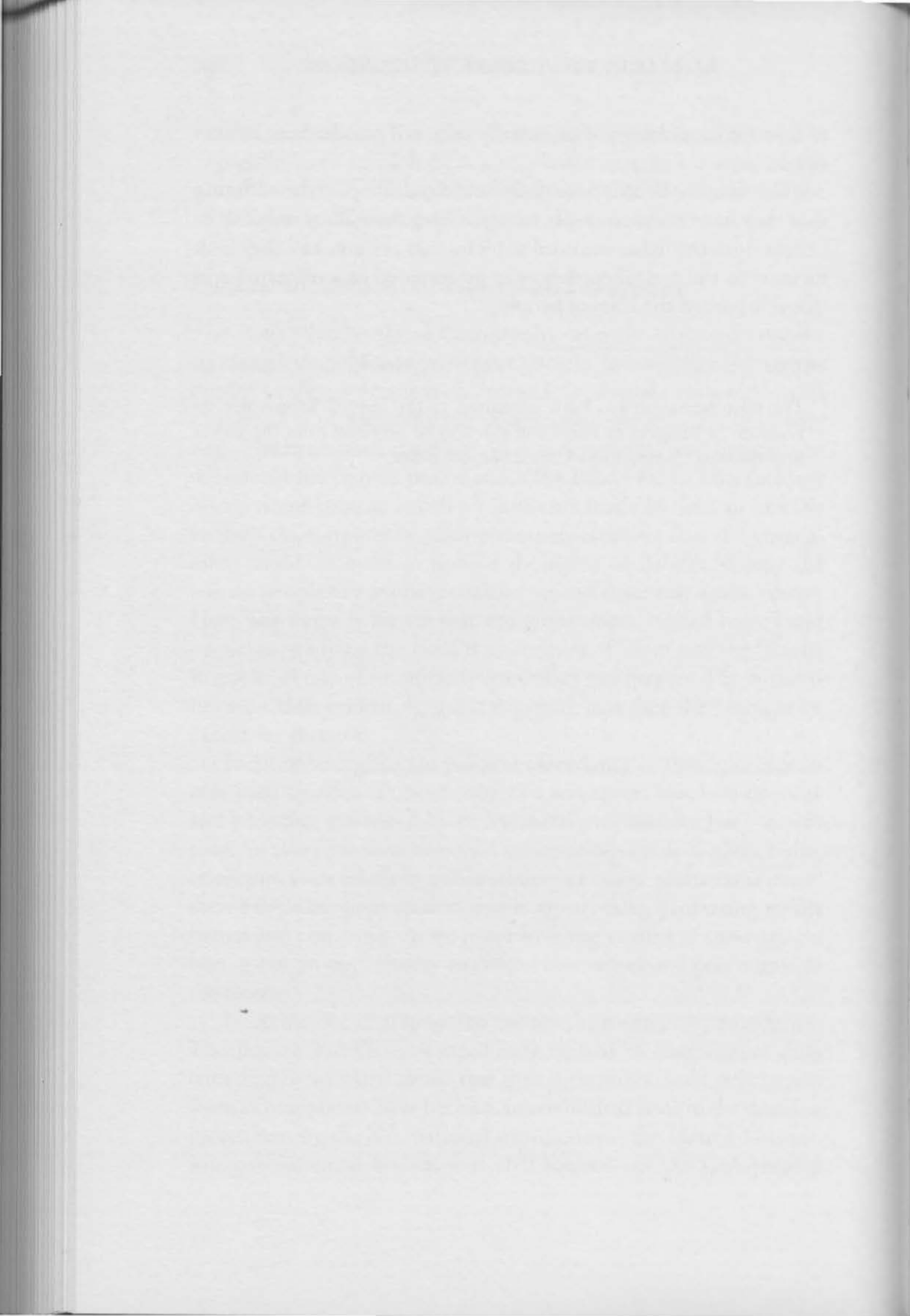
Nevertheless, all attempts to destroy the community have failed. The Iranian Bahá'ís have steadfastly refused to compromise their faith despite the worst abuses that their tormentors could inflict upon them. These abuses have become an established issue in the ongoing indictment by the international community—the United Nations, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society—of the Government

of Iran for its violation of universally accepted standards in human rights.

The Iranian Bahá'ís love their homeland, despite the suffering that they have endured under successive regimes. They only ask to benefit from the rights accorded to all Iranian citizens, and they look forward to the day when they may be accepted as a respected and valuable part of the Iranian people.

NOTES

- ¹ The documentation has been submitted to the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and can also be obtained from the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations office.



Bahá'ís in Egypt

CURRENT SITUATION

Oral statement of the Bahá'í International Community to the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, held in Geneva from 15 March to 23 April 2004.

Regrettably, the Bahá'í International Community must, once again, come before this Commission because members of the Bahá'í community in Egypt are suffering from violations of their human rights, in particular their right to freedom of religion or belief.

At the outset, it is important to recall that the Bahá'í community coexisted peacefully with other religious communities in Egypt for nearly a hundred years. From 1868 to 1960, the community enjoyed all basic rights and freedoms, which did not generate any conflict with the Constitution or with Public Order.

All Bahá'ís believe that one of the essential purposes of religion—emanating as it does from one God—is to promote concord and harmony. It is common knowledge that Bahá'ís do not become involved in partisan politics and that obedience to their government is a tenet of their faith. It is also well-known that Bahá'ís revere the position of the Prophet Muhammad, uphold the Holy Qur'an as an authoritative repository of God's word, and have the utmost respect for the religion of Islam. Bahá'ís affirm the truth of the Islamic message, together with that of the other Divine Revelations, as our Faith proclaims the continuous and progressive nature of Divine Revelation.

It was therefore of grave concern to us when Egyptian newspapers published a *fatwa* issued by the Islamic Research Academy of the Azhar in December 2003, falsely denouncing the Bahá'ís not only as heretics but also as active enemies fighting Islam. This is a new accusation, never before explicitly used by this institution in its attacks on the community.

The media and widely publicized court decisions in Egypt have often denounced the Bahá'ís as apostates, with some journalists adding that they deserve to be killed. And the government has not acted to stop those who incite hatred and violence in this way. In his reports, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief has detailed these facts.

The international community needs to consider how to address such situations, when those who benefit from the right to freedom of expression overstep its bounds—in public statements that incite the public to violate other human rights, such as the right to practice one's religion, or the rights of citizenship regardless of religious affiliation.

It is a matter of record that many abuses stem from Presidential Decree No. 263 of 1960, which dissolved the Bahá'í community's religious institutions and banned its religious activities. Restrictively interpreted, the decree is still used to justify investigations, arrests, searches, and the destruction of Bahá'í literature. Under constant police surveillance, the members of the community are denied their rights to legal marriage, pensions, and inheritance, and cannot obtain documents required for official purposes. Inequality before the law has made them second-class citizens.

