

THE
BAHÁ'Í
WORLD

2004-2005

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2004-2005

161 OF THE BAHÁ'Í ERA

THE
BAHÁ'Í
WORLD

2004-2005

AN INTERNATIONAL RECORD

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HAIFA

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Introduction to the Bahá'í Community

A theater group in Germany uses the performing arts to address social issues among students in public schools. In South Africa, more than 230 people gather at a conference to discuss ways to contribute to community development. Organizers of an event in Canada commemorate International Women's Day by holding a panel discussion on the role of men and boys in advancing gender equality. A group in Singapore organizes an event to promote racial harmony that attracts an audience of 5,000. Participants at a conference in Australia learn how to integrate personal spiritual development with service to others. In the United Kingdom, a group formed to promote social cohesion offers seminars to assist society in fostering a greater sense of unity amidst growing diversity. People in Vanuatu organize an interfaith memorial service for victims of a natural disaster. In Swaziland, children learn virtues of generosity and kindness as they deliver clothes to more than 200 orphans and perform a dance on the theme of poverty. At a gathering in India, participants discuss initiatives to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS and discuss the importance of moral development in providing an effective response to this epidemic. A choir from the Democratic Republic of the Congo travels to North America to promote a message of peace and unity through musical theater.

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 and a half million souls. Its members represent 2,112 ethnic and tribal groups who live in thousands of localities in 191 independent countries and 45 dependent territories. What was once regarded by some as a small, obscure sect was reported by the *Britannica Book of the Year 2004* 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 Ḥusayn-ʿAlí 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 Ḥusayn-ʿAlí 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, ʿAbbás Effendi, Who adopted the title "ʿAbdu'l-Bahá" ("Servant of Bahá"), as His successor and the sole authoritative interpreter of His teachings. ʿAbdu'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 Bahá'í 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 41 years, launched eight global plans for the advancement of the Faith. From a worldwide population of 408,000 in 1963, the Bahá'í community has grown to

more than 5.5 million members, and the number of National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies has grown from 56 to 183.

Spiritual and Moral Teachings and Bahá'í Community Life

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

At this stage of humanity's development, the unity of the human race must be recognized, the equality of women and men must be established, the extremes of wealth and poverty must be eliminated, and the age-old promise of universal peace must be realized. Liking the development of the human race to that of an individual, the Bahá'í writings say that we have passed through stages analogous to infancy and childhood and are now in the midst of a tumultuous adolescence, standing on the threshold of maturity. Bahá'u'lláh taught that humanity is destined to come of age, but the course it takes to achieve that goal is entirely in its own hands.

To promote the development of a society in which Bahá'í ideals can be fully realized, Bahá'u'lláh established laws and moral teachings that are binding on Bahá'ís. Central to these is daily obligatory prayer. Study of and meditation upon the Bahá'í sacred writings each

morning and evening are also enjoined. Bahá'ís between the ages of 15 and 70, with certain exceptions, observe an annual 19-day, dawn-to-dusk fast. Bahá'u'lláh referred to prayer and fasting as the “twin pillars” of faith, an indication of their importance and the benefits to be gained from them. He also raised work to the level of worship. The main repository of Bahá'u'lláh's laws is a volume entitled the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or the “Most Holy Book.”

There are no dietary restrictions in the Bahá'í Faith, but the consumption of alcohol and the use of narcotic and hallucinogenic drugs are forbidden, as they affect the mind and interfere with spiritual growth. Bahá'u'lláh counseled Bahá'ís to be honest and trustworthy, to render service to humanity with an abundance of deeds rather than mere words, to be chaste, and to avoid gossip and backbiting. He 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, Samoa, Uganda, and the United States. Plans have been launched for the construction of an eighth House of Worship in Chile, and sites have been purchased around the world for the erection of many more. The Houses of Worship are open to people of all faiths—or those professing no particular faith—for prayer and meditation. Services are nondenominational. There are no sermons, only readings and prayers from the Bahá'í writings and scriptures of other faiths with music by an *a capella* choir. This preserves the sacredness of the experience of hearing and meditating upon the Holy Word without the interference of man-made concepts.

Aims, Objectives, and Activities

As the Universal House of Justice stated in a message addressed to the peoples of the world written in October 1985, coinciding with the United Nations International Year of Peace, "Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind." The ultimate aim of the Bahá'í Faith is to establish unity among all the peoples of the world, and it is because of its orientation towards unity on an international scale that the Bahá'í community has been active at the United Nations since that organization's inception. Today the Bahá'í International Community, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that represents the collective voice of national Bahá'í communities around the world, enjoys special status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is particularly involved in addressing human rights issues, the needs of women and children, and environmental concerns, as well as pursuing sound, sustainable development policies. To coordinate its international efforts in these areas, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office and Office of Public Information, as well as the Office of the Environment and the Office for the Advancement of Women, collaborate with National Spiritual Assemblies around the world. The Bahá'í International Community's activities at the United Nations have earned it a reputation as one of the most effective religious NGOs in the UN system. Its national and international representatives have taken active roles in the major world summits and NGO forums sponsored by the United Nations during the past decades.

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

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds, and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This

commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs, and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system.¹

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

The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.²

To make its aims and objectives widely known and to promote its perspective on various issues, the Bahá'í International Community not only collaborates with like-minded organizations within and outside of the United Nations, but it also engages in public information efforts to bring the spiritual and social principles of the Faith to the attention of people everywhere. The persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran since the 1979 Iranian revolution has prompted wide dissemination of information about the Bahá'í Faith in the international news media. More than 200 members of the Faith have been executed for their belief, which is considered as heresy by the regime, and thousands more have been imprisoned, fired from their jobs,

or had their homes confiscated or their pensions cut off as a result of government orders. Bahá'ís around the world have responded in unity to this ongoing persecution in Iran—the land in which their religion was born—by petitioning their governments to take action against this injustice. It is, to some degree, as a result of these efforts that the persecutions have not been more extreme, although Iran's Bahá'ís still face the possibility of arbitrary imprisonment and execution, and are still denied fundamental rights and freedoms.³

The Bahá'í community has also taken a proactive approach to promulgating its views. The statement on peace issued by the Universal House of Justice in 1985, entitled *The Promise of World Peace*, sparked a worldwide campaign of presentations and public awareness programs throughout the International Year of Peace and since, aimed at government figures, leaders of thought, and the general population. The centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's passing in 1992 was commemorated, in part, with the publication of a statement detailing His life, teachings, and mission, designed to increase knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith among members of the public. A statement presenting the Bahá'í perspective on social development, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, was disseminated at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995, and later that year a statement entitled *Turning Point for All Nations* was released as a contribution to discussions on the future of the United Nations during its 50th anniversary. In 1999, the Bahá'í International Community released *Who Is Writing the Future? Reflections on the Twentieth Century*. Most recently, in 2002, the Universal House of Justice addressed a message to the world's religious leaders.⁴

The Bahá'í community has also been continually engaged in a series of international teaching plans. It has seen rapid expansion in different parts of the world, perhaps most notably in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where national Bahá'í communities have been established in recent years following the collapse of long-standing political barriers. New national governing bodies are also being formed elsewhere, as the Universal House of Justice deems communities to have reached a sufficient level of maturity.

The existence and growth of the Bahá'í community offer irrefutable evidence that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work together in harmony. While Bahá'ís are 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.⁵

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

NOTES

- ¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 2nd rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 203.
- ² Ibid., p. 204.
- ³ See pp. 163–174, 279–280 for further information on the continuing persecution of Iran's Bahá'í community.
- ⁴ For the full text of this message and a report on its presentation around the world, see *The Bahá'í World 2002–2003* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2004), pp. 79–87 and 89–98.
- ⁵ Bahá'í International Community Office of Public Information, *The Prosperity of Humankind* (1995). See *The Bahá'í World 1994–95* (Haifa, World Centre Publications, 1996), pp. 273–296, for the complete text of this statement.

WRITINGS
AND MESSAGES

Bahá'í Sacred Writings

*A compilation from the writings of
Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá
about progress, science, and religion.*

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Arts, crafts, and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words . . .

In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Happy the man that cleaveth unto it, and woe betide the heedless.¹



[W]hatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that most great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist. How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a

drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed . . .

From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God. So potent and universal is this revelation, that it hath encompassed all things, visible and invisible.²



Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth.³

From the Writings and Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

For every era hath a spirit; the spirit of this illumined era lieth in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. For these lay the foundation of the oneness of the world of humanity and promulgate universal brotherhood. They are founded upon the unity of science and religion and upon investigation of truth. They uphold the principle that religion must be the cause of amity, union, and harmony among men. They establish the equality of both sexes and propound economic principles which are for the happiness of individuals. They diffuse universal education, that every soul may as much as possible have a share of knowledge. They abrogate and nullify religious, racial, political, patriotic, and economic prejudices and the like. Those teachings that are scattered throughout the Epistles and Tablets are the cause of the illumination and the life of the world of humanity. Whoever promulgateth them will verily be assisted by the Kingdom of God.⁴



While the religion of God is the promoter of truth, the founder of science and knowledge, it is full of goodwill for learned men; it is

the civilizer of mankind, the discoverer of the secrets of nature, and the enlightener of the horizons of the world. Consequently, how can it be said to oppose knowledge? God forbid! Nay, for God, knowledge is the most glorious gift of man and the most noble of human perfections. To oppose knowledge is ignorant, and he who detests knowledge and science is not a man, but rather an animal without intelligence. For knowledge is light, life, felicity, perfection, beauty, and the means of approaching the Threshold of Unity. It is the honor and glory of the world of humanity, and the greatest bounty of God. Knowledge is identical with guidance, and ignorance is real error.

Happy are those who spend their days in gaining knowledge, in discovering the secrets of nature, and in penetrating the subtleties of pure truth! Woe to those who are contented with ignorance, whose hearts are gladdened by thoughtless imitation, who have fallen into the lowest depths of ignorance and foolishness, and who have wasted their lives!⁵



See how, in this day, the scope of sciences and arts hath widened out, and what wondrous technical advances have been made, and to what a high degree the mind's powers have increased, and what stupendous inventions have appeared.

This age is indeed as a hundred other ages: should ye gather the yield of a hundred ages, and set that against the accumulated product of our times, the yield of this one era will prove greater than that of a hundred gone before. Take ye, for an example, the sum total of all the books that were ever written in ages past, and compare that with the books and treatises that our era hath produced: these books, written in our day alone, far and away exceed the total number of volumes that have been written down the ages. See how powerful is the influence exerted by the Daystar of the world upon the inner essence of all created things!⁶



And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that religion must be in conformity with science and reason, so that it may influence the hearts of men. The foundation must be solid and must not consist of imitations.⁷



Two calls to success and prosperity are being raised from the heights of the happiness of mankind, awakening the slumbering, granting sight to the blind, causing the heedless to become mindful, bestowing hearing upon the deaf, unloosing the tongue of the mute, and resuscitating the dead.

The one is the call of civilization, of the progress of the material world. This pertaineth to the world of phenomena, promoteth the principles of material achievement, and is the trainer for the physical accomplishments of mankind. It compriseth the laws, regulations, arts, and sciences through which the world of humanity hath developed; laws and regulations which are the outcome of lofty ideals and the result of sound minds, and which have stepped forth into the arena of existence through the efforts of the wise and cultured in past and subsequent ages. The propagator and executive power of this call is just government.

The other is the soul-stirring call of God, Whose spiritual teachings are safeguards of the everlasting glory, the eternal happiness and illumination of the world of humanity, and cause attributes of mercy to be revealed in the human world and the life beyond.

This second call is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God.

However, until material achievements, physical accomplishments, and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities, and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities, and violent afflictions are imminent.⁸



These schools for academic studies must at the same time be training centers in behavior and conduct, and they must favor character and

conduct above the sciences and arts. Good behavior and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger. A physician of evil character, and who betrayeth his trust, can bring on death, and become the source of numerous infirmities and diseases.

Devote ye the utmost attention to this matter, for the basic, the foundation principle of a school is first and foremost moral training, character, and the rectification of conduct.⁹



The sciences of today are bridges to reality; if then they lead not to reality, naught remains but fruitless illusion. By the one true God! If learning be not a means of access to Him, the Most Manifest, it is nothing but evident loss.¹⁰



Strive as much as possible to become proficient in the science of agriculture, for in accordance with the divine teachings the acquisition of sciences and the perfection of arts are considered acts of worship. If a man engageth with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in churches and temples. Thus as thou enterest a school of agriculture and strivest in the acquisition of that science thou art day and night engaged in acts of worship—acts that are accepted at the threshold of the Almighty. What bounty greater than this, that science should be considered as an act of worship and art as service to the Kingdom of God.¹¹



Every child must be instructed in sciences as much as is necessary. If the parents are able to provide the expenses of this education, it is well, otherwise the community must provide the means for the teaching of that child.¹²



In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakable foundation is the teaching of sciences and arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts, to the degree that is needful. Wherefore, in every city and village, schools must be established and every child in that city or village is to engage in study to the necessary degree.¹³



The virtues of humanity are many, but science is the most noble of them all . . . It is a bestowal of God; it is not material, it is divine. Science is an effulgence of the Sun of Reality, the power of investigating and discovering the verities of the universe, the means by which man finds a pathway to God. All the powers and attributes of man are human and hereditary in origin, outcomes of nature's processes, except the intellect, which is supernatural. Through intellectual and intelligent inquiry science is the discoverer of all things. It unites present and past, reveals the history of bygone nations and events, and confers upon man today the essence of all human knowledge and attainment throughout the ages. By intellectual processes and logical deductions of reason, this super-power in man can penetrate the mysteries of the future and anticipate its happenings.

Science is the first emanation from God toward man . . . God has created or deposited this love of reality in man. The development and progress of a nation is according to the measure and degree of that nation's scientific attainments. Through this means, its greatness is continually increased and day by day the welfare and prosperity of its people are assured.

. . . science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected. It is the very foundation of all individual and national development. Without this basis of investigation, development is impossible.¹⁴



Bahá'u'lláh teaches that religion must be in conformity with science and reason. If belief and teaching are opposed to the analysis of reason and principles of science, they are not worthy of acceptance. This principle has not been revealed in any of the former Books of divine teaching.¹⁵



All the sciences and arts we now enjoy and utilize were once mysteries, and according to the mandates of nature should have remained hidden and latent, but the human intellect has broken through the laws surrounding them and discovered the underlying realities. The mind of man has taken these mysteries out of the plane of invisibility and brought them into the plane of the known and visible.¹⁶



God's greatest gift to man is that of intellect, or understanding . . . Intellect is, in truth, the most precious gift bestowed upon man by the Divine Bounty. Man alone, among created beings, has this wonderful power.¹⁷



It is impossible for religion to be contrary to science, even though some intellects are too weak or too immature to understand truth.

God made religion and science to be the measure, as it were, of our understanding. Take heed that you neglect not such a wonderful power. Weigh all things in this balance.

To him who has the power of comprehension religion is like an open book, but how can it be possible for a man devoid of reason and intellectuality to understand the Divine Realities of God?

Put all your beliefs into harmony with science; there can be no opposition, for truth is one. When religion, shorn of its superstitions, traditions, and unintelligent dogmas, shows its conformity with science, then will there be a great unifying, cleansing force in the world which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discords, and struggles—and then will mankind be united in the power of the Love of God.¹⁸



Now, all questions of morality contained in the spiritual, immutable law of every religion are logically right. If religion were contrary to logical reason then it would cease to be a religion and be merely a tradition. Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand,

with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism. All religions of the present day have fallen into superstitious practices, out of harmony alike with the true principles of the teaching they represent and with the scientific discoveries of the time. 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 way 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.

We are familiar with the phrases “Light and Darkness,” “Religion and Science.” But the religion which does not walk hand in hand with science is itself in the darkness of superstition and ignorance.

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.

Consider what it is that singles man out from among created beings, and makes of him a creature apart. Is it not his reasoning power, his intelligence? Shall he not make use of these in his study of religion? I say unto you: weigh carefully in the balance of reason and science everything that is presented to you as religion. If it passes this test, then accept it, for it is truth! If, however, it does not so conform, then reject it, for it is ignorance!¹⁹



Among other principles of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings was the harmony of science and religion. Religion must stand the analysis of reason. It must agree with scientific fact and proof so that science will sanction religion and religion fortify science. Both are indissolubly welded and joined in reality. If statements and teachings of religion are found to be unreasonable and contrary to science, they are outcomes of superstition and imagination.²⁰



Bahá'u'lláh declared that religion is in complete harmony with science and reason. If religious belief and doctrine is at variance with reason, it proceeds from the limited mind of man and not from God; therefore, it is unworthy of belief and not deserving of attention; the heart finds no rest in it, and real faith is impossible.²¹

NOTES

- ¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988; 2001 printing), pp. 26–27.
- ² Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), para. 107, 109.
- ³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 96.
- ⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), section 71.1.
- ⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 137.
- ⁶ *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sections 73.5–6.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, section 227.10.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, sections 225.1–5.
- ⁹ *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1 (Ingleside, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), section 622.
- ¹⁰ *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, section 72.3.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, section 126.1.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, section 227.23.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, section 109.1.
- ¹⁴ *Foundations of World Unity* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), pp. 60–61.

- ¹⁵ *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. 434.
- ¹⁶ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 351.
- ¹⁷ *Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), sections 11.1 and 11.4.
- ¹⁸ *Paris Talks*, sections 44.23–26.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, sections 44.14–18.
- ²⁰ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 175.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

Highlights of Messages from the Universal House of Justice

One of the outstanding features of the worldwide Bahá'í community is its unity of principle, vision, and action. One would be hard pressed to find such a degree of unity in any other community on earth. Its reason is not difficult to discern: Bahá'ís look directly to the authoritative sacred writings of their Faith, as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, authoritatively interpreted by His eldest son and appointed successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, later expounded by Shoghi Effendi in his capacity as the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, and now safeguarded by the Universal House of Justice. This clear line of succession of authority from Bahá'u'lláh has flowed from the institution of His Covenant, which He established "to direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation." The effect has been to preserve the integrity of the Faith established by Bahá'u'lláh, to maintain its unity, and to stimulate its expansion around the globe over the past century and a half. While the Universal House of Justice has no power to alter any of the teachings explicitly given by Bahá'u'lláh in His writings, it does have the authority to decide on matters not specified in the texts and performs a number of specific functions: "to ensure the continuity of that divinely appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the

unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.”¹

To this end, letters and messages flow regularly from the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assemblies and to the worldwide community, as well as to individual believers, offering guidance and vision. One of the most important of these regular communications is the message released each year during the Festival of Ridván (21 April–2 May).

As the Bahá'í world community embarked on the third year of its current five-year plan of growth and development, the message of the Universal House of Justice written at Ridván 2004 conveyed a strong sense that “processes set in motion” are unfolding as they should—and bearing fruit in all parts of the world, as individuals, institutions, and communities play distinctive roles in the plan and yet also reinforce each other's actions.