As we have said before, we would prefer to resolve these problems directly with the Egyptian government. Unfortunately, however, the authorities are not taking steps to rectify the situation. They have ignored the observations made by the UN Human Rights Committee on official discrimination against Bahá'ís and the denial of their basic religious rights and freedoms.

Egyptian Bahá'ís have always remained loyal, law-abiding, and tolerant, despite the false accusations and defamation campaigns that have targeted them for over 40 years. Their only request is that the government remove all the official restrictions against them.

We therefore ask the international community for support in calling upon the government of Egypt to resolve this difficult situation.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

THE HISTORY
OF THE

Obituaries

'ALÍ-AKBAR FURÚTAN

On 26 November 2003, in Haifa, Israel.

'Alí-Akbar Furútan, one of the most beloved figures in the Bahá'í world, influenced thousands of lives through his warmth, humor, and wisdom. He carried the rank of Hand of the Cause of God and at the time of his passing was one of only two surviving members of that company. Appointed as a Hand of the Cause in December 1951 by Shoghi Effendi, Mr. Furútan was the longest-serving member of that illustrious body of senior officers of the Faith.

Mr. Furútan was born in Sabzivár, Iran, on 29 April 1905 to Muḥammad-'Alfí-i-Sabzivárf and Sughrá Furútan. Partly because of the harassment and threats his father received after becoming a Bahá'í, the family moved to Ashkhabad, Russian Turkestan (now part of Turkmenistan), where there was an established Bahá'í community and young 'Alí could attend a Bahá'í school for boys. Through his years of school and university, he took an active part in the work of the Bahá'í communities of Ashkhabad, Baku, Moscow, and elsewhere in Russia.

As a young man, Mr. Furútan won a scholarship to the University of Moscow, from which he obtained degrees in education and psychology. Following his graduation in 1930, he was expelled from the Soviet Union in the wave of the government persecution of religion. Despite the circumstances of his departure from the Soviet Union, though, he retained to the end of his

life a deep love for the people of that region.

After his return to Iran, he married Ataieh Azíz-Khurásání in 1931. The two moved to SAYSÁN, where he established two Bahá'í schools—one for girls and one for boys—which enrolled 700 students.

He played an ever more significant role in the work and administration of the Iranian Bahá'í community, moving to Tehran upon being elected to the National Spiritual Assembly in 1933. He also served on the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tehran, and was often secretary of both bodies. During Mr. Furútan's first



'Alí-Akbar Furútan

pilgrimage to Haifa in 1941, Shoghi Effendi commended him on the excellence of his work on both Assemblies and said, "Your services are now local and national, and they will be international in the future."¹

After his relocation to Tehran, Mr. Furútan was appointed as principal of the Tarbíyat School for Boys, only to see it and other Bahá'í schools close soon after by order of the Pahlavi government at the instigation of fanatical Islamic elements in the country.

In 1946 the Iranian Radio and Broadcasting Service invited him to give a series of lectures on children's education, the texts of which were published as *Essays on Education* and subsequently in English as *Mothers, Fathers, and Children*. He also wrote other books on the Faith, including books for children, which have been translated into several languages. His memoirs, titled *Hikáyat-i-Dil* (*The Story of My Heart*), were published in Persian and English.

Of his appointment as a Hand of the Cause of God in 1951, he wrote, "[it was] a momentous transformation in my spiritual life" and said, "I have never been able to offer enough gratitude at the Holy Threshold for bestowing on me such an honor."² Though the beginning of the Ten Year Crusade in 1953 brought a substantial increase in his duties for the Faith, he bore them with love and humility. During that year he traveled constantly and attended all four of the Intercontinental Bahá'í Conferences.

His 24 years as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran came to a close in 1957, when, after the passing of Shoghi Effendi, he was one of the nine Hands of the Cause selected to reside in the Holy Land, pending the election of the Universal House of Justice.

He remained a resident in the Holy Land following the House of Justice's election in 1963 until his death, but continued to travel extensively. He undertook trips in countries throughout Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia, and Europe, both to spread the teachings of the Faith and to offer encouragement and counsel to Bahá'í communities.

It was with particular joy that he finally returned to Russia in 1990 to witness the re-formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Moscow after a lapse of 60 years. He also returned the following year, this time for the election of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Soviet Union.

He died at the age of 98 of natural causes, but despite his advanced age maintained to the end a demanding schedule of activities, including his regular meetings with the thousands of pilgrims who visit the Bahá'í World Centre every year. Mr. Furútan would greet the pilgrims and give inspiring talks that drew on his decades of service to the Bahá'í Faith. It seemed a particularly fitting conclusion for a long life of service to humankind that his death should have occurred at the close of one such meeting, where he had just addressed assembled Bahá'í pilgrims.

His passing occurred on the Day of the Covenant—a poignant moment for a man whose life was so consecrated to promoting and defending the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

He is survived by his daughters, Írán Muhájir and Parvín Furútan, and two granddaughters, Gisu Muhajir-Cook and Shabnam Rahnama.

The Universal House of Justice sent a message to the Bahá'í world on 27 November 2003 announcing his passing and recalling his illustrious life and services:

With profound feelings of loss, we announce the passing, yesterday evening, on the Day of the Covenant, of the dearly loved Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Akbar Furútan. Having addressed the assembled pilgrims as was his practice, he paused to exchange a few words with some of the Russian-speaking friends; then, as he was leaving the room, his heart failed. He had fulfilled his longing to serve the Cause to his last breath.

Born in Sabzivar, Iran, on 29 April 1905, 'Alí-Akbar Furútan moved with his family to 'Ishqabad in what was then Russian Turkestan, and, through his years of school and university, he took an active part in the work of the Bahá'í communities of 'Ishqabad, Baku, Moscow, and other parts of

Russia. In 1930 he was expelled from the Soviet Union for his involvement in Bahá'í activities and, from that time on, played an ever more significant role in the work and administration of the Iranian Bahá'í community. In December 1951 he was among the first to be appointed by Shoghi Effendi as Hands of the Cause of God. Following the passing of the Guardian, he was one of the nine Hands of the Cause selected, at their first Conclave, to serve as Custodians in the Holy Land. For the remaining forty-six years of his life he labored strenuously at the World Centre, undertaking journeys throughout the world, assisting, advising, and enthusing the friends and their national and local institutions. These journeys culminated in 1990 and 1991 with visits to the newly re-emerging Bahá'í communities of the countries of the Soviet Union.

'Alí-Akbar Furútan's single-minded devotion to the Faith and its Guardian, the vital role he played in the establishment of the Administrative Order in Iran, his contribution to the spiritual and material education of children, his services as a Hand of the Cause of God, and his unswerving support of the Universal House of Justice together constitute an imperishable record of service in the annals of the Cause. His penetrating mind, his loving concern, and his sparkling humor are ineffaceable memories in the hearts of the thousands of believers with whom he spoke.

While praying in the Holy Shrines for the progress of 'Alí-Akbar Furútan's illumined soul in the Abhá Kingdom, we supplicate Bahá'u'lláh to bless likewise the fruition of the seeds he sowed in this world.

We extend our loving sympathy to his daughters, Írán Muhájir and Parvín Furútan, to his granddaughters, and to all other members of his family.

We advise friends in all lands to commemorate his passing and to hold memorial services in his honor in all *Mashriqu'l-Adhikárs*.

HADI AFSAHI

On 28 April 2003, in Uppsala, Sweden.

A fourth generation Bahá'í, Hadi Afsahi was born on 15 April 1924 in Tehran, Iran, and received his early education at the Bahá'í-run Tarbíyat School in that city. After earning a degree in civil engineering from the University of Tehran he worked with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company from 1947 to 1959 and pioneered to two different localities within the country. Mr. Afsahi was a member of the first Local Spiritual Assemblies in the Iranian cities of Masjid-i-Sulayman and Gachsaran. He married Mehri Golmohammadi in 1954; they had two children, May and Aram. In January 1960, Mr. Afsahi left Iran for Sweden, settling in Uppsala, a pioneer goal city, to be joined several

months later by his family. In Sweden, he served as a member of the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Uppsala and was also a member of the country's National Teaching Committee from 1960 to 1967. Elected as a member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sweden, he served on that body from 1962 until 1968, when he was appointed as a member of the Auxiliary Board of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Europe, in which capacity he served until 1993. Mr. Afsahi made many trips throughout Sweden and internationally to teach the Bahá'í Faith. Within Sweden, he was active in teaching minority groups such as the Roma people and the native Sámi people of Lapland. During his years in Sweden Mr. Afsahi worked as a high school teacher of mathematics, physics, and chemistry, until his retirement in 1989. He was also involved with the United Nations Association and the National Sámi Organization. In its message after his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote of his "long-serving and steadfast devotion, his warm and radiant spirit, and his indefatigable dedication to the teaching work," which it "recalled with deep gratitude."

DAOUD (DAVID) ANI

On 26 June 2003, in Oxford, England.

Daoud (David) Ani was born in Baghdad in 1913 into a Jewish family. He and his brother both became Bahá'ís, and later he taught the Faith to his two sisters. After serving for many years on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iraq, he moved to the United Kingdom, arriving there in 1973. He lived in London, Portsmouth, and Oxford, and served on several Local Spiritual Assemblies. Mr. Ani was a keen historian who spent much time researching and writing about the history of the Bahá'í Faith in his native land. In its message of condolence, the Universal House of Justice said, "His outstanding service . . . in his native Iraq . . . has left influential traces that future generations will befittingly acknowledge."

ETHNA STEWART ARCHIBALD

On 17 October 2003, in New Plymouth, New Zealand.

Born in 1918 in New Zealand and raised in a strong Presbyterian family, Ethna Stewart Archibald became a Bahá'í in May 1947 after a chance encounter with a Bahá'í during a train journey in Australia. Back in New Zealand, she served on the Local Spiritual Assembly in Auckland from 1950 to 1952, before moving to London. During her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1955, Shoghi Effendi encouraged her to pioneer to Africa, and nine months later she found herself in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), where she stayed until 1973. Ms. Archibald was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís

of South Central Africa and served as its secretary for many years. When she moved to American Samoa, she became the secretary to the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia, and later she served at the Bahá'í World Centre as secretary to Universal House of Justice member 'Alí Nakhjavání. She married Phillip James Daka of Zambia in 1966. They divorced in 1981. In its message after her passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "Ethna will long be remembered for her total commitment to the Cause, her warm and loving spirit, her positive outlook, and her kindness to all with whom she came in contact."

SHANTA BASIN

On 5 April 2004, in Maseru, Lesotho.

Shanta Appa was born into a Hindu family in Mauritius on 10 August 1938. She became a Bahá'í as a teenager, along with other family members, and began her life of service organizing Bahá'í deepening classes for children and youth. In 1965 she traveled to Madagascar and then pioneered there from 1966 to 1968. In 1971 she moved to the United States, where she was active in teaching campaigns in the Southern region. During that time she also traveled to Canada, Tobago, Martinique, and Trinidad. In 1973, in Lesotho, she met and married Kalman Basin, a pioneer from Alaska. She served as a member of the Auxiliary Board of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa from 1972 to 1991. The following year she was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Lesotho and served on that body until the end of her life. She was the first Bahá'í pioneer to die in Lesotho. The Universal House of Justice wrote, "The steadfastness of her commitment in service to the Cause has left an example for others to follow."

JOON CHUNG

On 3 December 2003, in Seoul, Korea.

Joon Chung was born on 30 April 1945 in Seoul, Korea. After becoming a Bahá'í in 1968, he served as a member of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Guam in 1970. He married Irene MacKenzie in 1971, and the couple had three sons, Chaun, Kapono, and Lucas. They moved to Chicago in 1973, and there Mr. Chung received his training in graphic design at the Illinois Institute of Technology. He was a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Chicago from 1975 to 1977. He also served as the graphic designer for the Public Information Office at the Bahá'í National Center from 1974 to 1979 before moving to Hawaii, where he founded a design firm in 1982. In 1987 he pioneered with his family to Korea and was elected as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly from 1990 to 2000. Professionally, he was

one of Korea's leading designers and was widely acknowledged as raising the level of design in the country.

HOPETON FITZ-HENLEY

On 14 September 2003, in Kingston, Jamaica.

Hopeton Glanville St. Leger Fitz-Henley, who was born on 12 January 1938 in Kingston, Jamaica, embraced the Bahá'í Faith in 1956. He was a member of the Auxiliary Board for the Propagation of the Bahá'í Faith in the Americas from 1976 to 1981. A member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Jamaica for more than two decades, from 1982 until the time of his death, he was also a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Kingston, served on several national and local committees, and traveled throughout Jamaica to teach the Faith and to strengthen Local Spiritual Assemblies, communities, and isolated believers. Mr. Fitz-Henley often represented the Bahá'í Faith in its external affairs work with government committees, nongovernmental organizations, the United Nations Association of Jamaica, the Interfaith Council, and others. Professionally, Mr. Fitz-Henley established his own business college in Kingston in the 1960s, which operated for many years. Among his many initiatives in the business community was his role in co-founding the Small Business Association of Jamaica and the National Development Foundation of Jamaica. He was a founding member of the National Advisory Council for Small Business and served on a number of other bodies that sought to stimulate the economic development of disadvantaged members of Jamaica's population. He married Sally Bowman in 1976, but they later divorced. In its message after his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "Surely his record of achievements will inspire generations of believers in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands." He leaves behind a daughter, Parisa, and a son, Naysan.