The Universal House of Justice identified several areas in which the capacity gained by the worldwide Bahá'í community is particularly strong: the Bahá'í education of children; the spiritual empowerment of junior youth (ages 12–14); the movement of “clusters” (small geographic areas) to greater levels of activity; the ability of the Bahá'í community to reach out to a wider circle of people and involve them in its activities; the emergence of structures within the Bahá'í community for administering intensive growth; and concentration on raising up human resources in certain geographic areas that show special promise. The Universal House of Justice further noted the role of training institutes in Bahá'í communities around the world as “an engine of growth” and the worldwide use of course materials developed by the Ruhi Institute in Colombia, which has given a sense of global coherence to the process of learning in which the Bahá'í community is engaged.

In contrast, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

A chaotic international society, torn by conflicting perceptions and interests, is assailed by rising terrorism, lawlessness, and corruption, and eroded by economic failure, poverty, and disease. In its midst the Bahá'í community is becoming increasingly visible, inspired by a divinely revealed vision, building on solid foundations, growing in strength through the processes that are now in place, and undaunted by seeming setbacks.

Recalling that the election of the Universal House of Justice went forward “without a missed step” when world crises necessitated the cancellation of the 2003 International Bahá’í Convention, and noting the reconstitution of long-dissolved Local Spiritual Assemblies in Iraq “despite the disruption and chaos of life” there, the Universal House of Justice wrote: “Now we announce with great joy the election, this Ridván, of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Iraq, restored after more than thirty years of stifling oppression.”

The year 2004–2005 saw the launch of several new or revamped Websites by the Bahá’í International Community. A letter on 4 January 2005 from the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies announced the launch of one of these: the Bahá’í Pilgrimage Website, at <http://pilgrimage.bahai.org>, which offers information to assist Bahá’ís who are contemplating making a pilgrimage or short visit to the Bahá’í World Centre.²

The year also saw the publication of a significant statement commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, entitled *One Common Faith*, which was released on the occasion of Naw-Rúz (21 March) 2005. In a foreword to the statement, which is aimed at Bahá’í readers rather than at a wider audience, the House of Justice wrote that its publication was necessitated by “the accelerating breakdown in social order,” which “calls out desperately for the religious spirit to be freed from the shackles that have so far prevented it from bringing to bear the healing influence of which it is capable.” The statement thus expands on points made in an open letter to the world’s religious leaders, which was released at Ridván 2002. The House of Justice continued, “If they are to respond to the need, Bahá’ís must draw on a deep understanding of the process by which humanity’s spiritual life evolves. Bahá’u’lláh’s writings provide insights that can help to elevate discussion of religious issues above sectarian and transient considerations.” Through study of these teachings, the House of Justice said, “Bahá’ís will come increasingly to appreciate that the Cause they serve represents the arrowhead of an awakening taking place among people everywhere, regardless of religious background and indeed among many with no religious leaning.” To this end, *One Common Faith* “reviews relevant passages from both the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and the scriptures of other faiths against the background of the contemporary crisis.”

A letter dated 17 January 2005 announced to all National Spiritual Assemblies that “Considerations of age and the related needs of the Cause have prompted Mr. Douglas Martin and Mr. Ian Semple to request permission to relinquish their membership on the Universal House of Justice in accordance with Article v.2.(c) of its Constitution.” The House of Justice expressed “deep regret” at the departure of these two “much-loved” individuals, noting that Mr. Semple had been a member since 1963 and Mr. Martin since 1993. The results of the by-election held for their successors were announced just over two months later, in a brief message on 20 March 2005 that stated: “We welcome our newly elected members Payman Mohajer and Paul Lample.”

The election of Mr. Lample and Mr. Mohajer left two vacancies on the International Teaching Centre, on which both men had been members. To replace them, Gustavo Correa and Stephen Hall were appointed as Counsellor members of that institution, as announced in a letter from the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies on 24 March 2005.

A major announcement was made by the Universal House of Justice on 14 April 2005 regarding the site for the Bahá'í House of Worship in Chile. The first Bahá'í temple in South America will be constructed on a site north of Santiago, and a groundbreaking ceremony is anticipated. Representatives from all national Bahá'í communities in the Western hemisphere will be invited to attend, “with a special emphasis on the countries and indigenous peoples of South America.” The House of Justice noted in its letter that the unusual and innovative design prepared by the project architect, Siamak Hariri of Canada, generated “unprecedented media coverage of the project in Chile,” and “[i]n connection with the current decade-long commemoration of Chile’s two hundred years of independent nationhood, the Chilean Bicentennial Commission has designated the house of Worship as one of a limited number of official bicentennial projects in the private sector.” The House of Justice concluded, “This clearly reflects the civil authorities’ recognition of the significance of this edifice and their confidence in the benefit the undertaking will bring to Santiago and to Chile as a whole.” The letter also outlined the financial implications for the

temple project, citing the total cost at \$27 million, which is needed to complete the construction within a three-year period.

Numerous letters during the year detailed specific events related to the persecution of Iran's long-suffering Bahá'í community, from the destruction of the House of Mírzá Buzurg in Tehran, to the obstruction of Bahá'í students from entrance to Iran's universities, to arrests, to seizure of property, and perhaps most notably, to the distribution of a letter from Iran's Bahá'í community to President Khatami.³

The messages of the Universal House of Justice written between April 2004 and April 2005 reflect a community engaged in a coherent, unified process of global education of its members, through its institute program, which will better equip it to minister to the needs of humanity. These communications show a community growing, reaching outward, and yet at the same time actively working to deepen its understanding of its teachings to better engage in meaningful dialogue with the wider society and find points of unity on which positive relationships and collaboration can be built.

NOTES

- ¹ *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1972), pp. 3–4.
- ² For its part, the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information announced on 1 June 2004 the launch of a Bahá'í Reference Library Website and, on 20 April 2005, the launch of The Bahá'ís Website, to replace the Bahá'í World site. The Reference Library can be accessed at <http://reference.bahai.org/>, and The Bahá'ís is accessible at <http://bahai.org/>. For a full article on these new Websites, see pp. 143–145 of this volume.
- ³ Further details on this letter and on the persecutions in Iran can be found on pp. 163–174, 279–280 of this volume.

EVENTS
2004–2005



A member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Samoa, Mulipola Ale, speaking at the 50th jubilee of the Samoan Bahá'í community and the 20th anniversary of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Samoa.

Worldwide Jubilee

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OPENING OF THE TEN YEAR CRUSADE

In 2004–2005, 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.

In 1953 Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, initiated a decade-long plan to spread the Faith around the world, which he described as an “historic, spiritual venture, at once arduous, audacious, challenging, unprecedented in scope and character in the entire field of Bahá'í history.”¹ Known as the Ten Year Crusade, the plan called upon Bahá'ís to travel to those nations and territories that had not yet been “opened” to the Faith. Individuals arose to serve with selfless devotion, enduring many hardships and winning many victories for their beloved Cause.

As Bahá'ís journeyed to the far reaches of the globe in order to share Bahá'u'lláh's unifying message and assist in the development of their new communities, this decade proved to be a dynamic period for the expansion of the Faith. These steadfast volunteers were responsible, in just 10 years, for increasing the number of National Spiritual Assemblies around the world from 12 to 56. Shoghi Effendi bestowed the accolade “Knight of Bahá'u'lláh” upon the individuals who first established the Faith in these virgin territories.

Among the many countries settled by Bahá'ís in 1954–1955 were Samoa and the Solomon Islands in the Pacific, Botswana and

Burundi in Africa, and Monaco in Europe. The 50th anniversary festivities that were commemorated this year gave believers an opportunity to come together in celebration and to reflect on the history and progress of the Faith in their countries. The following presents highlights from the golden jubilees celebrated around the globe during 2004–2005.²

Africa

BOTSWANA

The minister of local government of Botswana, Dr. Margaret Nasha, commended the activities of the Bahá'í community and its efforts to “further the development of Botswana along moral and ethical lines” when she addressed its golden jubilee held 10 to 12 December 2004. The event brought together 370 participants from Australia, Canada, Chile, India, and the United States, as well as many nearby African countries.

Half a century ago, however, attempts to carry on Bahá'í activities based on the Faith's fundamental principle of the oneness of mankind received no such official endorsement. Until independence in 1966, Botswana, then known as the Bechuanaland Protectorate, was administered from Mafikeng in apartheid South Africa. As such, Mafikeng was subject to strictly imposed conditions of racial segregation, and the Bahá'ís of Botswana had to meet under the cover of darkness.

At the jubilee, Lally Lucretia Warren described her childhood in apartheid-era Bechuanaland and her introduction to the Faith by the Robarts family. Bahá'í pioneers from Canada, John and Audrey Robarts, along with their son Patrick and daughter Nina, brought the Faith to Bechuanaland in 1954. Mr. and Mrs. Robarts and their son each received the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, and Mr. Robarts was later named a Hand of the Cause of God.

Mrs. Warren was 10 years old when the Robarts family would come to her house for meetings with her parents, James and Stella Moncho, the first local couple to become Bahá'ís. “They could only do this at night, and as they came towards the house they would switch their [car] lights on and off to say, ‘Is it OK, is it safe, can we come?’” said Mrs. Warren, who served as a member of the Conti-



Botswana government minister Dr. Margaret Nasha (center) arrives for the jubilee celebrations with the vice-chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Botswana, Sheila Barongwi (left), and Assembly member Esther Moncho.

mental Board of Counsellors in Africa from 1985 to 2000. "There was no electricity in the black area during those days so my mother would take a lantern and stick it out through the window and wave it to say, 'OK, it's safe for you to come.'"

Nina Roberts, who was a teenager at the time, told the jubilee participants about the drama of those nights. "When we saw the lantern, that was the most glorious sight for us. It meant we were going to see our African friends that night," said Ms. Roberts, who now lives in Canada.

A message written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the jubilee participants said that “this historic event, at which the shining spirit and soul-stirring exploits of the early believers will be recalled, will surely inspire the friends to arise with renewed dedication to bring the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the indigenous peoples of your beloved country.”

Among the other “soul-stirring exploits” described at the jubilee was the way Mr. and Mrs. Robarts were able to present the Faith to local people. They befriended Modiri Molema, a highly respected medical doctor and the only black man who was permitted to associate with whites. Dr. Molema invited his friends and family to hear about the Bahá'í Faith, and he gave the Robarts family letters of introduction to the *dikgosi* (traditional chiefs) of the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Dr. Molema accepted the Faith, but his enrolment was not made public because of likely harassment due to his previous high-profile political involvement. In 1955 his relative, Stanlake Kukama, became the first native Tswana of Bechuanaland to become a publicly declared Bahá'í.

Mr. Kukama, who attended the jubilee celebrations, said he had been an anti-apartheid activist and was a member of the South African political party, the African National Congress. He said he had detested white people because of their attitude towards Africans, but that changed when he heard about the Bahá'í Faith from the Robarts family. “In 1955 I heard of the Bahá'í Faith,” Mr. Kukama said, “and [found] the principles of the Faith were the solution to [achieve] peace and harmony for mankind.”

The African National Congress tried to woo back Mr. Kukama for many years without success. The police kept him under surveillance even after he became a Bahá'í because they did not believe that he had given up partisan politics. Mr. Kukama later served for many years as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Bophuthatswana and of South Africa.

Other early Bahá'ís present at the jubilee celebrations included Goitsemodimo Bolokang, Gaolebale Komanyane, Mothusiotsile Matabane, Esther Moncho (a member of the first National Spiritual Assembly), and Michael Nthau.

The participants made fond mention of others who had contributed significantly to the Botswana Bahá'í community but were unable to attend the jubilee, such as former member of the Continental Board of Counsellors Shidan Fat'he-Aazam, and a Bahá'í from the United States, Jeff Gruber, who organized the translation of many of the Bahá'í writings into the local language of Setswana and who personally translated Bahá'í scripture into several Bushman languages.

At the jubilee celebration, member of the Continental Board of Counsellors Enos Makhele spoke about the significance of the Bahá'í history in Botswana and the achievements and future plans of the community. There are 30 Local Spiritual Assemblies in the country, and Bahá'ís can be found in several hundred villages and other localities.

Bahá'í choirs from the villages of Oodi and Tlokweng, as well as the National Jubilee Choir and the Swaziland Bahá'í youth choir provided uplifting entertainment, and a dramatic presentation by a group of Bahá'í youth portrayed traditional and modern aspects of cultural life in Botswana.

BURUNDI

In a country that has endured many years of harrowing conflicts, the golden jubilee of the establishment of the Faith in Burundi was a time to reflect on principles of unity and peace.

The country has suffered terribly from the sustained violence that erupted in 1993. Bahá'ís have been among those killed during the fighting, and many others have fled to neighboring countries. The community has also suffered in other ways, experiencing the destruction of several regional Bahá'í centers. Despite the difficulties, the Bahá'ís of Burundi have opened their activities to the wider public, providing participants with spiritual solace, a respite from their sorrows, and a vision of a united, peaceful future.

In a message to the Bahá'ís of Burundi on the occasion of the jubilee, the Universal House of Justice expressed its wish that “this historic gathering may be a source of inspiration to the friends as they endeavor to further advance the Cause of God in Burundi.”

Other congratulatory messages arrived from a former member of the Universal House of Justice, Mr. 'Alí Nakhjavání, and his



A dance troupe that performed at the jubilee celebrations in Burundi in August, 2004.

wife, Violette, and from the Continental Board of Counsellors in Africa.

During the celebrations, held at the national Bahá'í center in Nyakabiga, Bujumbura, from 27 to 28 August 2004, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Africa, Ahmad Parsa, spoke about the important role the Burundi Bahá'í community has played in this region. "Despite all the difficulties in Burundi, the Bahá'ís could keep their ideals and continue working for all the people of the country without any distinction," Mr. Parsa said.

Mr. Parsa said many residents of Burundi who were originally from Rwanda and the Congo region became Bahá'ís in Burundi and then returned to their homelands where they have contributed to the Bahá'í communities and the wider society there.

The jubilee gathering was also a time to hear about the history of the Faith in the country.

The Faith came to Burundi in 1953 when Mary and Reginald (Rex) Collison from the United States and Dunduzu Chisiza, a young Bahá'í from Malawi (then Nyasaland), arrived in Ruanda-Urundi (now the independent countries of Rwanda and Burundi).

The Collisons, a retired couple, had previously rendered many services in their Bahá'í community in New York, through extensive travels in the United States, and in Uganda.

Mr. Chisiza was their interpreter in Ruanda-Urundi. Government policies required the Collisons and Mr. Chisiza to leave the country some 18 months after their arrival, but by the time of their departure, there were about 20 Bahá'ís in the country. The first person to accept the Bahá'í teachings there was Selemani Bin Kimbulu, of Congolese origin from Bukavu. For establishing the Bahá'í community in Ruanda-Urundi, Shoghi Effendi named Mr. and Mrs. Collison and Mr. Chisiza Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.

At the jubilee celebrations, one of the first Bahá'ís of Burundi, Fidele Simwakira, age 75, spoke about his recollections of the early days of the Faith in the country. Jubilee participants also enjoyed artistic presentations, including poetry and traditional dances performed by a group from Kinama.

Mr. Bin Kimbulu, the country's first Bahá'í, who now lives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was unable to attend the festivities because the border was closed. However, his grandson, Sylvestre Kitenge, was present as a member of the choir that entertained jubilee participants. Others who addressed the jubilee gathering about the history of the community were Zuruzuru Ezekiel, Barbara and David Sunstrum, and Jean Baptiste Habimana.

CAPE VERDE

In January 1954 Howard and JoAnne Menking decided to leave their home in the United States to introduce the Bahá'í Faith to Cape Verde, then a poverty-stricken Portuguese colony. The Menkings left Cape Verde in 1959 after the local Bahá'í community was established. A half-century later, in November 2004, Mr. Menking returned for the jubilee celebrations of that community, accompanied by his daughter and grandson.

Mr. Menking, now 79, told participants at the jubilee festivities held on 18 November 2004 about the challenging conditions and



Some of the participants at the jubilee celebrations of the Cape Verde islands.

slow progress of the Faith on the islands in 1954. In fact, so barren were the results of the Menkings' initial efforts to interest local people in the Bahá'í Faith that Mr. Menking wrote to Shoghi Effendi and asked about the wisdom of staying there when the needs of the Bahá'ís were so urgent on the mainland of Africa. Shoghi Effendi replied that victories in a difficult post were more meritorious than those easily won, and from that point onward the fortunes of the Faith in Cape Verde improved.

The first local person to become a Bahá'í was a good friend of Howard Menking, named Frutuoso (meaning "fruitful"). Others soon followed him into the Faith, including Claremundo (a name meaning "the light of the world"), Inacio Barbosa Amado, Avalino Barros, Octavio Brito, and Antonio Leon. By April 1956 there were enough Bahá'ís in Praia to form the first Local Spiritual Assembly. Three years later the Menkings returned to the United States, having each been awarded the distinction Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for their efforts.

At the jubilee festivities the chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Praia, Manuel Jesus Moreno, spoke about the history of the

Faith in Cape Verde. Cristina Menking addressed the participants on her Bahá'í experiences in Cape Verde and on the role of women and the importance of family life, and two members of the Continental Board of Counsellors also spoke to the gathering.

Also present were representatives of the Bahá'í community of Portugal, Aminullah Shahidian and Varqa Carlos Jalali. Dr. Jalali addressed the gathering about the aims and purposes of the Bahá'í Faith.

A photographic exhibition included photographs of the first Bahá'í institutions in Cape Verde, the early Bahá'ís, distinguished Bahá'í visitors to the country, and current activities of the Bahá'í community.

The National Radio of Cape Verde and Croule FM, a private radio station, broadcast coverage of the jubilee. Three newspapers of Cape Verde, *Expresso das Ilhas*, *Horizonte*, and *A Semana*, published articles about the celebrations.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

When Elise Lynelle arrived in this West African country in 1954 to introduce the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, she faced two major obstacles. The first was a restriction on free association between whites and blacks. The second was that she was allowed only a one-month visa, barely enough time to get settled, let alone explain the teachings of a world religion.

Nevertheless, she was able to help establish the Faith in this country, then known as Spanish Guinea, and was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for her efforts. Fifty years later, she described those early days to participants in the jubilee celebrations, which the Bahá'í community held here from 20 to 21 August 2004.

A young journalist from the United States, Ms. Lynelle (then Elise Schreiber) arrived in Bata, Spanish Guinea, on 17 May 1954. While in Bata, Ms. Lynelle was unable to make contact with black Africans because of restrictions on association between the races, and any new religion was frowned upon. However, a Spaniard, José Ramos Espinosa, accepted the Faith.

With Mr. Espinosa's help, Ms. Lynelle joined a group of surveyors who were traveling in the colony looking for places to build lighthouses. In June 1954, she sailed with them to the island of Co-



Bahá'ís in Oveng, Equatorial Guinea.

risco, where she met the elderly king of the island, Santiago Uganda Mdelo and his nephew, Edward Robinson, both of whom readily accepted the Bahá'í teachings. King Uganda told Ms. Lynelle that he had had a premonition about someone who would come to him with a message.

Returning to the country for the first time in 50 years, Ms. Lynelle said she was impressed by the changes that had taken place in Equatorial Guinea and the progress of the Bahá'í community, which now has four Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Other speakers at the jubilee festivities to describe the early days were Alberto Ntutumu, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Equatorial Guinea, and Miguel Bielo, a member of the Auxiliary Board. Also present was José Maria Fierro Cueto (also known as Dr. Pepe), who came from Mexico to Equatorial Guinea in the 1980s to assist the Bahá'í community. Some prominent officials attended the celebrations, including the Health Minister, Dr. Justino Obama Nve.

A slide presentation about the history of the Faith paid tribute to other early members of the community, among them Joseph Enonguene and Johanna Ngompex, who came from Cameroon in the 1960s. Theatrical and musical presentations entertained the participants, a highlight being traditional dances by members of the biggest tribe of Equatorial Guinea, the Fang.

The national television channel, RTV (Radio Television Malabo), covered the event. A monthly magazine, *La Gazeta*, later published an article about the celebrations.

GHANA

“Spiritual Solutions for Social and Economic Problems” was the theme of the celebrations held from 27 to 29 August 2004 to commemorate the establishment of the Faith in Ghana 50 years ago. “I sincerely believe that the theme chosen for this celebration is to engender our whole society to reflect on the principle that human nature is fundamentally spiritual,” Kwaku Agyeman Manu, the Deputy Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, told participants at the Bahá’í jubilee celebration. “I urge the rest of us who are non-Bahá’ís to exhibit some of the good principles of religious humility, to examine the noble principles of the Bahá’í teachings,” he said.

During the past 50 years, the Bahá’ís of Ghana have been active in social and economic development programs. A recent example is the work of the Olinga Foundation for Human Development, founded in 1999, which has been involved in promoting literacy and moral education classes in primary and junior secondary schools in rural areas of Ghana. In the Western region of the country, for example, more than 5,000 children in 150 schools participate in such classes with the help of the foundation.

Part of the jubilee was the awarding of prizes in a student essay competition organized by the Bahá’í community. Students throughout Ghana were asked to discuss four principles shared by at least four of the world’s main religions. On behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Ghana, Thelma Khelgati, a former member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa, congratulated the winners and handed out the prizes.



Two of the Bahá'ís who introduced the Faith to Ghana, David Tanyi (standing) and Benedict Eballa (left), with Samuel Njiki, one of those who took the Faith to Cameroon, 1954.

A special feature of the celebrations was the launching of the book titled *Conquering the Hearts: A Brief History of the Bahá'í Faith in Ghana 1951–1995*. Introducing the book, Diana Heymann-Adu, the managing director of Meridian FM radio station, said that “the

Bahá'í Faith has much appeal and relevance to the modern world" and that the book, which tells about the lives of the early Bahá'ís in Ghana, will offer insights to future generations.

The Bahá'í teachings were first brought to Ghana (then under British rule and called the Gold Coast) in 1951 when Ethel Robertson Stephens, an African-American Bahá'í from Virginia, came to Accra. Mrs. Stephens stayed one year in the Gold Coast. In the early 1950s Bahá'í pioneers established Bahá'í communities in the Northern Territories, Ashanti Protectorate, and British Togoland. Those three regions, together with the Gold Coast, became the independent nation of Ghana in 1957.

Among the first Bahá'ís in those three regions were three young Bahá'ís from Cameroon, Benedict Eballa (Ashanti Protectorate), Edward Tabe (British Togoland), and Martin Manga (Northern Territories). Other pioneers were Julius Edwards, a Jamaican from Liberia (Northern Territories), and the first Bahá'í from the Gold Coast, Albert Buapiah (British Togoland). For their services in establishing Bahá'í communities in these regions the five men later received the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

Another Cameroonian Bahá'í who assisted the Bahá'í community in Ghana in the early days was David Tanyi. In 1954, Mr. Tanyi was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for introducing the Bahá'í Faith to Togo (then French Togoland). In 1957, he moved to Tamale (Northern Territories), and with his wife, Esther, and their children, remained in Ghana for more than three decades. Today the Bahá'í community has 63 Local Spiritual Assemblies.

During the three days of festivities, participants enjoyed a variety of artistic performances, including presentations by the local Bahá'í youth choir, Flight 009, and songs and dances by the Bawdie Bahá'í youth group. Other musical performers included George Olinga of Uganda and Ekua Mensah from the United States. Some of the first believers, among them Blanche Fredua-Agyemang, Emmanuel Budu, Ernest Bentsil, and Prince Abaidoo, gave accounts of the early years of the Faith in Ghana. After the celebrations, participants said prayers at the gravesites of two of the early believers, Joseph Musah and Beattie Casely-Hayford.

GAMBIA

The Bahá'í community of Gambia celebrated its golden jubilee from 24 to 26 December 2004. The festivities coincided with the opening of a new national Bahá'í center in the coastal town of Bakau, about 10 kilometers from the capital.

Among the 200 people attending the opening and dedication ceremony of the national center, held on 24 December 2004, were representatives of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim communities. Also present were the nation's solicitor-general, Raymond Sock; the headman (Alkalo) of Bakau, Alhaji Luntung Jaiteh; a representative of the local mayor of Kanifing municipality; and other dignitaries.

Bahá'í participants came from remote areas of Gambia, from Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal, and other countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America.

An uplifting performance by the Dakar Bahá'í choir opened the dedication ceremony, followed by the reading of messages from the National Spiritual Assembly and other Bahá'í institutions around the world. Precious gifts from the beleaguered Bahá'í community in Iran were presented and gratefully received.

The keynote speaker was Wendi Momen, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom, who first went to Gambia in 1976 as a doctoral researcher. The ceremony continued with a performance by Les Etincelles, a Bahá'í dance troupe from Dakar, displays of books and historical photographs, and a celebratory dinner.

The center will provide a venue for administrative and devotional meetings, study circles, children's classes, and social and economic development programs such as free computer lessons for the public.

The program for the jubilee celebrations, which began on 25 December 2004, opened with performances on the *balafon* (African xylophone). The history of the Faith in Gambia was told in both the Wolof and English languages, followed by a performance by the Bahá'í choir, the Nightingales of Gambia.

The story of the introduction of the Bahá'í Faith to Gambia by Fariborz Ruzbehyan was told by his grandson, Iraj Sarvian, who came from the United States for the jubilee celebrations.



In Gambia in 1971, the Hand of the Cause of God 'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum (third from left), actively assisted in the election of village Spiritual Assemblies. She is pictured here at the National Convention of Upper West Africa.

Mr. Ruzbehyan arrived in Gambia on 19 February 1954 and was subsequently named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. Shortly after his arrival, suffering greatly from asthma and fever, Mr. Ruzbehyan had to be admitted to a hospital. His seeming misfortune turned into delight when he was able to introduce the Faith to a fellow patient, Nelson Ethan Thomas, who soon became the first indigenous Bahá'í.

During his two years in Gambia, Mr. Ruzbehyan saw 300 people accept the Bahá'í teachings and helped with the elections of six Local Spiritual Assemblies. He returned briefly in 1957 and purchased a house in Serkeunda to serve as a Bahá'í center.

Other historical accounts at the festivities came from Bahá'ís who had left other countries to settle in Gambia and from Bahá'ís who had visited as traveling teachers of the Faith.

They recalled the dedicated service of many Bahá'ís who had since died, and recounted anecdotes of their experiences. Among the Bahá'ís recalled with great affection was a dedicated pioneer from Ghana, Yaw Asare, who served on the National Spiritual Assembly and passed away in a tragic accident in 1992. The first Gambian



A traditional dance from Gatenga was one of the presentations that prompted joyous participants in the jubilee festivities of the Rwandan Bahá'í community to join the performers on the stage.

woman to be elected to the National Spiritual Assembly, Ramatoulie Dem, was warmly remembered by her granddaughter.

RWANDA

The jubilee festivities in Rwanda were a major victory in the history of the Bahá'í community in that country, a speaker told the participants at the celebrations. Uzziel Mihembezo, one of the early Bahá'ís of Rwanda, said that the event was proof that despite the genocide in 1994, the Bahá'í community continues to grow. Many Bahá'ís were among the 800,000 to perish during the violence, and many others fled the country. However, the community is thriving, with 28 Local Spiritual Assemblies and Bahá'ís living in 106 localities.

In a congratulatory message to the Rwandan Bahá'ís on the occasion of the 50th anniversary celebrations, the Universal House of Justice wrote: “We cannot help but marvel at the progress the Cause of God has made in that land and express our humble gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh for bestowing His healing Message upon the sorely tried peoples of that country.”

The official guest speaker at the festivities, Ndigabo Francois, a government official of Nyagisagara, praised the Bahá'í community

for its efforts to build unity and understanding between Rwandans of different ethnic backgrounds. Those efforts include a statement in March 2000 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Rwanda to the National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation in which the Assembly urged that consideration be given to making the principle of the oneness of humanity the basis for reconciliation in the country.

The jubilee celebrations began on 11 December 2004 in Kigali and continued the following day in the village of Nyagisagara, 100 kilometers from the capital city. The 450 participants at the jubilee celebrations came from different regions of Rwanda, as well as from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Zimbabwe. Entertainment included Bahá'í choirs and dance troupes from Cyangugu, Gatenga, Goma, and Kigali that performed traditional and modern dances.

Among those recounting stories to the gathering about the early days of the Bahá'í community were Kitoko Mangili, now the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, Uzziel Mihembezo, and Isaac Ngwijebese.

The message of the Bahá'í Faith was introduced to Rwanda (formerly part of Ruanda-Urundi) in 1953 by Mary and Reginald (Rex) Collison, a retired couple from the United States, and Dunduzu Chisiza, a young Bahá'í from Malawi (then Nyasaland), all of whom were designated Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. Other members of the early Rwandan Bahá'í community included the late Alphonse Semanyenzi and a medical doctor, Dr. Ataollah Taaïd, who came with his wife, Zahereh, to assist in the development of the Bahá'í community.

After becoming a Bahá'í, Mr. Semanyenzi worked at Dr. Taaïd's clinic in Kigali. In 1972, he was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Rwanda. He also served as an interpreter during the visits in 1972 and 1973 by 'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khá-num, a Hand of the Cause of God.

Journalists from eight newspapers and magazines and from the Rwanda National Radio and Radio Flash FM covered the event. The three main newspapers in the country, one in French, one in English, and one in Kinyarwanda, published articles about the jubilee.

SWAZILAND

Members of the royal family and other dignitaries praised the Bahá'í community at celebrations marking the 50th jubilee of the Bahá'í Faith in Swaziland. "The contribution of the Bahá'í Faith in Swaziland is highly commendable," said Zephania Hlatjwako, the principal secretary to Prince Gabheni, the Minister of Home Affairs. Mr. Hlatjwako made his comment at the National Library in Mbabane as he opened an exhibition of photographs depicting the early Bahá'ís in Swaziland.

"The Bahá'ís have established an educational complex in Malagwane hill [in Mbabane] which strives to provide excellent academic and moral education at pre-primary, primary, and high school levels," Mr. Hlatjwako said. The school, founded in 1990, has more than 850 enrollments this year. Students sit their examinations under the Cambridge international examinations system. Another example of the Bahá'í contribution to education is the Tarbiyat School in Manzini. This institution assists pupils who have difficulties in regular schools, with a curriculum that focuses on moral education, youth enrichment, computer literacy, and HIV/AIDS prevention. There are four other Bahá'í schools in Swaziland.

The jubilee celebrations, held from 11 to 16 May 2004, featured presentations on the history of the Swaziland Bahá'í community, which now has 24 Local Spiritual Assemblies. The event was rich in cultural entertainment. The Swaziland Bahá'í choir sang and a local Bahá'í youth dance troupe gave performances inspired by Bahá'í principles. Thoz Nomvete and Crispin Pemberton-Pigott performed a song written for the occasion with lyrics about the history of the Faith in Swaziland. Guests received a color booklet produced for the jubilee, depicting the major events in the history of the Swaziland Bahá'í community.

Some 600 participants, who came from Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and the United States enjoyed a traditional feast, known as *braai*, which was held at the Bahá'í center. Some longtime Bahá'ís, including Ben Dlamini, Chuck Ducker, and Jacob Mdluli, told touching stories about the first Bahá'ís in Swaziland, Bula Mott Stewart and John and Valera Allen.

Ms. Stewart arrived in Swaziland from the United States on 11 April 1954 and was designated a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. She spent six



Maina Mkandawire (left), member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa, and Eva Mnisi wearing traditional dress at the jubilee celebrations in Swaziland.

weeks in that country and later moved to South Africa to serve the Faith. On 19 April 1954, John and Valera Allen, also from the United States, arrived in the country to help establish the Bahá'í community, and they, too, were named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.

Mr. and Mrs. Allen were both elected to the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Mbabane in 1955. In 1959, Mrs. Allen was elected to the National Assembly of South and West Africa and served as secretary. Later Mr. Allen served as the chairman of the first National Spiritual Assembly of Swaziland, when it formed in 1971.

Among the first local people to become Bahá'ís were Isaiah Phala, a teacher, and his wife, Jemima. Others to follow were Ben Dlamini, Chris Kuhlase, Andrew Mofokeng, Maxwell Ndlovu, and some of

the children of the late King Sobhuza II, including Princess Gcinaphi, a medical doctor and ardent promoter of Bahá'í principles.

On several occasions, Bahá'ís met the king, who often assured them of his support for the Bahá'í community. A tribute to him was offered at the jubilee by Beth Allen, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa.

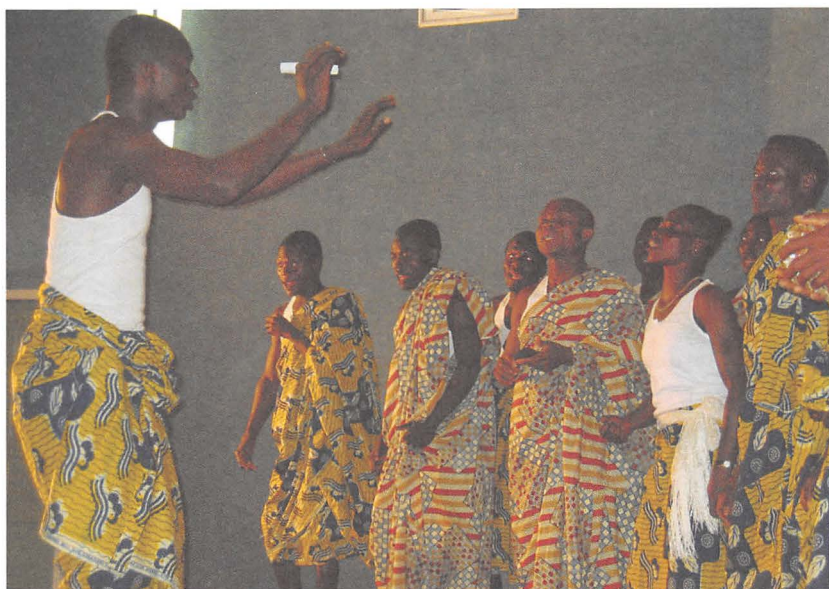
Representatives of King Mswati III and the Queen Mother were present at the jubilee festivities, a sign of the continuing good relations between Swaziland's royal family and the Bahá'í community. A message from the king was read on his behalf by his brother, Prince Phinda, a member of the Swaziland National Council, in which he praised the Bahá'í community's efforts in educational and agricultural projects and their "active participation in and contribution to the welfare of the Swazi nation."

Several newspapers reported extensively on the jubilee, among them *The Nation* monthly magazine and the *Weekend Observer*. Radio Swaziland broadcast several talks on the Faith, both in English and the local language, SiSwati.

TOGO

A message from one of the Bahá'ís who introduced the Bahá'í Faith to Togo was a highlight of the jubilee celebrations, held from 20 to 22 August 2004 in Lomé and Djidjole. "I love you all so much, pray for your spiritual growth and that you may continue in faith and teaching the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh—the Cause of God," wrote Mavis Nymon, 82, who now lives in the United States and was unable to attend the celebrations in this West African country.

Ms. Nymon, originally from Fargo, North Dakota, was 32 years old when she and 59-year-old Vivian Wesson of Chicago, Illinois, took the message of the Bahá'í Faith to what was then called French Togoland, arriving on 2 May 1954. In her letter, which was read to the jubilee participants, she vividly described their dramatic landing by large dugout canoe in Ghana and their subsequent night journey across the border, ending with their arrival in the capital city of Lomé just before midnight. In her letter, Ms. Nymon described the help she and Mrs. Wesson received from Togolese people and how, about one month after their arrival, they met another Bahá'í there, David Tanyi, from Cameroon. For introducing the Bahá'í teach-



The Yoyovi Kondji choir from Togo at the jubilee festivities.



Performers from Korbongon at the national Bahá'í convention, Togo, 2000.

ings to French Togoland, the three received the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

Fifty years after their arrival, the Faith is established in 665 localities and there are 108 Local Spiritual Assemblies. Later, Ms. Nymon and Mrs. Wesson moved to Liberia to assist the Bahá'í community there.

More than 300 participants from 20 countries gathered in the capital city of Togo to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bahá'í community. Throughout the celebrations youth groups and choirs provided entertainment. A message from the National Spiritual Assembly described the early days of the Togo Bahá'í community and named those who first accepted the message of the Faith there, including Emmanuel Ocloo, Bruno Adjakly, Samuel Ggogbo, Michel Kokou, Negble Attigah, and the first Togolese woman to become a Bahá'í, Patience Adjakly.

An integral part of the jubilee was a regional Bahá'í youth conference, the main theme of which was “unity in diversity.” Performances came from the Henri Montra dance group, La Voix de l'Unité (Voices of Unity) choir of Djidjole, a choir from Yoyovi Kondji, the Rossignols d'Akká (Nightingales of Akká) choir, and a



Some of the participants at a gathering at the port of Keelung commemorating the anniversary of the arrival in 1954 of early members of the Taiwanese Bahá'í community, Mr. and Mrs. Suleimani.

dance group from Niamey, Niger. Presentations were given on the history of the Bahá'í Faith in Togo, and a slideshow brought back memories of the early days. The jubilee received extensive coverage in the local and national media.

The event was covered by Television Togolaise (a national television channel), Radio Lomé (a national radio station), the *Grand Quotidien National d'Information Togo-Presse* (a national daily newsletter), and other private news services.

Asia

TAIWAN

A joyous event held in Tainan, Taiwan, from 22 to 24 October 2004 marked the 50th anniversary of the arrival in Taiwan of Suleiman and Ridvaniyyih Suleimani, a Persian couple who heeded the call for volunteers to move to the island to support the fledgling Bahá'í community there. The Suleimanis arrived on 22 October 1954, when there were only 10 Bahá'ís on the island. They remained in Taiwan for the rest of their lives as stalwart members of the Bahá'í community. Following in their footsteps over the decades, Bahá'ís came from a range of countries to help local members develop the Taiwanese Bahá'í community. When the Suleimanis passed away, Mrs. Suleimani in 1981 and Mr. Suleimani in 1989, they bequeathed their home to the Faith, which now serves as the Bahá'í center for this thriving community.