LEONARD HERBERT

On 3 May 2003, in Lihue, Kauai, the Hawaiian Islands.

Born on 10 December 1903 in San Bernardino, California, USA, Leonard Herbert trained at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, afterwards staying on to teach there for 14 years. By the 1950s he was maintaining his own studio, teaching classes in portrait and figure painting, and was a member of the Los Angeles Art Institute. During that time his wife, Jesma Robison, whom he had married in 1927, became a Bahá'í while working on contract for the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Los Angeles, and Leonard joined the Faith shortly afterwards. Jesma passed away in the late 1950s, and he married Serrita Camargo in 1960. A few years later they pioneered to the island of Kauai, where they sought to establish a Bahá'í center. In Hawaii the couple

contributed energetically to Bahá'í activities and also to cultural life, teaching art classes at the community college and helping with the introduction of art in the schools. When Mr. Herbert suffered a series of debilitating strokes in the early 1970s, he and Serrita relocated to Honolulu, and after he recovered, they discovered she had cancer. They moved to Los Angeles, where she died in 1980. Afterwards, Mr. Herbert returned to Kauai, where he remained until his own passing. The House of Justice wrote of his "impressive record as a homefront pioneer and as a teacher of the Cause," continuing, "He will long be remembered for his artistic skills, which found expression in paintings on Bahá'í themes as well as other subjects."

DAVID HOFMAN

On 9 May 2003, in Oxford, England.

David George Ronald Hofman was born in 1908 in Poona, India, where his father served in the British Army. Educated in England, as a young man he set out to see the world. While in Canada during the 1930s, he encountered the Bahá'í Faith at the home of May and William Sutherland Maxwell in Montreal. He embraced the Faith and continued his travels, living for a time in Hollywood, California, and appearing in a number of silent movies. Back in England, he earned several acting roles in the West End of London and in 1937 became the world's only television announcer on the BBC's first television transmissions. His voice was also heard on the radio, on the BBC's Empire Service. Following World War II he married former US Olympic athlete Marion Holley, who predeceased him. They had two children. The Hofmans were very active members of the Bahá'í community, establishing Bahá'í communities in Northampton, Birmingham, Oxford, Cardiff, and Watford. Mr. Hofman served for 27 years as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom. To promote books of religious interest, including titles on the Bahá'í Faith, he established the publishing firm George Ronald; its first title was *The Renewal of Civilization*, a book he wrote as an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith. Years later he authored a biography of Hand of the Cause of God George Townshend. Mr. Hofman was elected to the Universal House of Justice at the first International Convention in 1963 and served on that body for 25 years. After his retirement in 1988, he made several extended international teaching trips, meeting not only with Bahá'í communities but with public officials and leaders of thought. After his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "He will be remembered for an adamant loyalty to the Cause, an unflinching response to the call and guidance of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, a central role in the advancement of the British Bahá'í community and the launching of the brilliant Africa campaign,

and his outstanding contributions to Bahá'í literature both as an author and a publisher." He is survived by his second wife, Kathleen, his children, May and Mark, and several grandchildren.

LISIATE MAKA

On 16 November 2003, in Kolofō'ou, Nuku'alofa, Tonga.

Lisiate Maka was born in Lau, Fiji, on 3 January 1919. He became a Bahá'í in 1957 and served the Bahá'í Faith with distinction until the end of his life. In 1958 he was elected as a member of the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Nuku'alofa and served as its secretary for many years. He also served on the first Regional Spiritual Assembly of the South Pacific, formed in Fiji in 1959, and then as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the South Pacific in 1964. From 1970 to 1975 he served on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tonga and Cook Islands, and then on the National Spiritual Assembly of Tonga from 1976 to 1979. In 1979 he was appointed as a member of the Auxiliary Board of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia, which he served until he was appointed to the Board of Counsellors the following year, functioning in that capacity for 10 years. Mr. Maka's first wife, 'Emli Laru, whom he married in 1947, predeceased him in 1991. In 1995, Mr. Maka married Kololia Opera. He was father to 10 adopted children. Professionally, Mr. Maka was a licensed lawyer and a legal advisor to Tonga's lower and supreme courts; his efforts resulted in the legal incorporation of the first five Local Spiritual Assemblies in Tonga and in the legal recognition of Bahá'í marriage in Tonga in 1973.

STELLA MOTSHEDI MONCHO

On 30 December 2003, in Jwaneng, Botswana.

Stella Molema was born on 17 May 1909 in Kraaipan, South Africa. Her grandfather had been the first of his tribe to accept Christianity, and his granddaughter and several other grandchildren became the first members of his family to accept the Bahá'í Faith. In 1938 she married James Leonard Moncho, who predeceased her in 1995. They had four children. She and her husband embraced the Bahá'í Faith in December 1955, and shortly afterwards she was elected to the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Mafikeng, on which she served from 1956 to 1957. In 1957, when Mr. Moncho's work took the family to live in the village of Kanye, they became the first Bahá'ís inside what was to become the Republic of Botswana. Mrs. Moncho's services to the Bahá'í community were many: she was appointed to the first Bechuanaland Area Teaching Committee; she served for many years on Local Spiritual Assemblies in Matlaken and Jwaneng. A school teacher by profession, she had

unequalled command of the Setswana language and was the cotranslator of two significant volumes of Bahá'í writings: *Dithapelo tsa Bahá'í* (Bahá'í Prayers) and *Mafoko a a Subilweng a ga Bahá'u'lláh* (The Hidden Words). Many other Bahá'í translation projects benefited from her collaboration and advice.

OLA PAWLOWSKA

On 2 April 2004, in Newfoundland, Canada.

Born on 14 February 1910 in Lakta, outside Cracow, Poland, Ola was the first child of Count Clemens and Alexandra Rutowski. She married Wacław Pawłowski, who died in a yachting accident and left her with a young daughter, Suzanne. Ola was working for the Department of Foreign Affairs in Denmark in 1939 when the Second World War broke out; she eventually made her way to Canada. It was while working in the Polish Consulate in Winnipeg that she encountered and eventually embraced the Bahá'í Faith. During the Ten Year Crusade she offered to pioneer to St. Pierre and Miquelon, as she was a French speaker. For this act of service in opening a new territory to the Bahá'í Faith, she was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. Living in that isolated post, she began her work of translating the Bahá'í writings into Polish. After five years she returned briefly to Poland, then moved to Luxembourg. While working for an airline company there, she was offered the opportunity to go to Congo in 1961, only one year after it had gained its independence from Belgium. She remained in that country for 30 years as a cherished member of the community, walking many miles from village to village, nurturing the youth, serving as a member of the Auxiliary Board of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa. With her health deteriorating, she returned to her native Poland and was able to witness the election of the first National Spiritual Assembly there, but in 1993 she decided it was time to rejoin her daughter in Canada. She spent her final years in yet another pioneer post, in Newfoundland, where she passed away and is buried.