On 21 October 2004, a group of Bahá'ís held a prayer gathering at the port of Keelung, where the Suleimanis first arrived. The next day more than 100 Bahá'ís from Taiwan, as well as guests from the United States, attended a morning devotional meeting at the Bahá'í center, during which prayers and selections from the Bahá'í writings were read, chanted, and sung. Musicians played the flute, guitar, and piano. The afternoon session included reading of congratulatory messages from the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Hawaii, Hong Kong, and the United States. A representative of the city's mayoral office also brought greetings to the participants.

A video presentation featured excerpts from the diary kept by Mr. Suleimani. Some Taiwanese Bahá'ís who remembered the couple



Left: Dr. Adelbert Mühlischlegel, a Hand of the Cause (second from right), with King Sobhuza II (center). Others pictured (left to right) are Helen Wilks, Mrs. Mühlischlegel, an aide to the King, and Valera Allen (far right).



Right: James and Stella Moncho, in 1986, the first Bahá'ís in Botswana (then known as the Bechuanaland Protectorate). Below right: Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for Togo, Mavis Nymon, in 1956.



Above: David Tanyi (back row, fourth from left in white shirt) with Bahá'ís in Tamale, Northern Ghana, in 1960. Below: Participants at the third convention of the Bahá'ís of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji, in 1961.





Above left: Musicians performing at the golden jubilee of the Bahá'í community of Burundi. Above right: Dancers who performed at the Rwandan Bahá'í jubilee festivities in Nyagisagara.



Above: Friends reunited at the Botswana Bahá'í jubilee celebration: Nina Robarts (left) and Lally Warren. Below left: Some of the children at the jubilee festivities in Togo. Below right: Members of the Fijian Bahá'í community planting a Norfolk Island pine to commemorate the early Fijian Bahá'ís.



Above: Samoan men bearing torches during a jubilee reception at the residence of the Head of State.



shared stories and fond reminiscences. After a feast including Persian and Chinese dishes, there was a family fun night characterized by music, singing, dancing, stories, and laughter. The next morning Bahá'ís gathered for prayers at the hilltop gravesite of Mr. and Mrs. Suleimani.

Australasia

FIJI

One Bahá'í community in Australasia that can trace its origins back long before the Ten Year Crusade is Fiji, which marked its 80th anniversary in 2004. Fijian Bahá'ís planted trees in honor of the occasion



Participants at the first regional convention of the Bahá'ís of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, in 1959. Hand of the Cause of God Collis Featherstone is at rear, fifth from left. A member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, Tinai Hancock of Fiji, is seated in the front row, fourth from left. Irene Jackson (later Mrs. Williams) is at front row, left.



A traditional meke (dance) from Lau being performed at the Fijian Bahá'í anniversary celebrations.

and as a tribute to the Bahá'ís in Fiji and Iran. Four trees, each a different type of Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria*) from different Pacific countries, were planted at the Bahá'í compound in Suva.

"A Norfolk pine from Australia signifies the services of Irene Jackson Williams, who came here in the mid 1950s to assist the Bahá'ís," said Kim Bowden-Kerby, the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Fiji.

"Another type of *Araucaria*, which can only be found in Fiji, stands in memory of the first Fijian Bahá'ís," she said.

"An *Araucaria* from Papua New Guinea was planted at the national Bahá'í center to mark the 80th anniversary of the Faith in Fiji and one, a Cook pine from New Caledonia, for those Bahá'ís who have been martyred in Iran."

Norfolk Island pines, distinguished by their height, beauty, and symmetry, are well known by Bahá'ís for gracing the approaches to the holiest places in the Bahá'í world, the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and the Shrine of the Báb in the Holy Land.

The plantings took place at the anniversary festivities, which were held from 12 to 15 November 2004. Present at the festivities were some longstanding members of the community including Victor

Williams, Aisea Aisake (the first Rotuman Bahá'í), Apisai Matau, Yee Wah Sing (the first Fijian Chinese Bahá'í), and Lepani Vakaloloma. They spoke about the early days of the Faith in Fiji and shared stories about their first encounters with the Bahá'í teachings. Among the official guests at the celebrations was Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, who subsequently became Vice-President of Fiji.

During those celebrations, Fiji-based historian Graham Hassall addressed participants about the history of the Fijian Bahá'í community and the individuals who played an important role in establishing it. Dr. Hassall highlighted the contributions of Irene Jackson (later Mrs. Williams), a Bahá'í from Australia, who arrived in Suva on 21 March 1954. Ms. Jackson, who worked as a bookkeeper in the capital, was soon elected as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Suva and served as its secretary. In 1959, when the first Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the South Pacific was formed, Ms. Jackson was elected secretary. Today there are 21 Local Spiritual Assemblies in Fiji, and Bahá'ís live in more than 80 localities.

A New Zealand Bahá'í, Nora Lee, had lived in Fiji from 1924 to about 1930, and before Ms. Jackson's arrival there were already a number of staunch Bahá'ís in the country. Among the Bahá'ís who visited in the early days were Loulie Matthews and Alvin and Gertrude Blum. Among the first Fijians to accept the Faith were Nur and Violet Ali and Wali and Zainab Khan.

The celebrations were rich in music and dance. The Bahá'ís of the Lau Islands danced a traditional meke, while a youth group from the island of Rabi and a Bahá'í choir sang songs. The performance of a Nasinu youth troupe included European, Fijian, and Indian dances.

Following the public ceremony there was a joyous two-day celebration in the Bahá'í compound where Bahá'ís from all over Fiji shared stories and joined in group singing.

The *Fiji Times*, one of the mostly widely read dailies in the country, published an article about the anniversary festivities.

MARIANA ISLANDS

On 2 May 2004, the Bahá'ís of the Mariana Islands celebrated the arrival of Cynthia and Edgar Olson, the Bahá'í couple from Delaware,



The first Local Spiritual Assembly in the Marianas, 1956. At rear, left, is Robert Powers. At front, left, is Joe Ilengelkei. Cynthia and Edgar Olson are standing, second and third from right.

in the United States, who brought the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to them 50 years ago. The dramatic story of the Olsons was recounted at the gravesite of Mrs. Olson, who passed away in 1988.

The Olsons arrived in Guam in 1954, and from that foundation the Bahá'í Faith has spread across the four inhabited islands of the archipelago, located in the Pacific Ocean. At the time of the Olsons' arrival, the Mariana Islands were still a military area, controlled exclusively by the US Navy, and security clearance was required even for short-term visitors. Cynthia Olson came first, completing the last leg of her 12,000-kilometer journey on a rare civilian Pan Am flight, having convinced the Navy that she could be useful on Guam. Meanwhile, Edgar had stayed behind to close up their store and was anxiously awaiting word of her safe arrival. She landed on 2 May 1954 and sent a cable the next morning, which was immediately read to a cheering audience at the US Bahá'í National

Convention. She was named a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh as the first Bahá'í to reach the Marianas.

In her memoirs, Mrs. Olson wrote about the first Bahá'í Feast on Guam, when she and Robert Powers, a young Bahá'í sailor who had been posted there temporarily, said prayers and had a picnic at the water's edge in the southern village of Inarajan. Mr. Powers also received the title Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.

Her first job was as host of a popular daily program called "Women's World" at the islands' only commercial radio station. Edgar, widely known as "Olie," followed a year later and also became a TV executive and presenter. In addition, the couple opened a popular Swedish pancake house on the island, which later functioned as a Bahá'í center for the community. The Olsons quickly fell in love with the friendliness and generosity of the indigenous people, the Chamorros. Other ethnic groups there include Filipinos, Micronesians, Asians, and a tiny minority of US mainlanders, often called "haoles" or "statesiders."

In a message read at the commemoration event, Mrs. Madeleine Bordallo, Guam's present US congresswoman, lovingly recalled Cynthia's support and encouragement for her as a fellow radio presenter and later in Mrs. Bordallo's official role as the First Lady of Guam. "As we remember Cynthia, let us remember a lady who was kind with her words, abundant with faith and hope, and generous with her love," wrote Mrs. Bordallo.

Mrs. Olson later became a journalist for the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific, and then a supervisor responsible for arranging scholarships for island students. Many of those students, some of whom stayed in the Olsons' home, became prominent members of Guam society, including legislators, teachers, and businessmen.

The first Micronesian islander to become a Bahá'í was Joe Erie Ilengelkei, who became the ninth member of the community, allowing the formation of the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Guam on 21 April 1956. Today, the community includes seven Local Spiritual Assemblies.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The Bahá'ís of Papua New Guinea celebrated the golden jubilee of a community that includes more than 40,000 Bahá'ís living in all

19 provinces of the country. Rather than holding the festivities in a central location of this mountainous country where communities are often separated by difficult terrain, the celebrations were held at a variety of venues.

Some 700 Bahá'ís from the New Ireland region and their guests gathered on 8 May 2004 for the anniversary festivities in Madina, where in 1958 the country's first Local Spiritual Assembly was formed. There are now 252 of those nine-member local Bahá'í administrative councils spread throughout Papua New Guinea.

To mark the occasion, the local Bahá'ís built a memorial pool at the Madina Bahá'í center as a tribute to the Bahá'ís who introduced the Faith to the area. Colored lights illuminated two large stars that were placed in the middle of the pool to symbolize Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb.

The guest of honor was Rodney Hancock, who came to Papua New Guinea in July 1954 from New Zealand to help establish a Bahá'í community. Mr. Hancock addressed the participants at the jubilee



Tamun Kosep, a traditional chief and treasurer of the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Madina, Papua New Guinea (center), flanked by Rodney Hancock (left), and Jalal Mills, member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia, with other Bahá'ís at the jubilee festivities.



Violet Hoehnke with children in Papua New Guinea, 1954.

about the exemplary life of Violet Hoehnke, an Australian Bahá'í who introduced the Faith to Papua New Guinea, earning her the accolade of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, and who stayed at her pioneering post for 50 years. Confined to bed, Ms. Hoehnke was unable to attend the jubilee celebrations. She passed away one month later, on 4 June 2004, at the age of 87.³

Mr. Hancock also spoke of the difficulties of introducing the Faith in the 1950s, when the Australian administration disapproved of any friendly association between expatriates and local people. He had to obtain special permission from the government before visiting villages. It took more than a year before he and Ms. Hoehnke could introduce the Faith to the first Papua New Guinean to become a Bahá'í—Apelis Mazakmat, a teacher from Munawai village in New Ireland.

Participants at the jubilee also paid tribute to some of the other early believers who have passed away, among them Axomerang, Kelep, Romalus, Sairu, Salomie, Sanaila, and Tivien.

At the celebrations, New Ireland provincial administrator Robinson Sirimbat praised the efforts by the Bahá'í community to promote unity and understanding among the different religions in the region. Guests enjoyed a lavish traditional feast. Bahá'í choirs,

string bands, and “singsings” (traditional dancing and singing) provided the entertainment.

In Rabaul, some 600 guests arrived on 3 April 2004 at the jubilee venue, Kulau Lodge, after traveling down a road decorated with streamers, flowers, and a large banner. Donald Tulai, who grew up in Rabaul, was the master of ceremonies. Among the participants at the celebrations was Roslyn Bale, the first Papua New Guinean woman to become a Bahá’í in that area. A dance group, wearing traditional costumes and headdresses, performed a dance that told the story of the first Local Spiritual Assembly.

The local Bahá’í communities in Alotau, Baimuru, Balimo, and Pencilat will hold their jubilee celebrations later this year.

SAMOA

A royal welcome greeted participants at the “Waves of One Ocean” conference that marked the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the Bahá’í Faith to Samoa and the 20th anniversary of the opening of the Bahá’í House of Worship in Samoa. The conference, held from



The first Bahá’í Local Spiritual Assembly in Samoa, 1957.

22 to 26 September 2004, attracted some 600 Bahá'í participants from 21 countries.

The Head of State of Samoa and member of the Bahá'í Faith, His Highness Susuga Malietoa Tanumafili II, extended his greetings to the participants and expressed his joy in the many accomplishments of the Samoan Bahá'í community. The conference began with the reading of a message from the Universal House of Justice, in which it praised the Samoan Bahá'í community for its “energy, devotion, and vitality.” “Your nation has won the everlasting distinction of being blessed by the presence of His Highness Susuga Malietoa Tanumafili II, the first reigning monarch to accept the Message of Bahá'u'lláh,” the Universal House of Justice said.

Present at the jubilee banquet, held on 22 September 2004, were acting Prime Minister Fiamē Mataafa Naomi, other cabinet ministers, the chief justice, members of the diplomatic corps, and representatives of Christian churches. Welcoming the participants on behalf of the government of Samoa, Fiamē Mataafa Naomi said she acknowledged with gratitude “the continuous and unwavering service rendered by the Bahá'í Faith to Samoa and its people for the



Performers in traditional costume at the jubilee festivities in Samoa.

last 50 years.” “You have demonstrated in words and deeds that religion is the real basis of civilized life, which includes peace building, promotion of human rights, equality of men and women, education, healthcare, and sustainable development,” she said.

Among the Bahá’ís present were Lilian Wyss-Ala’i, who introduced the Faith to Samoa in 1954, and Hossein Amanat, the architect of the House of Worship. Mrs. Wyss-Ala’i, then single and aged 24, arrived in Apia, Samoa, in 1954, while her brother, Frank, introduced the Faith to the Cocos Islands. For their service, Shoghi Effendi designated both of them as Knights of Bahá’u’lláh.

Mrs. Wyss-Ala’i, who continues to reside in American Samoa, delivered an address to the conference in which she spoke of her admiration for the Samoan people and shared historical anecdotes. Today, the Bahá’í community there includes 29 Local Spiritual Assemblies.

The festivities included a traditional gift-giving ceremony, musical entertainment, the performance of a traditional dance by Samoan Bahá’í Saifale’upolu Tamasese, a dramatic performance by the Samoan Bahá’í youth dedicated to the Bahá’ís in Iran, and a Samoan dance performed by Mrs. Wyss-Ala’i.

Among gifts presented on that occasion was a traditional tapa cloth given by the Tongan Bahá’ís to Mrs. Wyss-Ala’i in memory of her late husband, Suhayl Ala’i, who served with great distinction in the region as a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors.

During a visit to the House of Worship at Tiapapata, Bahá’ís from the Samoan islands of Savai’i and Upolu performed songs and dances that depicted the arrival of the first Bahá’ís, the dedication of the Temple, and aspects of the Bahá’í teachings. A devotional service dedicated to those Bahá’ís who brought the Faith to the Pacific was held at the Temple and featured choirs from Samoa, American Samoa, Australia, Fiji, and New Zealand. Mr. Amanat delivered an address in the basement hall of the Temple.

The following day, more than 400 Bahá’ís attended a reception at the private residence of His Highness, the Malietoa. Among those present were members of the Continental Board of Counsellors, as well as representatives of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Hawaii, New Zealand, Samoa, and Tonga.

Later, members of the National Spiritual Assembly, accompanied by other members of the Bahá'í community, presented traditional gifts to the government of Samoa, which was represented by acting Prime Minister Fiaame Naomi and other cabinet ministers, including Health Minister Siafausa Mulitalo Vui, who thanked the Bahá'ís for their contributions to the country.

Bahá'ís in Samoa have made significant contributions to the well-being of the Samoan people. There are five Bahá'í preschools in Samoa—two in Savai'i and three on Upolu. Members of the Bahá'í community have been active in human rights education and have also produced a television cooking show promoting nutritional recipes.

The Bahá'ís then visited the gravesites, located on the Temple property, of Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Ugo Giachery and Mr. Ala'i. They also visited the Bahá'í cemetery and the Bahá'í Montessori school.

On 27 September, many conference participants attended a joyous picnic at a local beach.

The festivities and conference received extensive coverage by national television, radio, and Samoan newspapers, published locally and abroad.

Europe

ANDORRA

On 17 November 2004, Bahá'ís from Andorra la Vella, Spain, and France attended the jubilee festivities of the Bahá'í community of Andorra. William Danjon Dieudonne, the first Bahá'í in Andorra, read the opening prayer at the celebration.

At a conference in Stockholm in August 1953, French-born Mr. Danjon decided to answer Shoghi Effendi's call to establish the Faith in countries where there were no Bahá'ís. When a keynote Bahá'í speaker at the conference, the Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker, asked for a Bahá'í to settle in Andorra, Mr. Danjon volunteered. He left his home in Denmark and arrived in this mountainous country, located between France and Spain, on 7 October 1953, thus earning the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. "To come to Andorra was the most important decision of my life," said Mr. Danjon, who remains a resident.



William Danjon (left) meets the Prime Minister of Andorra, Marc Forne Molne, at a reception for Bahá'í representatives before the anniversary celebrations.

In 1954, he saw the first fruits of his decision when two residents of Andorra, Carmen Tost Xifre de Mingorance and her husband, José Mingorance Fernandez, joined the Faith. They remained steadfast until they passed away. Their son, José Mingorance Tost, is now chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Andorra.

Although it was difficult initially for Mr. Danjon to obtain a job, he has since held prominent positions in the media, the public service, and the Red Cross. For eight years, he represented the Andorra Trust Board in France, where he formally presented a book of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh to two French presidents, who, by virtue of their office, held the title of co-prince of Andorra.

The jubilee celebrations included a dinner; musical performances with the piano, saxophone, and cello; presentations about the history of the Andorra community; and prayers for the Bahá'ís of Andorra.



Some of the early Bahá'ís of Monaco: (seated from left to right) Guilda Navidi-Walker, Florence Ullrich-Kelley (with husband Larry Kelley), Shamsi Navidi (with granddaughter Alexandra Walker.)



An early Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Monaco.

who have passed away. Guests included representatives of Christian churches, the diplomatic corps, the Red Cross, and the media.

MONACO

More than 320 participants from 25 countries joined the Bahá'ís of Monaco to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the Bahá'í Faith in the principality, including guests from Albania, Canada, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Italy, and Uruguay.

The jubilee celebrations from 24 to 25 April 2004 were held at the Théâtre de Variétés in Monte Carlo and opened with the reading of a welcoming message from the National Council of the Principality. Present at the jubilee were members of the Continental Board of Counsellors and representatives of the National Spiritual Assemblies of France, Italy, and Switzerland. Congratulatory messages arrived from other European Bahá'í communities, and a message from the Board of Counsellors for Europe was delivered to the Monaco Bahá'í community. The president of the Monaco National Council sent representatives to the jubilee. Also present was a representative of the mayor of Monaco. To commemorate the jubilee, the postal authorities issued a special postal mark.

The celebrations featured many artistic presentations, including performances by Tunisian-born singer Hatef Sedkaoui, also known as Atef, guitarist Serge Merlaud, and pianist Francine Astani. Participants viewed slides depicting the history of the Monaco Bahá'í community, as well as a short film on the late Hand of the Cause of God Ugo Giachery, who resided in Monaco during his later years.

In September 1953, Nellie French, 85, was the first Bahá'í to arrive in Monaco, but she passed away a few months later. For her act of service in bringing the Faith to the country, she received the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh from Shoghi Effendi. Shamsi Navidi arrived from Iran in February 1954 with her daughters Vida and Guilda, followed by her husband, Aziz Navidi, a few months later. They were named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, as were Florence Ullrich (later Ullrich-Kelley), a young college graduate, and Olivia Kelsey, an accomplished Bahá'í author and poet, who arrived from the United States in March 1954.