RUTH PRINGLE

On 22 August 2003, in Ciudad Colon, Costa Rica.

Ruth Yancey was born in the United States on 15 June 1920. She became a Bahá'í in 1953 after reading the writings of Bahá'u'lláh for the first time. Two months later, she left to pioneer to Puerto Rico. Subsequent pioneer posts included Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. In this latter country, she was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly in 1961. Trained as an operating room nurse, with a degree in zoology and chemistry, she worked long hours to support herself and then devoted her free time to Bahá'í activities, particularly to encouraging the youth of the community. Her union to Alan Pringle was the

first Bahá'í marriage to be legally recognized in Panama. She and her husband, as members of the National Spiritual Assembly in that country, participated in the first election of the Universal House of Justice and attended the First World Congress in London in 1963, where Mrs. Pringle gave an address on "Victories of the Pioneers." In November of that year she was appointed a member of the Auxiliary Board, which she served until her appointment to the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas in 1980. She was devoted to working for the rights of women and indigenous peoples and was instrumental in the establishment of the Guaymi Cultural Center and radio station in Soloy, Chiriqui, Panama. Following her passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "She particularly promoted the spread of the Divine Message among the indigenous peoples of the Americas, raising their consciousness of the high destiny that awaits them in serving the Cause."

ALICK RATU

On 18 August 2003, in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Born in the village of Adegego, Malaita Island, in the Solomon Islands, in 1942 or 1943, Alick Dudley Ratu entered the Bahá'í Faith in 1972 and served it with distinction for the rest of his life. His first wife, with whom he had five children, died in the late 1970s, and he married Nonoli Olisukulu in the mid-1980s, becoming a stepfather to one daughter. Mr. Ratu was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Solomon Islands almost continuously from 1973 to 2003; for more than half of this time he served as its secretary and for the last four years managed the Bahá'í National Office. Professionally, he worked for many years for the government as an agricultural extension officer on the Island of Malaita; from the mid-1970s, however, he devoted his energies to full-time service of the Bahá'í community.

URSULA SAMANDARI

On 20 June 2003, in Buea, Cameroon.

Ursula Newman was born in Mitcham, Surrey, England, on 29 December 1909. A lecturer in botany at the Swanley Horticultural College in Kent, she embraced the Bahá'í Faith in 1938, after meeting Richard St. Barbe Baker, Hasan Balyuzi, and Dorothy Ferraby. In 1945 she volunteered as one of the first three homefront pioneers in Britain, moving to St. Ives to help establish a Bahá'í community there. Afterwards she moved to Dublin, Ireland, becoming a member of the first Local Spiritual Assembly in the city and in the entire country, serving as its secretary. She married Dr. Mihdi Samandari, whom she had met in Belfast, at the Bahá'í center in London in 1951. Two years later, they moved to Kenya, and after a year went on to Mogadishu, Somalia, where

they stayed until 1971, when they pioneered to Cameroon; they remained there until Mrs. Samandari's passing. In the condolence register at her funeral, paramount chief of Buea, HRH Samuel L. Endeley wrote, "My dear Sister, You lived with us like one of us, you served faithfully and lovingly to win souls into God's redeeming grace. You loved us and our country, Cameroon, and you have demonstrated this in dying here like the good soldier of God you have lived to be. You died with your boots on. We thank God for all you were to us. May your soul rest with the good God, our creator, in perfect peace." In its message, the Universal House of Justice recalled her "purity of spirit, radiant joy, and love for all peoples."

LOTTIE TOBIAS

On 25 July 2003, en route from De Poort to Voorburg, the Netherlands.

Elisabeth Charlotte (Lottie) Tobias joined the Bahá'í Faith in 1950 when there were only a few dozen Bahá'ís in the Netherlands. She was elected to the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Den Haag in 1952, and in 1957 became a member of the first Spiritual Assembly of the Benelux Countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg). When the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Netherlands was established in 1962, she was elected to that body and served on it until 1986—and was its secretary for 24 years. Known as both a cheerful and meticulous administrator and proofreader of Bahá'í materials, "Aunt Lottie" was also unfailingly thoughtful towards others, warmly welcoming newcomers, writing cards to pioneers, and telephoning or visiting the sick. Trained as a social worker, she wrote a long-running column in the *Haagse Courant* newspaper, offering advice on social and legal matters, and even held a weekly consultation hour for individuals at the newspaper office. She also belonged to the Business and Professional Women's Organization for 40 years and was named an honorary member shortly before her passing. In its message upon her passing, the House of Justice wrote, "she will always be lovingly remembered for her dedication to the progress of the Cause, the upbuilding of its institutions and for her tireless endeavors, over many years, to inspire and encourage all the friends."

HESHMAT VAHDAT

On 27 June 2003, in Danville, California, USA.

Heshmatullah Vahdat was born into a Bahá'í family in Kashan, Iran, on 25 September 1923. When he was nine years old his family spent one month in Haifa and were often in the presence of Shoghi Effendi. In Iran, he served as a homefront pioneer in Shahreza for five years, before leaving for Japan, where he remained from 1956 to 1978. He was one of the first Persian Bahá'ís

to arrive in Japan during the Ten Year Crusade and served on the first Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Amagasaki, Japan, from 1956 to 1968, and then on the Spiritual Assembly of Nishinomiya from approximately 1971 to 1978. He supported his family by establishing an import/export business. He held regular weekly firesides at his home in Japan for 22 years and undertook teaching trips in villages in Japan as well as in Korea and Okinawa. He also visited Bahá'í communities in the Arabian countries, offering them his support for their pioneering efforts. In 1980, he and his family were forced to leave Japan and go as refugees to the United States when the Iranian government refused to renew his passport and the Japanese government would not extend his visa. From 1990 to 2003 he was a homefront pioneer in Danville, California, and served on the first Spiritual Assembly of that community, which was elected in 1991; he remained a member until 1997. During that time he also held regular devotional meetings and discussions of the Faith in his home. He married Kiandokht Youssefian in 1949; the couple had four children.

JIM WALTON

On 18 November 2003, in Alaska.