Some of the participants at the jubilee celebrations in San Marino. Sobrab Payman and his wife, Tabandeh, who introduced the Bahá'í Faith to San Marino, are pictured at right.

Ms. Ullrich-Kelley said the Bahá'ís initially found it difficult to establish contact with the locals. However, they made the effort to learn the language and soon met people who were interested in the Faith. The first person to become a Bahá'í in Monaco was Margaret Lantz, of Luxembourg. Soon after her a Frenchman, M. Charbonnet, who owned an antique shop in Monaco, also accepted the Faith. Charlotte Campana was the first person of Monegasque nationality to become a Bahá'í. The first Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Monaco was established in 1955.

One highlight of the jubilee was the reading of a prayer in Monegasque. The guests of honor at the jubilee were former member of the Universal House of Justice, Mr. 'Alí Nakhjavání, who addressed the participants on spiritual matters, and his wife, Violette, who described the visit in the 1980s to Monaco of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, a Hand of the Cause of God and the widow of Shoghi Effendi.

SAN MARINO

Prominent government officials paid tribute to the Bahá'í community of San Marino at a gala dinner celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Bahá'í Faith in the country. The anniversary was “a very special and important occasion,” the Secretary of State for Industry, Claudio

Felici, told 100 prominent citizens of San Marino and their Bahá'í hosts at the event held on 25 September 2004. He conveyed greetings from the government and praised the Bahá'ís' efforts in human relations and their attitude towards peace.

The activities of the Faith in seeking peace and religious unity are well known in San Marino, a country surrounded by Italy, and a member of the United Nations since 1992, which lays claim to the description of "the world's oldest republic." A message read to the jubilee dinner from the captains regent, Paolo Bollini and Marino Riccardi, said, "the presence of the Bahá'í community in San Marino is of great significance and will help bring a future of certainty and peace."

A prominent member of the Italian Bahá'í community, Julio Savi, delivered an address to the gathering in which he outlined the history of the Bahá'í Faith in San Marino. Dr. Savi described how Tabandeh ("Toby") Payman of Iran was attending a Bahá'í conference in Stockholm in 1953 when she decided to introduce the Faith to San Marino as part of the Bahá'ís' 10-year plan to take the teachings around the world. Without returning to her home in Tehran, she moved directly to San Marino, where her husband, Sohrab, and their daughter Ghitty joined her some months later. They established friendships, and soon the Bahá'í ideas and principles became better known in the country.

Mr. and Mrs. Payman received the accolade of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for their service in introducing the Bahá'í Faith to San Marino. They still reside there and were honored participants at the jubilee festivities. The celebration continued with a concert in the Titano theater where a prominent singer from Ghana, Ranzie Mensah, performed, accompanied on the piano by Alfredo Matera and by singers Stefy Piovesan, Aurelio Pitino, and Lidia Genta Rigamonti.

NOTES

- ¹ Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-57* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 42.
- ² More information about many of the jubilee celebrations can be found on the Website of the Bahá'í World News Service, <http://news.bahai.org/>. For a

comprehensive list of countries and territories opened during 1954–1955, see Glenn Cameron with Wendi Momen, *A Basic Bahá'í Chronology* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1996), pp. 309–327.

- ³ For more information on the life of Violet Hoehnke, see her obituary on pp. 288–289.

The Year in Review

Since the implementation of the Five Year Plan in April 2001, the Bahá'í International Community has been engaged in a process of systematic expansion and consolidation. This year has seen a steady increase in the activities of the Bahá'í community around the globe. Aimed at fostering spiritual development as well as building the capacity of individuals and local communities, the “core activities,” comprising study circles, devotional meetings, and children's classes, are being carried out with increasing skill and enthusiasm. Bahá'í communities worldwide have been transformed by the galvanizing effect of these activities. The momentum generated by their endeavors can be seen in their involvement in such diverse areas as racial unity, social and economic development, education, gender equality, and interfaith dialogue. While this article cannot possibly encompass the breadth and number these activities, it does provide a brief survey of the various events and achievements of Bahá'ís in the past year.

Advancement of women

“As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which

might be theirs,” stated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in an address He gave in 1911 in Paris, France.¹ Bahá’ís believe that equality between the sexes, one of the fundamental principles of the Bahá’í Faith, is a prerequisite of world peace and that women must be given equal opportunities in all fields of human endeavor in order for humanity to reach its full potential. Activities undertaken around the globe demonstrate the Bahá’í community’s commitment to this ideal.

This year, Bahá’í communities throughout Canada celebrated International Women’s Day in a variety of ways. The Bahá’í Women’s Committee of Gatineau, Québec, organized an event to celebrate International Women’s Day and the 10th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Joining the event was SOPAR (the Society for Partnership), a nongovernmental women’s organization in India. Its founder, Angèle Gingras, was the honored guest and gave a presentation on the organization. The program included an international dinner with dishes from several countries and a presentation on the Beijing Platform for Action by Mireille Hutchison, one of the Bahá’í representatives at the Beijing conference.

A similar event was held in Burnaby, British Columbia. Following her trip to New York to attend the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Elizabeth Wright, Director of the Office for the Advancement of Women for the Canadian Bahá’í Community, gave the keynote address at a commemoration of International Women’s Day. She addressed an audience of several hundred, noting that 2005 represents “a crossroads for women in the movement for gender equality and the advancement of women.” It marks the ten-year review of the outcome of the Beijing Conference and the review of its Platform for Action, a document adopted by consensus by 189 member states of the United Nations in 1995.²

Active participation of men and boys in promoting equality of the sexes was the theme at this year’s International Women’s Week Panel in Cochrane, Alberta. Following the title of the event, “Achieving Greatness Together: The Role of Men and Boys in Advancing Gender Equality,” the panelists presented a variety of perspectives on the topic, offering practical ideas for ways to advance equality between the sexes.³ The panelists included Dr. Garry Jones, an elementary English language arts specialist for the Calgary Board of

Education, who is involved with the Males in Education Inquiry Group, and Claire Young, a community resource worker with Family and Community Support Services in Cochrane, who has received an award for her work around family violence.

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW), also known as White Ribbon Day, was marked in Canberra, Australia, on 25 November 2004 by an event co-hosted by the Australian Bahá'í Community, Amnesty International Australia, the National Council of Churches, UNIFEM, and the YWCA. One hundred people attended the function, held in the ACT Legislative Assembly building. Attendees included Nggunawal elders, members of government, and heads of human rights and women's organizations. MLA Mick Gentleman, representing the ACT Chief Minister, gave a thoughtful speech about the role that men can play in changing a culture of violence against women. "If this situation is to change, men need to be part of the solution," he observed. "Men must commit to full equality for women . . . we as men need to stand up and say to other men that violence against women is absolutely unacceptable." Other speakers included Commander Steve Lancaster, representing the Australian Federal Police, and Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward. Soul 2 Soul, the Bahá'í community's youth dance group, ended the program with a powerful performance on domestic violence.

The Bahá'í Office for Advancement of Women and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) co-hosted a seminar in the auditorium of the information center of the Bahá'í House of Worship in India on 12 January 2005. The seminar was attended by more than 200 participants from a number of schools, colleges, and NGOs around New Delhi. The seminar was opened with a welcome address by Mrs. Farida Vahedi, Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, followed by the keynote speaker Mrs. Aparna Basu, President of the AIWC. Following the talk there were workshops that included art and drama on the theme of gender equality, and youth were encouraged to discuss perspectives on gender equality from their own experiences.

In Zimbabwe, a seminar was held at the Women's University in Africa (WUA) in August, which was co-organized by the WUA and the Bahá'í community. The discussions revolved around contemporary

issues in education, such as quality of education, educational reform, and gender issues. The 47 participants included the Head of Forum of African Women Educationists, lecturers from three universities in Harare, and officials from the Ministry of Education.

In Acuto, Italy, the Vision Association held its first International European Conference, titled “Building Tomorrow Today.” Founded in Florence, Italy, in 2003, Vision is a nonprofit Bahá'í-inspired organization. Its goal is to facilitate the development of women's spiritual, moral, and intellectual capacities and capabilities so that they can become agents of social change. The conference, held from 14 to 17 October 2004, included sessions on topics such as consultation and moral education. Participants examined women's role in social transformation, with workshops on life balance, spirituality in business, and public relations.

On 2 October 2004, the 135th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women in India opened a new branch of its training center in the village of Padria Kachhi in the district of Bhopal. The Institute currently holds six-month and year-long residential courses for close to 200 women each year. The courses offered at the new branch will be non-residential and three months in duration. The subjects taught will be health and hygiene, personal development, and cutting and tailoring. “The purpose of opening this center is to reach the rural women who are unable to leave their homes for long periods of time to take training at the Institute in Indore,” explained Mrs. Janak Palta McGilligan, the Director of the Institute. The inauguration program started with an invocation in Sanskrit for peace and harmony, followed by devotional recitations by the newly enrolled trainees. The objective of this training Institute is to help women recognize their potential and increase their self-confidence, so that through their own personal development they will be better able to contribute to the development of their families and society.⁴

In addition to grassroots efforts, Bahá'ís are also involved in organizations that influence ideas and policy on a national level. Three Bahá'í women serve on the national executive committee of UNIFEM Ireland, which recently hosted a celebration of UNIFEM's 10th anniversary in Ireland. Talks were given by Mahin Sefidvash, aid worker Stephanie Frame, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.



A class of trainees at the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women in Indore, India.

A legal center that has done much over the years to contribute to human rights for women recently won a high-profile case. The Tahirih Justice Center in the United States offers legal, medical, and social services to immigrant and refugee women. For over two years the Tahirih Justice Center has been litigating a case against a Maryland-based international marriage broker on behalf of a Ukrainian woman who was paired with an abusive man and was misled by the company regarding her legal rights. The victory marks the first time in the United States that an international marriage broker has been held liable for negligent conduct.⁵

A newly published handbook demonstrates the leading role played by the Bahá'í community of the United States in advocating the ratification by the US government of an important international treaty on women's rights. The handbook, which outlines the importance of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), was co-authored by Leila Rassekh Milani, a spokesperson for women's issues for the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. A coalition of some 190 US NGOs recently launched the book at the US Senate.

For more than a decade, a representative of the us National Spiritual Assembly has co-chaired the coalition, which is known as the Working Group on Ratification of CEDAW. The Convention is an international “Bill of Rights” for women that addresses the political, cultural, economic, and social dimensions of human rights for women around the world. The United States was active in drafting the Convention and was one of the first nations to sign it. However, it is also the only industrialized nation that has failed to ratify the treaty, lacking the necessary votes in the us Senate. The handbook, *CEDAW: Rights that Benefit the Entire Community*, was launched in a Senate hearing room under the sponsorship of Senator Joseph Biden, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. More than 100 attended, including representatives of the UN, NGOs, and Congressional staff. “This handbook is an important educational tool to gain the 67 votes needed for Senate ratification,” commented a spokesman for Senator Barbara Boxer.

Working with Ms. Milani on the book were Sarah Albert of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and Karina Purushotma of the us National Spiritual Assembly’s office in Washington. The book is a revised and expanded edition of *Human Rights for All*, an advocacy book compiled and edited by Ms. Milani in 2001. The second edition of the book focuses on the international impact of the treaty and documents how the treaty has been used by activists, lawyers, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations to address trafficking in women, HIV/AIDS, terrorism, national security, and other key issues of global concern.

Race unity

As a worldwide community, with individuals from more than 2,100 ethnic and tribal groups who reside in more than 230 countries and territories, the Bahá'í Faith is among the more diverse bodies of people on earth. This diversity extends to the local and national levels, as Bahá'í communities comprise people from a wide variety of backgrounds, ages, professions, and educational levels. However, far from being a source of conflict or contention, Bahá'ís believe that such diversity is a cause of unity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and har-

mony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord.”⁶

Since its inception 22 years ago, Nur University has been a leader in supporting Bolivia's under-served communities. The first private university in the country, it continues to successfully pioneer higher education as a catalyst for social and economic development in Latin America. Recently the Confederation of Bolivia's Indigenous People (CIDOB) awarded Nur University its highest honor, the Sombra Grande, in celebration of CIDOB's 22nd anniversary. The award was made to Nur for its many years of educational support to indigenous youth and for its promotion of social justice in the country, where indigenous peoples comprise 62 percent of the population, most of whom live in conditions of “extreme poverty” as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The Hedi Moani Memorial Secondary School Speech Awards took place in association with Race Relations Day in Auckland, New Zealand. Six finalists delivered speeches on race relations on 27 March 2004, and the three winning speeches were broadcast on Radio New Zealand. Attracting entrants from throughout the country, the competition is held in memory of Hedi Moani, an Iranian Bahá'í architect who spent the last 16 years of his life in New Zealand. He was actively involved with the Maori community.

A forum held by the Bahá'í community in the Republic of Ireland attracted significant interest from the media. “Intercultural Families, the Opportunities and the Challenges” was held at the newly refurbished Bahá'í center in Dublin on 23 October 2004. The event included presentations by guest speakers Kim and David Douglas, authors of *Marriage Beyond Black and White*. Fifteen nationalities were represented among the people at the event, many of whom were part of intercultural relationships. Media coverage included two radio interviews and a full-page article in Ireland's only multicultural newspaper. The event also received praise from the Minister for Social and Family Affairs in the Republic of Ireland.

In Singapore, various cultural and religious groups came together in July to host a “Multi-Racial Multi-Religious Harmony Nite” which attracted an audience of 5,000, including the President of the Republic of Singapore, Mr. S.R. Nathan. There were various

performances from a diverse array of cultures and religions, including a dance on racism performed by a group of Bahá'í youth.

More than 150 participants attended a memorial gathering in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, honoring the South African youth who were martyred during apartheid in Soweto, South Africa. The event was organized by the External Affairs Office of the National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia and attracted people from various religious and ethnic backgrounds. Prayers from different faiths were read, as well as a statement from the Bahá'í International Community on racism. The coordinator for the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child gave an informative keynote address outlining some of the challenges facing children in Africa today. Among those present were representatives from the United Nations, as well as other governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

The Native American Bahá'í Institute (NABI) in Arizona, United States, inaugurated the recent additions to its community center. Designated as a regional training institute by the National Spiritual Assembly, NABI's emphasis is on training human resources and responding to the needs of the surrounding population. The region served by NABI covers 16,000 square miles and includes 110 Navajo and 5 Hopi communities in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Following a Navajo tradition, the community conducted a house-blessing ceremony, which incorporated prayers and chants from the Bahá'í Faith and from the Navajo culture.

The University of Texas at Arlington's Bahá'í Club and the Native American Student Association sponsored an event at the university to encourage understanding of Native American culture and to promote the principle of the oneness of humanity. The sounds of native flutes, harmonized chanting, and the steady beat of drums filled the University Center Rosebud Theater during a performance by the Kevin Locke Trio. Composed of award-winning singers, dancers, and storytellers, the trio shared its heritage with an audience of about 300.

The arts

Bahá'ís are increasingly recognizing the vital role of the arts in the enrichment of community life and in deepening their understanding



People's Theater representatives Erfan Enayati (second from right) and Curtis Volk (right) with the Mayor of Offenbach, Gerhard Grandke (third from right), and some members of the cast.

of the Faith. From the use of role-playing and visual arts at conference workshops to traveling theater troupes, the arts provide a unique way to combine the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh with an appreciation of cultural diversity.

In Offenbach, Germany, an award-winning Bahá'í-inspired theater project, People's Theater, began a new season of performances in November. Aimed at preventing violence and promoting social skills among school students, the group has won favor this year at the highest levels of the federal government. The German Minister for Family and Youth, Renate Schmidt, awarded two representatives of People's Theater a financial grant to assist the further development of the theater. People's Theater was one of 25 winners selected from 560 entrants in a competition initiated by the Office of the Chancellor to select projects with the most promise of benefiting society.

People's Theater was founded by Erfan Enayati, a Bahá'í from Offenbach. The Bahá'í inspiration behind the People's Theater is seen not only in its selection of the social topics that are the themes of its performances, but also in its guiding principles such as the



People's Theater in action. Elements of the scene are outlined on the blackboard.

underlying unity of world religions and respect for all ethnic groups, which play a fundamental role in every show. Presentations by the People's Theater combine the elements of a talk show with those of theater. Each show illustrates a conflict that exists in the school where the show is being performed, such as violence, backbiting, or dishonesty, and teaches virtues such as unity, justice, and the tool of consultation to solve problems. The theater portion of the show portrays the problem to the audience. In the talk show session that follows, the audience discusses constructive solutions to the problem through dialogue and role-playing.

Gerhard Grandke, the Mayor of Offenbach, has been a strong supporter of the project since its inception in 2001. The project also

has the support of local government offices dealing with education, community integration, and crime prevention, and it has received a warm reception in the public school system. During the last two years the People's Theater has performed more than 700 shows in more than 40 schools.

One hundred and two participants gathered in the city of Baguio in the Philippines for the Bahá'í National Arts Festival. The festival, held from 26 to 29 December 2004, attracted Bahá'í artists from 20 localities in the country who came to perform, display their art, and encourage others to explore their own artistic skills and talents. Performers, including the rock band Sublime Vision, sang songs they had composed, and the NCR (National Capital Region) youth group gave dramatized performances about the early history of the Bahá'í Faith. The dances performed by the San José City youth troupe included depictions of Bahá'í principles. A trio of dancers performed modern and traditional dances, and poetry by Bahá'í authors, recited in English and Tagalog (the official language of the Philippines) won a warm reception. Youth, junior youth, and adult groups held discussions at the festival about the use of the arts in community activities, demonstrating their commitment to including artistic expression in the activities of the Faith.

Heartwarming performances brought life to Peace Fest 2004, held from 30 to 31 October at the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute in South Carolina, United States, which is named after the Hand of the Cause of God Louis G. Gregory. Close to 300 visitors came to see a diverse selection of dance, song, poetry, and drumming. Also set up were an information booth on the Bahá'í Faith, food stalls, and vendors selling hand-made crafts. One of the highlights of the event was a presentation in tribute to Charles E. Bolden Jr., this year's recipient of the Louis G. Gregory Award for Service to Humanity. A retired Marine brigadier general and South Carolina native, Bolden flew four space shuttle missions as an astronaut, commanding one.

A multinational musical theater troupe enjoyed a positive reception in Vilnius, Lithuania, during a two-week tour organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Vilnius. The Inspirit Performing Arts group, with members from 14 countries, presented three performances of a musical play, *Quest of the Spirit*, to enthusiastic audiences in the Elfu Theater in Vilnius. During the

tour, from 31 July to 12 August 2004, the 16-member cast composed of volunteer staff from the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, performed songs, dances, and instrumental pieces in a production that depicted aspects of the world's religions. The show's theme was the path of the wayfarer in his search for spiritual truth. Other activities included a public photographic exhibition held in a hall located near the city center. This well-attended display featured the work of Ineta Alvarado, a Bahá'í from Vilnius. On six evenings, members of the troupe gave public talks on a variety of topics relating to the Bahá'í Faith, which were followed by discussions. The activities of Inspirit sparked the interest of audience members, who have since begun attending Bahá'í study circles, devotional meetings, youth and children's classes, and discussion meetings.

The Celebration! Congo Choir, a Bahá'í troupe of singers, dancers, and musicians from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, had its first North American tour in April 2005. With a mission to promote a message of peace and unity through the arts, the choir performed a musical theatrical production titled *Bomoko: An African Story of Unity in Rhythm and Song* that joyously celebrates the glorious diversity of the oneness of humanity. The production, in the Lingala language spoken in regions of the Congo, dramatized the experiences of a mythical African village coping with the challenges of community prejudices when a young man and woman of different tribes wish to marry. Through song, dance, and drama, the events unfold as the villagers struggle to understand the meaning of unity in diversity.

In the spring of 2004, Bahá'í musicians from diverse cultural backgrounds came together for a concert tour in North America. Harmonizing a variety of musical styles and instruments, the "Embrace the World" tour, from 15 April to 11 May, traveled to ten US states and to British Columbia, Canada. The musicians performed 20 concerts at packed venues in major cities such as San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver, Salt Lake City, and Houston. Audiences from a wide range of religious and ethnic backgrounds responded with standing ovations, sing-alongs, and insistent requests for encores.

The purpose of the concerts was "to share the Bahá'í concept of the oneness of mankind," said K.C. Porter, a multi-Grammy-award-winning producer, songwriter, and keyboardist, who organized the



K.C. Porter at the keyboard during a performance of "Embrace the World."



A dance from a performance of "Quest of the Spirit" in Vilnius, Lithuania, featuring Tahmina Kakenova (left) from Kazakhstan and Penina Smith from Papua New Guinea.

concert series. “The spirit of unity was reflected not only in the music, but with the diversity that was represented on the stage, featuring artists and musical styles from around the globe,” he added. Sharing the stage with Mr. Porter were Lin Cheng, a singer and erhu virtuoso whose albums have sold by the millions in China, and Iranian-born Farzad Khozein, a jazz-influenced classical violinist. Also touring were Colombian singer Leonor Dely with her family’s flute-and-percussion group, Millero Congo, and backing musicians from the United States and Scotland. Local musicians also had the opportunity for exposure as opening acts for some of the concerts. They included the hip-hop group Justice Leeg in the Los Angeles area, the Duwamish Tribe drumming group in Seattle, and a 100-piece choir, Getting Higher, in Vancouver. As well as music, the concerts included presentations of selections from the Bahá’í writings. The concert won positive reviews as people recognized the uplifting message of the tour. The executive director of the Arts Council in Lake County, California, Xian Yeagan, wrote, “It was the integration of these styles in the hands of the masters that made the concert so moving. . . [a]nd that was what the concert was all about, embracing and unifying the world through art.”

Education

In the words of the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, education is “one of the most fundamental factors of true civilization.” However, in order for this education to achieve its fundamental purpose, it must be “comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and the intellectual side of man but also his spiritual and ethical aspects.”⁷ This year saw a wide range of Bahá’í educational activities around the world. From conferences on Bahá’í scholarship and professional life to classes in moral development and virtues training for children, Bahá’ís are committed to exploring and developing the spiritual dimension of education.

Children’s classes, which are held in Bahá’í communities throughout the world, have in recent years been accepted and encouraged by a wider society as a way of providing children with moral education. In Australia, about 6,000 primary school children are attending Bahá’í classes, which are offered in more than 300 state-run schools.

The classes are offered mainly to provide religious instruction to Bahá'í children. Yet more than 90 percent of the children in Bahá'í classes are from families who are not members of the Bahá'í Faith, indicating the wide appeal of the Bahá'í approach to religious education. In accordance with the Bahá'í belief that all the world's great religions share the same divine origin and have been revealed progressively to humanity, the approach of Bahá'í Education in State Schools (BESS) includes an introduction to the world's other great religions. BESS classes also stress the development of moral values as taught in all world religions, such as patience, honesty, and compassion, as well as Bahá'u'lláh's social principles, such as the oneness of humanity, the equality of women and men, and the promotion of racial and religious tolerance. Prayers and meditation are also incorporated. Established in the 1980s, today BESS classes are taught by hundreds of Bahá'í volunteers in most states of Australia.



In Perth, Western Australia, volunteer teacher Faeghe Evans teaches a Bahá'í Education in State Schools (BESS) class.



Children at the Associação Monte Carmelo in Mogi Mirim, Brazil, an educational center that promotes the intellectual, physical, and spiritual development of children and adolescents, aged 7 to 14, from all religious backgrounds and ethnic groups. The center's after-school programs aim to reinforce academic studies and foster moral development.

Children from families who are not Bahá'ís may attend BESS classes only with parental permission. There has been an enormous growth of interest in BESS classes over the past decade and the classes have expanded in number and size. The response from parents to the BESS classes has been overwhelmingly positive, largely due to the results parents see in the children who attend them. Many teachers draw on a Bahá'í curriculum known as the “Peace Pack,” initially developed in Western Australia by teacher Georgina Sounness and illustrator Terri Turner. “The whole purpose of it is to empower children to believe that peace is achievable and to give them the tools to become peacemakers and assist them in bringing it about,” said Ms. Sounness.

Bahá'í communities across Canada and Australia paid respect to the teaching profession at events that marked World Teachers' Day. The role of the educator is given prime importance in the Bahá'í Faith, and Bahá'í communities in various countries have been active supporters of the occasion, which was initiated by UNESCO in 1993 and is observed internationally in October. In Mill Bay, British Columbia, Canada, teachers at five schools received gifts and a framed

quotation from the Bahá'í writings that indicates the importance of teachers: "The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind." Elsewhere, the Bahá'ís of Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada, organized a teacher appreciation event that included a dinner and performances by students from a nearby Bahá'í-inspired school of performing arts, the Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute.

In Australia, teacher appreciation events were held in such places as Cairns, Darwin, Melbourne, Hobart, and Perth. In the weeks leading up to the events, children attending Bahá'í religious education classes in government schools and after-school Bahá'í education classes were encouraged to recognize the contribution that teachers make to their lives. In the Melbourne suburb of Eltham, more than 200 guests, including teachers, school principals, a local mayor, and members of Parliament gathered at a dinner and special presentation for teachers. Bahá'ís in other places organized events to show their appreciation of teachers such as special morning teas, dinners, and presentations at school assemblies. Brisbane held its first Teacher Appreciation event with four schools hosting a morning tea for 160 teachers. In Rockhampton, Queensland, the students went to every class to present a red carnation to their teachers. Some teachers said that this was the first time in their careers they had received such recognition and appreciation for their efforts.

The Rowhani Bahá'í School in Vanuatu has seen a dramatic increase in the interest of local families in the school, demonstrating a receptiveness in society to the Bahá'í model of education. The number of students at the school has grown from 60 to 140 in the past year. The increase in enrollment is due to the school's reputation for academic, spiritual, and moral education. The school also received praise for the standards of excellence it is aiming to achieve, for its high level of discipline and spirituality, and for the service opportunities that it provides for young children.

The 15th annual function of New Era High School in Panchgani, India, was inaugurated by the chief guest Sri Narayan Mishra, the Director-General of Police. Words of Bahá'u'lláh and a dance performance created a serene atmosphere. Sri Narayan Mishra talked about the importance of teachers in shaping the characters of young children, praised the performance of New Era during the past 15

years, and spoke about its contributions to society. The children of the school presented a cultural show depicting the theme of unity and love for nature and culture. More than 2,000 people attended the function and about 800 students performed on the stage.

A Bahá'í-inspired institute was established in Australia in 2004 with a commitment to assisting in building a culture of peace. The Education for Peace Institute is a nonprofit nongovernmental organization that offers a range of programs for children from eight years of age to adult. Its programs are based on the Education for Peace



Anita Vega and Juan Tamares of Ecuador at the “Growth and Victories” conference held in Otavalo.

curriculum, which has been developed and applied in various forms in the Bahá'í community over the past 12 years. The programs are designed to empower participants to discover their inner selves, cultivate their spiritual qualities, and channel them towards building a culture of peace using the skills required for peace making. Programs are available in a range of formats, including distance education, classes, camps, and residential schools. The institute currently has an annual intake of 400 students.

Around the world, conferences took place at which Bahá'ís came together to explore aspects of scholarship and spirituality. The Eighth European Bahá'í Conference on Law, organized by the Law Association of the Tahirih Institute, was held in the Netherlands. As part of its ongoing efforts to promote Bahá'í scholarship in law and law-related disciplines, and to encourage professional cooperation and fellowship among lawyers and law students, this year's program brought together presentations by scholars as well as panel discussions and workshops on criminal, commercial, and constitutional law, and on mediation.

The conference, held from 9 to 12 December 2004, attracted participants from 10 countries. Among the highlights was a lecture delivered by Professor Brian Leppard of the University of Nebraska; he emphasized the importance of looking at the ethical teachings of the world's religions in developing international law to effectively protect human rights. Professor Leppard said that moral and ethical teachings of religions, which underpinned international law at its historical formation, give that moral foundation to human rights by declaring that they are God-given rights; they also give recognition to the individual's duty to promote and protect the human rights of others. Among the papers delivered by Bahá'í lawyers were "State and Religious Order in Bahá'í Theology" by Tajan Tober (Germany), "The Oneness of Humanity as a Contemporary Legal Principle" by Neysun Mahboubi (United States), "The Place of Idealism in an Emerging International Legal Order" by Salim Nakhjavani (United Kingdom), and "From Empire to Empathy: Law, Spirituality, and the Oneness of Humankind," by Payam Akhavan (Canada).

The Bahá'í Association of Mental Health Professionals held its sixth annual conference at Bosch Bahá'í School in Santa Cruz, California, USA. The theme of this year's conference was "The

Brain and the Spirit: In Search of the Whole Self.” Presentations integrated Bahá'í scripture with scientific knowledge. Presentations included “The Biology of Belief” and “Spirituality and Psychology: An Emerging Partnership.”

More than 1,200 people from 16 countries came together in Calgary, Alberta, for the 28th Annual Conference for the Association for Bahá'í Studies–North America, on the theme “Spirit and Intellect: Advancing Civilization.” The plenary and breakout sessions investigated the meaning and history of civilization, its connection to the qualities inherent in human nature, and the process by which cultures and civilizations develop and change character. Presenters and audience members represented higher and intermediate academic institutions, artists and design professionals, community development practitioners, business people, and others in the general community. Speakers included architect Siamak Hariri, artist Otto Donald Rogers, members of the Continental Board of Counsellors Nicola Towfigh and David R. Smith, political scientist Andy Knight, associate professor of history Susan Stiles Maneck, and former director of the Centre for Studies on Religion and Society at the University of Victoria, Harold Coward.

The 12th Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies–Japan was held in Sapporo. Under the theme “The Prosperity of Humankind,” presentations addressed various topics such as the need to implement virtues training at home, in education, and in business, and the current overemphasis on material aspects of well-being with no recognition of the interconnectedness of humankind. Participants explored the institute process as an engine for human change and as a means to address contemporary problems. The opening talk, delivered by Dr. Sandra Fotos, discussed the community-building nature of the institute process and the ways in which study circles, implemented by Bahá'í communities worldwide, enhance consultative skills.

At the request of the National Spiritual Assembly, the Association for Bahá'í Studies–India, in collaboration with the Foundation for the Advancement of Science, organized a training workshop for Bahá'í youth throughout the country. The purpose of the workshop was to empower them to reach out to people in their own social circles and to engage with them in acts of service. With full support

and wide publicity generated by the National Spiritual Assembly and the Counsellors, the workshop attracted more than 90 participants from 24 cities and towns of India. The plenary sessions were led by Sona Arbab from the Bahá'í World Centre, and workshop facilitators included Counsellor Payam Shoghi, Farida Vahedi, Dr. Vasudevan Nair, and Collis Rost. The weekend included creative evening workshops with music, poetry, and dance, as well as a panel discussion in which youth shared their successes and challenges in promoting the three "core activities" in their communities.

Children and youth

Children and youth play a unique role in the activities of the Bahá'í Faith. Through their energy and creativity, they contribute to the vitality of communities and the advancement of society. The Bahá'í writings encourage youth to render service to mankind: "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

In Mbabane, Swaziland, children from the Bahá'í Primary School experienced the personal satisfaction of giving to others during a recent visit to the Shewula Orphanage, where they delivered clothes to more than 200 orphans. The clothes were collected by the Bahá'í students as part of their celebration of Ayyám-i-Há, an annual period of charity and hospitality for Bahá'ís. Participating in the trip were students from the grade 6 and 7 classes who sang songs and performed a dance on the theme of poverty.

In the Solomon Islands, more than 30 children from the Bahá'í community spent time at the National Referral Hospital's Children's Ward during Ayyám-i-Há. Accompanied by their teachers and parents, the children prayed for the young children in the hospital, sang songs, and presented gifts to them.

Varqa international children's magazine, a bimonthly magazine from Canada, is dedicated to the moral and intellectual development of children through Bahá'í-inspired principles. *Varqa* entered an exciting new phase in its distribution through a series of promotions designed to introduce the magazine to more than 8,000 Canadian children—the first time a Bahá'í-inspired children's magazine is being openly marketed to the general public. At Toronto's annual



Bahá'í children listen attentively in a spiritual education class in Fiji.



Participants at the national Bahá'í youth conference in N'Zérékoré, Guinea.

KidSummer festival, 6,000 copies of *Varqa* were placed in free sample bags that were given to the children who participated in the events, and at the annual Word on the Street festival, Canada's largest book and magazine festival which boasts more than 180,000 visitors, *Varqa's* booth was set up alongside those of the leading publishers in children's books and magazines.

In the spring of 2004, 17 members of Canada's Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute's (NCCI) Grade 11 World Citizenship class and 3 staff members went on a service project to the Bahamas. The trip was part of NCCI's World Citizenship Curriculum (WCC), a series of mandatory courses that focus on developing students' capacities and vision as world citizens and service-oriented leaders. Each year, students in the class have the opportunity to participate in an overseas service trip to put into action many of the concepts they learn about in WCC. Through the trip, students develop an understanding of themselves as world citizens as well as their skills of service, and they also render a practical service that is needed and can be sustained in the community being served. On this trip, the students participated in several meaningful service opportunities on the island of New Providence. One week was spent at All Saints Camp, an HIV/AIDS care center for 48 adults and 13 children, helping paint houses for the residents there. The second project was to teach literacy and virtues at an elementary school, and the final service was to perform the NCCI dance workshop's dances in New Providence.

To launch its new program FLAME (Foundation for Leadership and Moral Empowerment), the Social and Economic Development Services (SEDS) of Malaysia organized a three-day seminar to bring together people who have been active in promoting the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme (JYSEP). Entitled "Charting New Horizons in the JYSEP," the seminar's main objectives were to deepen the vision and understanding of JYSEP, to promote the program in corporate and public institutions, and to develop ways to reinforce the JYSEP courses through junior youth holiday camps and gatherings. Forty people from eight countries participated in this seminar.

One hundred and seventy youth from Croatia, Italy, and Sicily gathered at a national youth conference in Acuto, Italy. From the inception of the Five Year Plan, youth have been systematically in-

volved in initiating study circles, devotional gatherings, and children's classes. Throughout the conference, the workshops were inspired by courses in the Ruhi curriculum, which facilitates discussion on various social and spiritual issues.

Bahá'í youth from 30 countries came to the Townshend International School in Hluboka, Czech Republic, for the Changing Times European Youth Forum from 26 December 2004 to 1 January 2005. The seminar, organized by a team of European Bahá'í youth, was the third annual event of its kind, its reputation for learning and camaraderie attracting participants from many European countries as well as from Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Namibia, New Zealand, Samoa, and the United States. The keynote speakers were 'Alí and Violette Nakhhjavání. Mr. Nakhhjavání shared his insights on the current world situation and spiritual matters, and recounted his memories of growing up in the Holy Land. Other speakers included Italian industrialist Giuseppe Robiati and psychiatrist Hamid Peseschkian. In his talk, Dr. Peseschkian emphasized the need for good time management in meeting the challenges of living a balanced, faith-centered life. Workshops addressed a variety of themes such as consumerism, the art of communication, leadership and power, and using the arts to express a vision of a new world.

The Bahá'í youth of Guinea held their third National Youth Conference in N'Zérékoré in July. The theme of this year's conference was "The Bahá'í Faith: History and Perspectives." More than 60 youth from nearly all the regions of the country participated in workshops such as "The Central Figures of the Faith," "Bahá'í Administration," and "The Role of Youth Now," using the performing arts to elucidate the themes.

The State Bahá'í Youth Committee of Orissa in India organized a state-level youth festival (GLORY 2004) at the Bahá'í House in Bhubaneswar, drawing an attendance of more than 80 youth from throughout the state. Among the activities of the weekend were a devotional gathering, songs, various workshops, and talks on aspects of the Faith including "The Role of Youth in Present Society" and "Bahá'í Administration."

The Nordic Youth Conference was held in Enköping, Sweden, in March of this year. The main speaker, Dr. Suheil Bushrui, gave a talk on the main theme of the conference, "The Writings of

Shoghi Effendi.” Through workshops, discussions, and lectures, the participants deepened their understanding of the life of Shoghi Effendi and explored some of his most important writings, such as *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, and *God Passes By*.

The Bahá’í Youth Workshop, a Los Angeles-based dance collective, recently celebrated its 30th anniversary with a conference and reunion. Youth from throughout the United States and Canada gathered together for eight days of training, rehearsal, teaching, and service, and explored ways to further enrich and develop the workshop experience.

The conference, titled “Inspiration for Generations,” drew members and alumni of Bahá’í dance workshops all over the country to Los Angeles for a week of intensive training and street teaching. The conference was a time to develop new skills in the performing arts as well as a time to reminisce. Since 1974, when the first Bahá’í Youth Workshop formed, hundreds of young people have passed through the workshop program. Using the arts to promote the principles of the Faith, Bahá’í workshops like the one in Los Angeles have sprung up all over the world.⁹

One such initiative took place in August 2004 in Japan. Twenty youth from several countries around the world gathered in Japan and spent ten days on a Peace Relay and Dance Workshop trip. During this period the youth, who came from Canada, Japan, Korea, Rwanda, the UK, and the US, performed in various Japanese cities including Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Fukuoka, and Nagasaki. Conceived and initiated by the youth themselves, this project’s aim was to promote the unifying message of Bahá’u’lláh through dances inspired by social teachings of the Bahá’í Faith.

Community development

Reports indicate that Bahá’í communities worldwide are moving ahead with increasing momentum as they develop and expand their human resources through the systematic implementation of the “core activities” in their localities.

To facilitate the worldwide process of systematic development in Bahá’í communities, countries have been mapped and sectioned into

“clusters” of a composition and size that maximize human resources and the potential for growth. Through the implementation of the institute process, which promotes the three core activities of study circles, devotional meetings, and children’s classes, clusters have become organized areas of intensive growth around the world. Clusters worldwide, from Sumgait, Azerbaijan, to Vancouver, Canada, are experiencing growth through the institute process.

In its letter of 9 January 2001 introducing the Five Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice envisioned reflection meetings as periodic gatherings for consultation “to reflect on issues, consider adjustments, and maintain enthusiasm and unity of thought.” In the past four years, reflection meetings have become an important influence in encouraging individual initiative and an integral part of the evolution of communities.