James Wilbur Walton (Khaalaaxh) was born on 29 March 1923 in Sitka, Alaska, and became Chief of the Kaagwaantaan Wolf House Tlingit clan. As a young man he married Clara Hamilton, worked as a fisherman and carpenter, and served in the US Army during World War II. He also studied business at Alaska Methodist University. After becoming a Bahá'í in 1953, he traveled, as a Bahá'í teacher, throughout Alaska, North America, Europe, and the Russian Far East, working primarily with indigenous people. He established an International Cross-Cultural Alcohol Program to create a cross-cultural approach to alcohol recovery and spearheaded more than 25 Spiritual Unity of Tribes Gatherings, held from New Zealand to the Sakha Republic, Russia. In response to social problems he perceived in the Sakha Republic, he worked to establish alcohol recovery programs there and promoted cultural and health care exchanges between indigenous people of the Sakha Republic and Alaska. He actively promoted education among Native people and helped broaden understanding of the Tlingit culture. Upon his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "His many years of devoted service to the indigenous people of Alaska and as a pioneer in Russia are warmly remembered."

AZIZ YAZDI

On 19 April 2004, in Vancouver, Canada.

Aziz Ismayn Yazdi, born in 1909 in Alexandria, Egypt, to devoted Bahá'í parents, received his name from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who went to Alexandria in

1910 for a brief time. During the First World War, the Yazdi family moved to Damascus, on the instruction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then in 1919 to Haifa. As a young boy, Mr. Yazdi was often in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá until His passing in 1921. Later, Mr. Yazdi studied banking in Egypt and electrical engineering in England and then worked in management in the oil industry in Iran. He married Soraya Khamsi in 1941, and they had four children. Mrs. Yazdi passed away in 1997. After living and serving the Faith in both Iran and Iraq, the family moved to Kenya in response to a call from Shoghi Effendi. There, Mr. Yazdi ran an import business for some 20 years. He was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Central and East Africa, and later of Kenya. In 1954 he was appointed a member of the Auxiliary Board in Africa, and in 1968 he was appointed to the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa. From 1973 to 1988, he served as a member of the International Teaching Centre at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa. Following his retirement, he and his wife moved to Canada, but he continued his travels to promote the Faith he loved so dearly. Following his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "His life was characterized by an imperishable record of selfless service, steadfast action, and instant obedience."

NOTES

¹ 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, *The Story of My Heart* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1984), pp. 58–59.

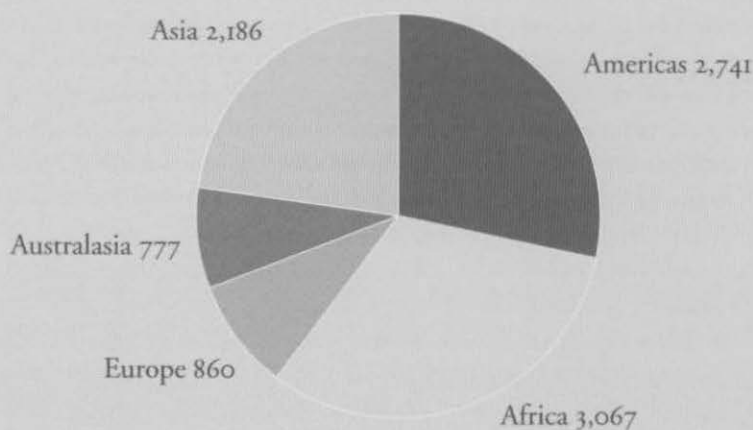
² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Statistics

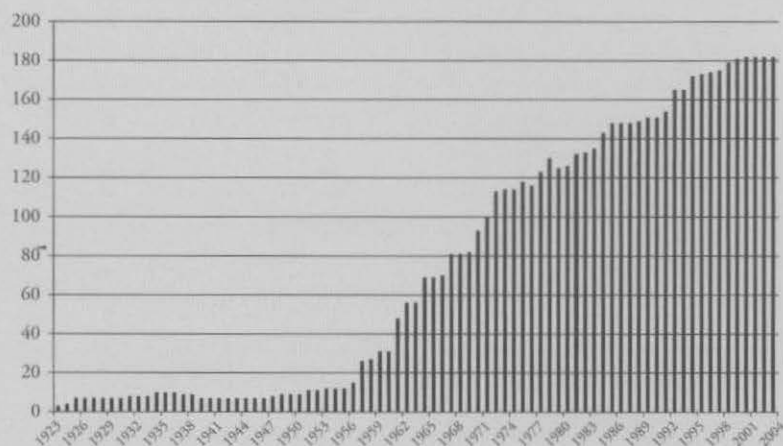
GENERAL STATISTICS

| | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Worldwide Bahá'í population | More than five million |
| Countries/dependent territories where the Bahá'í Faith is established | 191 countries/ 45 territories |
| Continental Counsellors | 81 |
| Auxiliary Board members | 990 |
| National/Regional Spiritual Assemblies | 183 |
| Local Spiritual Assemblies | 9,631 |
| Localities where Bahá'ís reside | More than 100,000 |
| Indigenous tribes, races, and ethnic groups represented in the Bahá'í community | 2,112 |
| Languages into which Bahá'u'lláh's writings have been translated | 802 |
| Publishing Trusts | 33 |

Geographic Distribution of Local Spiritual Assemblies by Continent



Number of National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies



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 2003–2004 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 consists of approximately 550 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.

Directory

Associations for Bahá'í Studies

Argentina

Centro de Estudios Bahá'ís
Otamendi 215
1405 Buenos Aires
Argentina
E-mail: secretaria@bahai.org.ar

Australia

Association for Bahá'í Studies
c/o PO Box 319
Rosebury, NSW 2018
Australia
E-mail: abs@bahai.org.au

Bermuda

c/o National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Bermuda
PO Box HM 742
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E-mail: nsabda@northrock.bm

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Association for Bahá'í Studies
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90,000 Pôrto Alegre
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Republic of Cameroon
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Asociación de Estudios Bahá'ís
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 los Bahá'ís del Ecuador
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English-Speaking Europe

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 27 Rutland Gate
 London SW7 1PD
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 E-mail: abs@bahai.org.uk
 Web:
<http://www.bahai-studies.org>

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Selected New Publications in English

Bahá'ís in the West

Edited by Peter Smith. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004. 319 pp.

Contains eight essays that examine the early history of the Bahá'í Faith in the West. The essays and photos depict the beginnings of Bahá'í communities in many Western countries, including Australia and New Zealand, Denmark, Hungary, and the United States, with contributions by Peter Smith, Moojan Momen, György Lederer, Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, Loni Bramson, Graham Hassall, Margit Warburg, and Ismael Velasco. (Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions series, vol. 14)

Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One

Gloria Faizi. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003. 234 pp.

An introduction to the Bahá'í Faith that depicts the story of Bahá'u'lláh's life, telling of the severe persecutions to which He and His followers were subjected, and the spread of His teachings within Iran and throughout the world.