There is no definitive format for the gatherings. In various clusters around the globe new insights are being gained about the implementation of cluster meetings, and communities are experimenting with creative ways to establish a dynamic and unifying atmosphere.

The Fako cluster in Cameroon begins its meeting with a devotional program and singing. The Lugari cluster in Kenya utilizes the arts in the form of dramatic skits and role-playing. In Nepal, youth are taking a leading role in reflection meetings; the youth of the Sunsari cluster not only organize and participate in the reflection meetings, they also visit members of the community in advance to encourage and educate them about the importance of the meetings. In Victoria, Australia, some of the clusters devote time to sharing the achievements of the communities relating to the three core activities, to increase enthusiasm and to inspire participants to undertake further initiatives.

Communities are learning how to use reflection meetings as an impetus for action. In Biharsharif, India, reflection meetings serve as a means for the believers to learn how to become more systematic in their collective undertakings. A report of a reflection meeting in Broward County, Florida, in the United States, demonstrates how such meetings can be used to launch a campaign to significantly multiply individual actions, which in turn can contribute to increased growth. In India, a believer who accepted the Faith over 20 years

ago commented, "Reflection gatherings have filled the entire community with excitement, providing us with the realization of what needs to be done and how we are to do it. Regular interaction in these gatherings ensures that our efforts are based on existing human resources and this approach has paved the way for success."

Another example of communities coming together to evaluate their progress and set new goals is the three-day Institutional Consultative Gathering that was organized by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India in Gwalior from 25 to 27 February 2005. More than 400 Bahá'ís from 26 states of India, representing State Bahá'í Councils, administrative committees, training institutes, cluster-level agencies, and the Auxiliary Board, took stock of the achievements of the past four years. The event also enhanced understanding of the elements that contribute to accelerated growth. Participants shared recent experiences of planning, expansion, con-



At the Bahá'í center in Suva, Fiji, participants study a course designed to assist them to become tutors of study circles.



Some of the 1,200 participants at the “Portals to Growth” conference in Sydney, Australia, in October 2004, representing a wide diversity of ages and backgrounds.

solidation, human resource development, and evaluation associated with intensive growth cycles in some of the clusters. As a result, the Bahá'í communities of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka received the necessary impetus to set a new vision of growth.

Service to society was the focus of the Australian Bahá'í conference “Portals to Growth—Creating Capacity for Service.” The conference, held from 1 to 4 October in Sydney, attracted 1,200 participants and was mirrored by a sister conference held from 7 to 10 October in Perth, which was attended by 700 people. The participants focused on the energy that is being unleashed through study circles and other core activities of Bahá'í communities worldwide. At the time of the conference, more than 380 study circles were being conducted in Australia, and Bahá'í classes were being held in 320 government schools. Members of study circles undertake voluntary community service, thereby learning to integrate personal spiritual development with serving others. Dr. Farzam Arbab, member of the Universal House of Justice and keynote speaker at both conferences, said that study circles not only build a sense of optimism about the

future, but also empower individuals to act for positive change and the “emphasis on a grassroots approach allows a great range of individual approaches and initiatives to be developed, and those that prove particularly effective can be broadened and made more widely available.” As well as exploring ways to expand and enhance the study circle process, the conference participants also looked at how to steadily improve Bahá’í educational classes offered to children.

Bahá’í summer schools worldwide also contribute to the consolidation and harmony of a community through a balance of devotions, study, and recreation. Common themes of summer schools this year were the creative ways the core activities are now being carried out by Bahá’ís throughout the world. A string of summer schools was held across Europe, in countries such as Croatia, Ireland, Norway, Romania, and Slovakia.

In Romania, the emphasis was on workshops and how Bahá’ís and their friends could improve the way they carry out the community’s core activities. The participants prepared skits, decorated prayer books, made invitations for devotional meetings and study circles, and learned how to tell stories.

More than 300 Bahá’ís gathered for Norway’s summer school at Beitostolen, where guest speaker Dr. Hossain Danesh of Canada addressed the topic of how to mature as human beings within the



A presentation of drawings by children at the Bahá’í summer school in Romania.



Participants at the Bahá'í summer school of Croatia and Slovenia.

context of family, work, and Bahá'í service. The summer school involved specific programs for children, junior youth, and youth.

In Ireland there was an emphasis on programs for the younger members of the Bahá'í community. Junior youth built a large wooden swing and a “watch tower” as part of the recreational program at the country's summer school, attended by more than 500 people in Waterford City. “Awakening the Spirit” was the theme of the school, which mixed panel sessions and workshops with traditional lecture formats. Visiting speakers included scholars and writers Wendi and Moojan Momen, and Rita and Viv Bartlett.

The principal guest speaker at Slovakia's national summer school was Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri, member of the Universal House of Justice, who spoke about the role of the Bahá'í Faith in the twenty-first century. Bahá'í actor and comedian Omid Djalili and his wife, Annabel Knight, presented a drama workshop. Other speakers included Raymond and Furugh Switzer, who talked about marriage, family life, and managing time and money.

The summer school of Croatia and Slovenia was held from 21 to 28 August in Seline, Croatia. Participants came from the host countries, as well as nearby Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and

World Order, a quarterly journal published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, received an international award for Best Journal Design in recognition of new designs for its cover and interior that convey the journal's multidisciplinary nature.

The award was presented to the *World Order* staff by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (CELJ) at a ceremony held in conjunction with the Modern Language Association annual conference in Philadelphia on 27 December 2004. The CELJ, whose membership comprises more than 450 journal editors, is a major international organization dedicated to appraising academic journals in the humanities.

World Order, which has been published since 1966 and has an international readership, is devoted to consideration of the spiritual, moral, cultural, and social challenges confronting world society at a time when humanity must recognize its oneness and establish a global, just civilization. *World Order* has published articles, editorials, and reviews on race and racism, the equality of men and women, human rights, the environment, the United Nations, spiritual approaches to economic problems, and interfaith dialogue. It also has a reputation for publishing poetry and photographs of high artistic merit.

Involvement in the life of society

Bahá'ís around the globe are dedicated to creating a peaceful world civilization. As an international nongovernmental organization, the Bahá'í International Community is involved in a wide range of activities to advance the welfare of society, including extensive work with the United Nations, participation in dialogues with leaders of thought, and interaction with the wider public.

In December 2004 a tsunami in the Indian Ocean caused death and destruction on an unprecedented scale. The magnitude of suffering experienced by the millions affected by the catastrophe caused people throughout the world to respond with compassion and concern. Bahá'í communities worldwide demonstrated their commitment to alleviating suffering by contributing to relief efforts through monetary means, donation of time and skills, and memo-

rial meetings. Bahá'ís were among the key organizers of national tsunami memorials around the world. From Brazil to Singapore, Bahá'ís encouraged their communities to embrace a vision of the unity of mankind and to consider the importance of cooperation in all aspects of life.

The Bahá'í community of Norway was one of three religions on the organizing committee of a national commemoration for the victims of the December 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami disaster. More than 1,000 people attended the event on 16 January 2005, World Religion Day, including the King and Queen of Norway, the Crown Prince and Princess, 50 ambassadors, and top-ranking government officials. The ceremony, open to the public, was broadcast on national television. One of Norway's most respected newspapers, *Aftenposten*, referred to the ceremony as an "important and historic step in creating mutual understanding and respect among different religions in Norway." For the ceremony, Oslo Town Hall was lit with 500 candles. Eleven faiths were represented with readings from their holy writings on hardship and hope. Music was interspersed with the readings and included Norwegian folk music, African drums,



Participants at an interfaith tsunami memorial service held at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney, Australia.

the Persian santor, and Indonesian cymbals. Performers included an orchestra and a children's choir.

Another event dedicated to the victims of the tsunami was held at the national Bahá'í center in Luxembourg. Prayers and holy writings from various faiths were recited in an atmosphere of respect and meditation. The chosen texts highlighted the themes of peace, fellowship, love, and trust in God.

The Slovenian Bahá'í community regularly organizes interfaith programs in order to strengthen relations with different religious groups. On World Religion Day, the community organized a memorial for the tsunami victims which included prayers and music. Religious representatives also gathered at the national Bahá'í center in Sofia, Bulgaria, to mark World Religion Day. The event brought together representatives of more than 30 religions.

Eight hundred mourners attended the special service for victims of the tsunami held at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney, Australia, on 16 January, and a multifaith memorial service organized by the Bahá'í community of Kingborough at the Hobart Town hall on the same day was attended by over 200 worshippers. Bahá'í communities around the country hosted or participated in interfaith services to pray for the victims of the tsunami, express support, and collect funds for relief and reconstruction efforts.

In Vanuatu, the Bahá'ís, in conjunction with the Indian community, organized an interfaith memorial service for the tsunami victims. The event was held at the Bahá'í gardens on the eve of 9 January. The ceremony was attended by the Indian High Commissioner, the British High Commissioner, the French Consul, other government officials, and members of nongovernmental organizations. Members of various religious communities shared prayers and holy writings. In Indonesia, the Bahá'ís raised \$6,000 us for the tsunami relief fund, which they took to the Ministry of Social Welfare.

An event organized by the Bahá'í community of Seri Setia, Malaysia, for the United-Nations-designated World Peace Day drew a crowd of 500, 40 percent of whom were not Bahá'ís. The event, titled "For the Love of Peace," was held in the serene setting of the Tropicana Gold and Country Resort in Petaling Jaya. Bernard Ong, who spoke on behalf of the Bahá'í community, highlighted

Bahá'u'lláh's call to the kings and leaders of the world urging them to meet together to establish peace. Guests included Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, the well-known socialist, and Yante Ismail, representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malaysia, who thanked the Bahá'í International Community for its efforts in creating a culture of peace.

"Tranquility Zones" have been growing in popularity since their creation by the Bahá'í community in Swindon, UK. Implemented by Bahá'ís in various communities around the world, Tranquility Zones are serene environments designated for prayer and meditation, where one can take time to focus on one's spiritual well-being. This past year, four Bahá'í health sciences students at Melbourne University in Australia initiated the creation of a Tranquility Zone at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. These youth designated their undertaking as a service project for the hospital community and sought to create an environment of relaxation and spiritual rejuvenation in the midst of a high-pressure workplace. With the approval of the hospital's chaplaincy coordinator and support from their Local Spiritual Assembly, they created posters and began publicizing their project throughout the hospital. In a dimly lit room decorated with candles and flowers, eight to ten short readings from various holy scriptures are recited while relaxing music plays in the background. Hospital staff and patients alike have found the Tranquility Zone to be a haven where they can reflect, meditate, and spiritually recharge.

The 10th anniversary of the United Nations International Year of the Family was celebrated in Stratford, Ontario, Canada, with three days of events during Family Week, 9 through 15 May, as proclaimed by Stratford's city council. The events, organized by the Bahá'í community of Stratford together with members of the general community, included a panel discussion, speeches by local high school students, virtues workshops, and dance and choir performances. A large community youth choir performed one evening, and students from the Bahá'í-inspired performing arts school the Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute, performed an African-inspired dance celebrating the origins of life. A panel of experts from the fields of education, medicine, counseling, community service, and religion spoke about the challenges and stresses facing families today and the steps we can take to improve the quality of family life.

In the Solomon Islands, Bahá'í Keithie Saunders received special acknowledgment from the government for her efforts in community development. Saunders, the daughter of Knights of Bahá'u'lláh Alvin and Gertrude Blum, was awarded the Solomon Islands Medal for Distinguished Service in the field of community development. She was included in a list of prestigious recipients, including Prime Minister John Howard of Australia and Prime Minister Helen Clark of New Zealand.

The Bahá'í community of Portugal was represented at a municipal conference on ethnic minorities. The City Hall of Lisbon and the Municipal Committee to Promote Equality, Rights, and Opportunities held a conference on the theme of "Immigration and Ethnic Minorities: Integration and Citizenship" to which they invited the Bahá'í community. During the conference, held on 16 November 2004, the representative of the Bahá'í community emphasized its role in receiving Bahá'ís from Eastern Europe as well as helping non-Bahá'í citizens from that part of the world.

The Bahá'í community of Stuttgart, Germany, joined seven other religions in a round table event on World Religion Day to discuss development of the city's peace manifesto. The Stuttgart Religious Round Table, a committee with official status to intervene in the event of religious conflict in the city, opened a panel discussion on "A manifesto for peaceful, active interaction among religions in Stuttgart." More than 450 took part. The manifesto, which has already been signed by 23 faith groups in the city, aims to foster cooperation of religious communities and the promotion of their mutual understanding. The Bahá'í community was one of the seven religions represented on the panel that spoke about reconciliation and confirmed that the manifesto's spirit had already borne fruit in their respective communities.

In Uganda, a Bahá'í delegation met with HRH Henry Wako Muloki, the Kyabazinga (King) of the Kingdom of Busoga in May. The community also met with Hon. Justice Benjamin Odoki, the Chief Justice of the Republic of Uganda.

In April, a delegation of the Bahá'ís of North West Province in South Africa presented prayers and Bahá'í writings in a ceremony to thank the Hon. Premier Dr. Popo Molefe for his 10 years of leadership in the province.

Prominent international visitors to the Bahá'í House of Worship in India during the past year expressed their admiration for the Temple that attracts more than 3.5 million visitors annually. Crown Princess Margareta of Romania and her husband, Prince Radu von Hohenzollern-Veringen, attended a prayer service at the Temple on 14 November 2004. On 13 December 2004, the First Lady of the Slovak Republic, Silvia Gasparovicova, attended a similar service at the House of Worship.

Social and economic development

“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements,” Bahá'u'lláh instructed His followers.¹⁰ From grassroots initiatives to international policymaking, this guidance is at the heart of Bahá'í efforts in social and economic development, seen as a collaborative process designed to empower individuals and communities.

Several seminars and conferences were held this year to promote discourse on social and economic development. In India, an international interfaith conference on the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS was held in December 2004. Organized by the Amity Humanities Institute and the National AIDS Control Organization, the primary focus of the conference was to discuss the initiatives to combat and contain the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. The secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India, the director of the Interfaith Activities Department at the national office, and a member of the Bahá'í Office for Advancement of Women represented the Bahá'í Faith at the conference. Copies of the statement of the Bahá'í community of India were included in the conference folder. The statement discusses the spiritual principles that provide the framework for developing appropriate practical measures to deal with this global issue. The Bahá'í community in India is actively engaged in a wide range of activities in every state in the country to help reduce vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and to mitigate its social impact. These include moral and life skills development for children, programs to promote gender equality in families and communities, and adult classes on the application of spiritual principles in daily life. The National Spiritual Assembly emphasized that religious com-



Crispin Pemberton-Pigott of Swaziland with his award-winning Vesto stove, which was honored by the Design Institute of South Africa.

munities can play a key role in fostering the change of heart that will lead to changes in behavior that will, in turn, make possible an effective response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Dr. Roza Olyai of Gwalior represented the Bahá'í Faith in the first meeting of the South Asia Inter-Religious Council (SAIRC) on HIV/AIDS held in New Delhi, India, from 19 to 20 November 2004. The purpose of the first meeting of the SAIRC was to engage senior leaders of major faiths in the region in a dialogue on the role of religion on HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and support, in order to develop an interfaith consensus for action in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Dr. Olyai shared the endeavors of Bahá'í communities worldwide and the comprehensive system of education to encourage the development of virtues. The Bahá'í representative was among five individuals appointed to the drafting committee, which brought out the two-day conference's final statement.

While the Bahá'í International Community is involved in policymaking on international and national levels, individual Bahá'ís are

taking initiative in their own communities to assist in the material and spiritual progress of humanity.

In Australia, a project to bring 120 refurbished computers to the Central Pacific island nation of Kiribati for use in schools began in March 2004 under the direction of a member of the Queensland Bahá'í community, Len Limpus. The first batch of 30 computers arrived in June, followed by the second in August. A community work coordinator for Salvation Army Employment Plus, Mr. Limpus began developing the project when he learned from the President of Kiribati that many nongovernmental schools in Kiribati had tight budgets and no computers.

Inspired by the Bahá'í belief in sustainable development and dedication to enriching the lives of others, Crispin Pemberton-Pigott and his wife Dawn moved to Swaziland almost three decades ago, founding New Dawn Engineering. The company designs and manufactures a wide range of simple but highly efficient machines



Participants in a seminar, The Family and Social Cohesion, sponsored by the Institute for Social Cohesion, an agency of the Bahá'í community of the UK, gather for a small group discussion following a presentation by Ceridwen Roberts, a senior research fellow at the University of Oxford.

for use at the village level in developing regions. After noticing the need for energy- and cost-efficient stoves in local communities, Mr. Pemberton-Pigott designed an innovative stove that is both efficient and commercially viable. The Vesto stove burns just one-quarter of the wood needed to cook on an open fire, and is virtually smokeless. New Dawn has sold more than 1,000 of the new stoves since early 2002. Moreover, the stove was honored last year by the Design Institute of South Africa (DISA), taking the Chairman's Special Award, and was described as "an outstanding piece of design which is of the highest international standard." Judging criteria included innovation, cost/value relationship, performance, safety and ergonomics, environmental impact, appearance, and ease of installation and maintenance. The portable Vesto stove burns wood and dung more efficiently and with fewer emissions than conventional stoves, a considerable benefit in a region where forests are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. It can also be manufactured relatively cheaply, making it financially viable for people at the lower end of the economic scale.

Against a backdrop of national concern, the Bahá'í community of the United Kingdom has taken a leading role in promoting wider discussion of how to heal the divisions that have arisen as Britain grows more diverse. In 2000, the Institute for Social Cohesion, an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom, was created to assist British society at large to foster a greater sense of unity amidst growing diversity. The Institute has sponsored a series of seminars and workshops that have sought to bring together community leaders and policy makers in an effort to facilitate greater dialogue.

The most recent Institute event, held on 6 July 2004, was a one-day seminar held at the Bahá'í national center offices, focusing on "The Family and Social Cohesion." The featured speaker was Ceridwen Roberts, a senior research fellow at the University of Oxford and former director of the Family Policy Studies Centre. In attendance were representatives from major faith communities. After remarks by Ms. Roberts, participants broke into two discussion groups, where they concluded that faith groups, rather than the government, were best equipped to promote positive family values.¹¹

Interfaith

The principle of the unity of religion is at the center of the Bahá'í teachings. Bahá'ís believe “that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same” and that they “represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.”¹² Bahá'ís worldwide are engaged in community interfaith activities and seek to foster friendship and understanding among members of different religions.

In 1950, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States of America instituted an annual World Religion Day. Different communities have adopted this idea, and it is observed in many countries around the world. The third Sunday of January each year has been designated for this celebration. Since its inception more than 50 years ago, World Religion Day has earned considerable praise from leaders of various religions, communities, government officials, and the general public for fostering interfaith understanding and harmony.