Bill: A Biography of Hand of the Cause of God William Sears

Marguerite Reimer Sears. Eloy, AZ: Desert Rose Publishing, 2004. 122 pp.

Biography of William Sears written by his wife that tells not only of the love between them, but also of the love Mr. Sears had for the Faith he labored

to promote. The book portrays the life of an eminent Bahá'í, including his passion for service, his vast creative output, his travels and exhaustive work for the Faith, and his renowned sense of humor.

**Gems from the Crown of Glory:
Glimpses from the Life of Bahá'u'lláh**

Compiled by Susan J. Allen. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003. 239 pp.

Drawing from such works as *Memorials of the Faithful*; *God Passes By*; *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*; and the four volumes of *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, this compilation collects stories that span the life of Bahá'u'lláh and includes accounts associated with the early years of the Bahá'í Faith.

God Speaks Again: An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith

Kenneth E. Bowers. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 2004. 296 pp.

A comprehensive introduction to the Bahá'í Faith, focused on the life of Bahá'u'lláh. Examines the way His life and teachings fulfilled prophecies which foretold the coming of "the Promised One" through a discussion of Bahá'í scripture, theology, and spiritual life.

**Healing the Body Politic: Bahá'í Perspectives
on Peace and Conflict Resolution**

Edited by Charles O. Lerche. Oxford: George Ronald, 2004. 316 pp.

Reflects an effort by a group of scholars from around the globe to contribute to the search for a peaceful world. The book uses the inspiration of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith to provide new insights and solutions for problems such as terrorism, ethnic conflict, trade wars, political partisanship, and the breakdown of families. (George Ronald Bahá'í Studies series)

Heroes and Heroines of the Ten Year Crusade in Southern Africa

Compiled by Edith and Lowell Johnson. Worcester, South Africa: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003. 462 pp.

Published in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of the Ten Year Crusade, the book presents the stories of individuals who worked to establish Bahá'í communities in Southern Africa during the years 1953–63, including the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh who brought the Faith to those countries.

In Search of Inner Peace

Parviz Farnoush. New Delhi: Mir'at Publications, 2003. 291 pp.

An introduction to the Bahá'í Faith presented as answers to some of life's most perplexing questions. Deals with subjects such as the return of Christ, the nature of religion, spiritual destiny, and the purpose of creation.

Jewel Among Nations

A. Manisegaran. Kuala Lumpur: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003. 624 pp.

Details the history of the first 25 years of the Bahá'í Faith in Malaysia. The book offers portraits of the Malaysian Bahá'í community's development and recounts the heroic deeds and sacrifices of the early Bahá'ís in the country.

Memories of Nine Years in 'Akká

Youness Afroukhteh, translated by Riaz Masrour. Oxford: George Ronald, 2003. 512 pp.

Translation of the memoirs of Dr. Youness Afroukhteh, who served 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His trusted secretary and interpreter from 1900 to 1909. First published in Persian in 1952, the book covers years when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was imprisoned in the city of Acre. Recounts not only the details of daily life but also many historic events, and is "pre-eminent among those works dealing with the history of Covenant-breaking." It also describes the pilgrimages to Acre of many eminent early Western Bahá'ís, including Thomas Breakwell, Hippolyte Dreyfus, Lua Getsinger, and Laura Clifford Barney.

Mystic Connections: Stories of Some Early Bahá'ís of Malaysia

Shantha Sundram, edited by Malini Sundram-Parker and Mariss Williams. Kuala Lumpur: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003. 258 pp.

Published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Faith in the country, the book collects stories of some notable early Bahá'ís in Malaysia—how they first encountered the Faith and the effect that it had not only on their lives but also on the people around them.

The Path of Love

Lasse Thoresen. Oxford: George Ronald, 2004. 162 pp.

Explores ideas about love that emerge from a study of the Bahá'í writings. The book focuses on the love of God for His creation and the love that human beings reciprocate to God and their fellow human beings. It explores the practical implications of these teachings for human relationships and includes quotations from the Bahá'í writings, as well as a section of practical exercises.

Search for Values: Ethics in Bahá'í Thought

Edited by John Danesh and Seena Fazel. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004. 319 pp.

An attempt by several scholars to come to terms with the implications of a Bahá'í system of ethics in modern life. Contributors include Udo Schaefer, John Hick, Christopher Buck, Moojan Momen, and Richard Hollinger. (Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions series, vol. 15)

Spirituality in the Land of the Noble: How Iran Shaped the World's Religions

Richard C. Foltz. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004. 224 pp.

Explores the impact of Persian culture on Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Manichaeism, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith. The author probes world history to uncover a wealth of Iranian ideas and influences, from the sacred formulas of the ancient Aryan inhabitants to the spectacular architecture of Iran's holiest cities. Spanning a wide spectrum of Persian history, the book offers insight into Iranian identity and the way religious traditions grow and change.

Stories of Bahá'u'lláh and Some Notable Believers

Compiled by Kiser Barnes. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2004. 444 pp.

An inspiring collection of stories about the life of Bahá'u'lláh and some prominent early Bahá'ís, drawn from sources such as *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* series; *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*; and *The Dawn-Breakers*.

Stories told by 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Compiled by Amir Badiei. Oxford: George Ronald, 2003. 183 pp.

Collects stories told by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, gleaned from accounts of His life. The book offers touching stories that He told to illustrate how to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Treasures of the Cause

Compiled by Rose Deloomy. West Palm Beach, FL: Palabra Publications, 2003. 144 pp.

Stories of early Bahá'ís collected from such sources as *The Chosen Highway*; *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*; *The Dawn-Breakers*; and *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* series. The book offers vignettes of stories about love, humility, sacrifice, martyrdom, steadfastness, and humor from the lives of men and women who distinguished themselves through their service to the Bahá'í Faith in its earliest days.

A Basic Bahá'í Reading List

The following list has been prepared to provide a sampling of works conveying the spiritual truths, social principles, and history of the Bahá'í Faith. It is by no means exhaustive. For a more complete record of Bahá'í literature, see Bibliography of English-language Works on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, 1844–1985, compiled by William P. Collins (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990).

Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

The Most Holy Book, Bahá'u'lláh's charter for a new world civilization. Written in Arabic in 1873, the volume's first authorized English translation was released in 1993.

The Kitáb-i-Íqán

The Book of Certitude was written prior to Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His mission as an explanation of progressive revelation and a proof of the station of the Báb.

The Hidden Words

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.

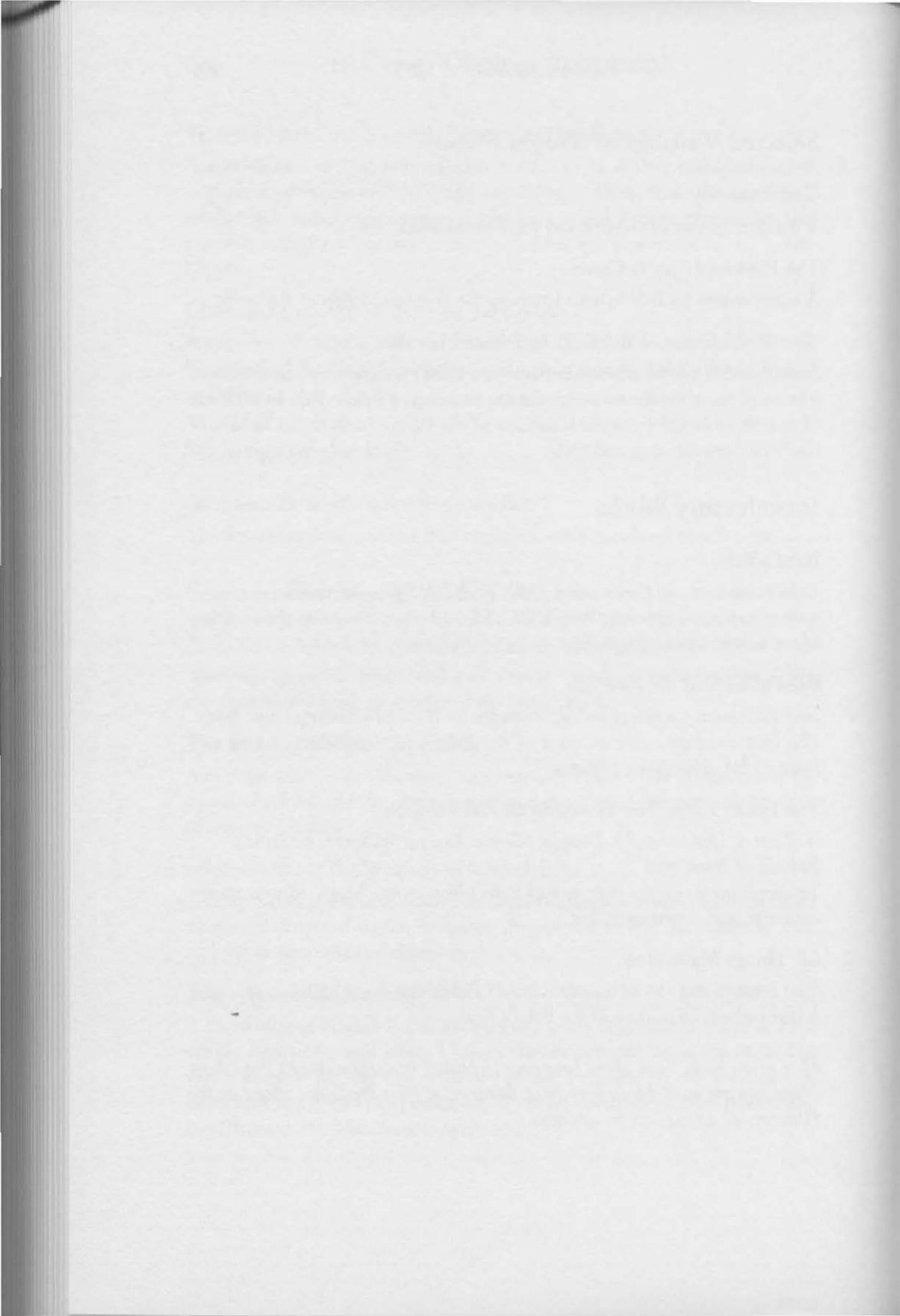
Textbook providing an overview of Bahá'í history, teachings, administrative structure, and community life.

All Things Made New

John Ferraby. 2nd rev. ed. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987.

A comprehensive outline of the Bahá'í Faith.

Most of the books listed above have been published by various Bahá'í Publishing Trusts and are available in bookshops, libraries, or from the Trusts. Please see the Directory on pp. 245–52 for addresses.



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 became known as Rúhíyyih Khánum Rabbání. ('Amatu'l-Bahá is a title meaning “Handmaiden of Bahá'u'lláh.”) She served as the Guardian's secretary during his lifetime and was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God in 1952. 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, 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.

Bahjí: 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*.

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.

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 coordinating, stimulating, and directing the activities of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and acting as liaison between them and the Universal House of Justice. The membership of the Teaching Centre comprises 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 signaling humanity's coming of age.

Local Spiritual Assembly: The local administrative body in the Bahá'í Faith, ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The nine members are directly elected by secret ballot each year at 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 2004, there were 183 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.

Ridván: 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 Ridván in Baghdad.

Shoghi Effendi Rabbání: (1897–1957) The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921, designated in His Will and Testament as His successor in interpreting the Bahá'í writings and as Head of the Faith.

Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh: The resting place of Bahá'u'lláh's mortal remains, located near the city of Acre, Israel. The Shrine is the holiest spot on earth to Bahá'ís and a place of pilgrimage.

Shrine of the Báb: The resting place of the Báb's mortal remains, located on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, a sacred site to Bahá'ís, and a place of pilgrimage.

State Bahá'í Council: See Regional Bahá'í Council.

Tablet: Divinely revealed scripture. In Bahá'í scripture, the term is used to denote writings revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

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*.

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*, ed. Wendi Momen (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989).

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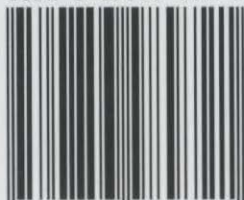
In just over one hundred years, the Bahá'í Faith has grown from an obscure movement in the Middle East to the second-most widespread of the independent world religions. Embracing people from more than 2,100 ethnic, racial, and tribal groups, it is quite likely the most diverse organized body of people on the planet today. Its unity challenges prevailing theory about human nature and the prospects for our common future.

The Faith's central message is that of unity. Its Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, teaches that there is only one God, that there is only one human race, and that all the world's religions have been stages in the revelation of God's purpose for humankind. Today, humanity has collectively come of age: "The earth is but one country," Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "and mankind its citizens." The emergence of the Bahá'í community offers persuasive evidence that the human race, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as a single people in its planetary homeland.

The Bahá'í World is the principal public record of the community's growth and development. The volumes reproduce major documents and provide statistical data and other information on the Bahá'í Faith's wide-ranging program of activities, which are illustrated by many photographs and charts. In-depth articles focus on major areas of Bahá'í concern.

For the serious researcher and the general student alike, the dramatic growth of the Bahá'í Faith raises new and interesting questions about the role of religion in social development. *The Bahá'í World* is designed primarily to help answer these questions.

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