In Canada, the Bahá'í community of Halifax, Nova Scotia, commemorated World Religion Day with an interfaith event that attracted an audience of 300. The 2005 program focused on children and youth, and included choral singing, dances, instrumental music, poetry, readings, and dramatic presentations. Eleven faiths were represented through various readings and performances, which included a call and response song in Sanskrit, a drum dance by the Kippu [Eagle] Dancers of the Mi'kmaq First Nation, the Bahá'í Junior Youth Slap Dancers, recitations from the Qu'rán, a dramatic piece by the young Shambala choir, and choirs from the Christian, Buddhist, and Bahá'í communities, including the Fire and Light Bahá'í Chorale. Generous contributions from the audience contributed to the UNICEF tsunami relief effort and to the Metro Food Bank.

More than 150 people attended a multifaith service in Tasmania at Hobart Town Hall on 18 January to mark World Religion Day, organized by the Bahá'í community of Kingborough. Part of Tasmania's bicentennial commemorations, the service was held to celebrate the diversity of faiths that have come to Tasmania during the past 200 years. Representatives from various religions offered prayers and

Montenegro. The theme of the sessions was “Living by the Will of God,” and presentations included “Bahá’í Family Identity,” “Spirituality at Work,” “Marriage and Finding a Partner,” “Bahá’í Burial Laws and Writing a Will,” and “Prayer.”

More than 230 adults, youth, and children gathered from all provinces at the Xtreme Momentum Conference in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The purpose of the gathering was to celebrate, promote, and encourage the activities of Bahá’í communities. Through devotions, workshops, and creative performances, participants shared their experiences and ideas on ways to encourage and expand devotional gatherings, children’s classes, and study circles in Bahá’í communities. One highlight was a talk by Jonah Mungoshi from Zimbabwe, who spoke about the capacity of the core activities to act as portals for entrance into the Faith, and the importance of genuine friendship and concern for one another in developing our love for humanity.

One group of Bahá’ís from Queensland, Australia, developed an innovative way to maintain a study circle across long distances. A resident of the mining town of Mount Isa, Maxien Bradley found a way for members of a study circle to meet regularly despite



In Queensland, Australia, David Podger participates in a study circle.

the desert and farmland that separated them in the vast outback. In the sparsely populated regions of the Northern Territory and Queensland, regular meetings had not seemed possible until Ms. Bradley suggested an inexpensive form of telephone conferencing. Since 2001, the telephone study circles have expanded, and now four members from the original group have become tutors themselves and are facilitating other telephone study groups. The members of the group have bonded through their involvement in the study circle; in addition to studying the material, they pray together, sing songs, read poetry, and share stories of their backgrounds and teaching efforts. Telephone study circles are also active on the other side of Australia. One based in the remote town of Tom Price in Western Australia has a participant 2,000 kilometers away.

Serembam, Malaysia, holds a special place in the annals of Malaysian Bahá'í history as the place where the first Local Assembly in West Malaysia was formed in 1954. This year Seremban celebrated its golden jubilee as 400 Bahá'ís, young and old, gathered to reminisce, gain inspiration from stories of the Faith in the early days, and pay tribute to those who dedicated their lives to establish the Faith in the country. The guest of honor was Ng Poh Loh, the only surviving member of the first Local Assembly. There was a special session to pay tribute to the early believers and to those who became Bahá'ís during the Ten Year Crusade.

On 2 October 2004 the Bahá'í community of Nashville, Tennessee, in the United States, dedicated its new center. More than 300 Bahá'ís and their friends from all over Middle Tennessee gathered for morning and afternoon programs, including devotions, performances by the Voices of Bahá choir, presentations honoring significant Bahá'ís in local history, and heartfelt speeches by the building architects and a National Spiritual Assembly member. The new center has already won an Excellence in Construction award from the Middle Tennessee chapter of the National Builders and Contractors Association and has been entered in a national competition. The center symbolizes a continued commitment to the oneness of humanity, noted guest speaker Kenneth Bowers. Particularly because of the South's history of racism, he said, the center is a sign of the "power of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to transform, not only our society, but also the entire world."

scriptural readings on the theme "Love Your Neighbor." The service also featured dance, musical performances, and meditation.

In Greece, the Bahá'í community of Patras organized a devotional gathering for World Religion Day which was attended by members of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Bahá'í Faiths. The event, held in a hall belonging to the Catholic church of Patras, began with soft music and readings from different religions. The Patras community has held this event annually for the past 25 years.

The National Interfaith Forum of New Zealand was held over the weekend of 11–13 February 2005 in Auckland. This Bahá'í-initiated forum brings together people of different religious backgrounds to consult about ways of promoting the elimination of religious prejudice. The Auckland Interfaith Council hosted the National Forum this year. The Race Relations Commissioner, Joris de Bres, was present, along with several politicians and leaders of different faiths. Among the seminars was a presentation based on the letter from the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders, written in 2002.¹³

On 28 November, the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO) of Singapore hosted a Peace and Harmony Charity Carnival. The purpose of the event was to raise the consciousness for interfaith and interracial harmony and to raise funds for community services such as nursing homes, welfare, and educational interfaith activities. Bahá'í youth performed songs and a step dance at the carnival.

In observance of Malaysia's 47th year of independence, the Bahá'í community organized one national and eight state-level devotional gatherings at which government officials and members of other religions in Malaysia joined the Bahá'ís to pray for the country's peace and prosperity.

The Bahá'í community of Portugal was invited to take part in various interfaith conferences and events around the country. A Bahá'í representative gave a talk about unity in diversity at a University of Lisbon interfaith meeting on 10 November 2004, to an audience of more than 200. The presentation underlined the importance of the role of women in building society with justice as its basic pillar. The event was attended by members of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Bahá'í communities.

The Federal Government of Brazil, through its Secretariat for Human Rights, has implemented a project to elaborate a popular educative booklet entitled *Religious Diversity and Human Rights*, with the goal of promoting understanding and tolerance among the different religious groups in Brazil. A number of different religions were invited to participate in the elaboration of the text. Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, Carlos Alberto Silva, participated in all the meetings of the ecumenical group that consulted extensively on this project. The official launch took place on 9 December 2004, at a ceremony attended by the Minister of Human Rights, the Minister of Race Equality, other government officials, and representatives of 34 religious groups.

NOTES

- ¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), p. 133.
- ² For more information about the review of the Beijing Platform for Action, see p. 153.
- ³ For more information, see the Bahá'í International Community's statement "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality," in *The Bahá'í World 2003–2004* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2005), pp. 211–212.
- ⁴ For a profile of the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, see *The Bahá'í World 2000–2001* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2002), pp. 219–227.
- ⁵ For a profile of the Tahirih Justice Center, see *The Bahá'í World 2003–2004* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2005), pp. 203–209.
- ⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 53.
- ⁷ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 9 July 1931, in "Scholarship," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 3 (Inglewood, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 2000), p. 229.
- ⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, in "Youth: A Compilation," *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2 (Inglewood, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), p. 415.
- ⁹ For more information on youth dance workshops, see the article on pp. 221–246 and *The Bahá'í World 1994–95* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1996), pp. 172–177.
- ¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 213.
- ¹¹ For more information on the Institute for Social Cohesion, see *The Bahá'í World 2002–2003* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2004), pp. 115–116.

- ¹² Shoghi Effendi, "The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" in *World Order*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Winter 1972–1973), p. 7.
- ¹³ For the full text of this statement, see *The Bahá'í World 2002–2003* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2004), pp. 89–98.

Parliament of the World's Religions

With the rise of activity on the part of civil society during the course of the past several decades, it is only natural that different religious groups should seek to become part of the dialogue. Religion is indisputably one of the most profound influences on both individual and collective development, and its insights into the spiritual dimensions of humanity cannot be discounted. But when it comes to religious groups collaborating, often their disagreements and differences in belief and practice override their mutual desire to assist humanity. As the Universal House of Justice pointed out in an open letter to religious leaders worldwide, “[O]rganized religion, whose very reason for being entails service to the cause of brotherhood and peace, behaves all too frequently as one of the most formidable obstacles in the path; to cite a particular painful fact, it has long lent its credibility to fanaticism.”¹

This is not a new issue, of course, but the necessity of interaction in our increasingly interdependent world has made it more immediate. As the Universal House of Justice suggests, “The challenge facing the religious leaders of mankind is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in

humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.”²

It was the actions of religious leaders willing to undertake the effort to work towards common understanding and collaboration that led to an interfaith movement that began to coalesce towards the end of the nineteenth century. In 1893, that movement gave birth to an event titled the World Parliament of Religions, which took place in Chicago under the aegis of the World Colombian Exposition. The Parliament was the first formal gathering of religious leaders from East and West, and the event is widely recognized as the birth of the interfaith movement.

As the Universal House of Justice noted about the event:

Briefly, it appeared that ancient walls had fallen. For influential thinkers in the field of religion, the gathering stood unique, “unprecedented in the history of the world.” The Parliament had, its distinguished principal organizer said, “emancipated the world from bigotry.” An imaginative leadership, it was confidently predicted, would seize the opportunity and awaken in the earth’s long-divided religious communities a spirit of brotherhood that could provide the needed moral underpinnings for the new world of prosperity and progress. Thus encouraged, interfaith movements of every kind took root and flourished.³

The Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions (CPWR), desiring to carry on the tradition a century later, inaugurated a series of new gatherings, beginning with a centenary Parliament in 1993 and followed by a Congress of more than 7,000 people in Cape Town, South Africa, six years later. Both were held in service to the CPWR’s stated purpose, which is to “cultivate harmony between the world’s religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its other guiding institutions in order to achieve a peaceful, just, and sustainable world.”

Despite the efforts of it and other like-minded groups, however, and the fact that religious communities worldwide are engaged in fostering interfaith dialogue, the religious landscape has, if anything, become more stratified since that meeting in 1999. The awareness

of the danger of religious fanaticism has risen on the global stage, largely thanks to the increased visibility of Islamic terrorist groups. In other spheres, such as biology, debates over ethics and morality have created a visible tension between religious representatives and their secular counterparts.

Nevertheless, in July 2004, the latest of these religious Parliaments was convened in Barcelona, Spain, a place where the message of the danger of fanaticism was especially resonant, as only months before bombs exploded by Islamic terrorists had blown up four packed commuter trains in Madrid, killing 190 people. The explosions, the worst in Europe in 15 years, made the city an appropriate place for discussing Islam and violence in religion, said Parliament organizers.

The event in Barcelona, held from 7 to 13 July, drew an estimated 8,000 people, each coming with different aims and hopes, but all seeking greater understanding and collaboration among the various religious communities. Open to religious leaders and adherents alike, the event involved more than 400 workshops, panel discussions, and artistic presentations. The overall focus was on promoting interreligious dialogue, and panels at the event highlighted the ways religious communities can contribute to progress on four central issues: religious violence, access to safe water, the fate of refugees worldwide, and the elimination of debt for poorer nations. At the opening assembly Wednesday evening, thousands gathered to listen to chanting Buddhist monks, dressed in orange and red tunics. Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian lawyer and human rights activist who won the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, gave the keynote address.

The 2004 Parliament was one of a range of events that were part of the Universal Forum of Cultures, the first in a series of international cultural events organized to support peace, sustainable development, human rights, and respect for cultural diversity. The executive director of CPWR, Dirk Ficca, described the uniqueness of this gathering by pointing out, "When people of faith commit to address religious violence and other pressing issues facing the global community, they follow through. We make a commitment not only to the world, but out of a deeply rooted religious or spiritual conviction. That is what makes the Barcelona Parliament commitments so special."⁴

Members of the Bahá'í community, an outspoken supporter of interfaith collaboration, participated in and supported the Parliament, taking their inspiration from Bahá'u'lláh's guidance that they should "[c]onsort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship."⁵ Seeing all religions as fundamentally united in their origination from a single God, Bahá'ís have been involved in key areas of all three modern Parliaments,⁶ with more than 20 Bahá'ís participating in panel discussions, giving speeches, and taking part in other events at the 2004 gathering. Another 80 Bahá'ís from more than 12 countries also attended. Miguel Gil, who represented the Bahá'ís of Spain, said the Spanish Bahá'í community gave significant support by providing volunteers and organizational assistance, stating that the goal for Bahá'ís at the Parliament was "to help further understanding between the different religions."

Lally Lucretia Warren, a Bahá'í from Botswana, attended as one of 15 members of the Parliament's international advisory committee—a group that includes such figures as the Dalai Lama, Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, and Ela Gandhi, the granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi—and because of her participation in Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa, which was initiated by the



Lally Lucretia Warren, a Bahá'í from Botswana, chairs one of the plenary sessions of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona, Spain, in 2004.

Lutheran World Federation. In describing the purpose of the event, Ms. Warren said that the Parliament would not dictate to the world what to do, but referred to Bahá'u'lláh's description of religion as "the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world, and of tranquility amongst its peoples."⁷ Ms. Warren chaired one of the Parliament's plenary sessions and participated in a panel on "Religion, Religions, and Religious Unity: A Bahá'í View" with Julio Savi from Italy and Chris Hamilton from the USA. Ms. Warren began her involvement in interfaith activities two decades ago as one of the organizers of local observances of World Religion Day, an annual event established more than 50 years ago by the Bahá'í community in the United States; it now sees observances all over the world.

Other Bahá'í participants included Denise Belisle of Canada, who was sponsored by the Goldin Institute because of her work in an interreligious "Partner Cities" project that grew out of her activity on the Interfaith Council of Montreal. Jan Saeed of Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, was sponsored by Brigham Young University because of her efforts on the Salt Lake Interreligious Council during the 2002 Winter Olympics. Brian Leopard, a professor of law at the University



Bahá'ís attending the Parliament of the World's Religions, from left to right: Robert Bennet (UK), Jan Saeed (US), A.K. Merchant (India), Badi Daemi (Andorra), Denise Belisle (Canada), and Miguel Gil (Spain).

of Nebraska, came at the invitation of the Global Ethics and Religion Forum because of his scholarship on international human rights and religion. Moojan Momen, a Bahá'í scholar from the United Kingdom who gave a well-attended talk at the Parliament on "The Bahá'í Theological Basis of Interreligious Dialogue," said that Bahá'ís are able to contribute particularly well to interfaith dialogue because of a belief system that defuses those elements of religion that tend to produce conflict.

A Call to Our Guiding Institutions, a document issued from the 1999 Parliament, served not only as a consensus of that meeting but also as a guidepost for future action, stating:

We find ourselves at a moment when people everywhere are coming to recognize that the world is a global village. Unique to this moment is the possibility of a new level of creative engagement between the institutions of religion and spirituality and the other powerful institutions that influence the character and course of human society. What is needed now is a persuasive invitation to our guiding institutions to build new, reliable, and more imaginative partnerships toward the shaping of a better world.⁸

Unlike the Parliaments in 1993 and 1999, this one did not produce a consensus statement. Instead, religious communities made separate commitments towards aiding each of the four stated goals.⁹ Nevertheless, with regard to the goal of promoting tolerance and understanding, most participants viewed the 2004 Parliament as a success, while some saw the event as more symbolic than anything else and were skeptical that practical action would emerge as a result, particularly since the Parliament's ability to influence government policies was questionable.

Still, the goals that it identified and promoted are essential. In their speeches and discussions, religious leaders and activists from an entire spectrum of beliefs and ideals repeatedly advocated recognition of human interdependence and recognition of the common spirit that pervades religion. Whether that advocacy will lead to real change remains to be seen, but the responsibility has been placed in the hands of religionists everywhere and many of them seem willing to do their part to aid a process that the Universal House of Justice describes as vital to no less than the success of human civilization:

With every day that passes, danger grows that the rising fires of religious prejudice will ignite a worldwide conflagration the consequences of which are unthinkable. Such a danger civil government, unaided, cannot overcome. Nor should we delude ourselves that appeals for mutual tolerance can alone hope to extinguish animosities that claim to possess Divine sanction. 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. At this greatest turning point in the history of civilization, the demands of such service could not be more clear.¹⁰

NOTES

- ¹ Universal House of Justice, *To the World's Religious Leaders* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), p. 1.
- ² Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985), p. 11.
- ³ *To the World's Religious Leaders*, p. 4.
- ⁴ Press release, <http://www.cpwr.org/2004Parliament/>.
- ⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Dunyá, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 87.
- ⁶ There was no Bahá'í representation at the original Parliament in 1893, since there were no Bahá'ís in North America at that time. However, that event was the occasion that marked the first public mention of Bahá'u'lláh, in a paper by Rev. Henry H. Jessup.
- ⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 28.
- ⁸ *A Call to Our Guiding Institutions*, available at http://www.cpwr.org/resource/call_to_gis.htm.
- ⁹ See <http://www.cpwr.org/2004Parliament/Barcelonacommitments/>.
- ¹⁰ *To the World's Religious Leaders*, p. 13.

Restoration of the Prison Cell of Bahá'u'lláh in Acre

In the late 1860s, Bahá'í pilgrims walked hundreds of kilometers from Persia, winding their way over barren mountains, past treacherous enemies, and through blistering deserts, to reach the ancient Mediterranean city of Acre, in what is now northern Israel. Their goal was to visit Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of their Faith, Who was being held prisoner in a fortress after His banishment to Acre by the Ottoman authorities. A victim of patently false charges, Bahá'u'lláh was incarcerated there with His family and some of His followers on 31 August 1868. For many pilgrims, simply to gaze upon that majestic prophetic figure was the most important moment of their lives. Sadly, many came all the way from Persia only to be turned back at the gates of this walled city. They often stood by the outer moat of the citadel and contented themselves with a glimpse of Bahá'u'lláh as He waved from a window high above the wall.

Today, thousands of Bahá'ís come as pilgrims to this same city and to nearby Haifa. And it is likewise a high point in their lives merely to visit the places where Bahá'u'lláh lived from 1868 until His passing in 1892. Among the focal points of Bahá'í pilgrimage has been a visit to the room in the fortress where Bahá'u'lláh was held from 1868 to 1870, and where He revealed some of His best-known



The citadel in Acre where Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned. The windows of His cell are in the upper right corner.

works, including a proclamation of His divine mission to political and religious leaders.

Since September 1995, however, visits to this holy place were suspended because of the need for extensive restoration and conservation work. After 15 years of negotiations, research, and planning, the restoration work began in 2003 and finished in June 2004. Approved by the government authorities keen to preserve the heritage of the site, the project was supervised and financed by the Bahá'í World Centre.

While the reopening marks a significant event for Bahá'ís around the world, the research, careful thinking, and delicate negotiations behind its restoration also offer the world at large considerable insight as to the historical and scientific outlook of the Bahá'í Faith as a modern, independent world religion.

Acre in history

Acre is an historic city in its own right. It was a principal base of the Romans, the Persians, and the Crusaders, who named the city St. Jean d'Acre and for whom it served as their last capital and

foothold in the Holy Land. The building where Bahá'u'lláh was held prisoner was erected by the Ottomans in about 1797 on top of the hospice of the Hospitallers of St. John, one of the few surviving Crusader structures.

By 1868, however, the city that was once described by David as “the Strong City” and designated by Hosea as “a door of hope” had fallen into a state of disorder and disrepair.¹ It had sunk “to the level of a penal colony to which murderers, highway robbers and political agitators were consigned from all parts of the Turkish empire.”² Acre was used by the Ottomans as a repository for some of the worst criminals in the empire. Banishment to this city was considered equivalent to a death sentence because of the filthy and plague-ridden conditions.

In one tablet, Bahá'u'lláh described it as “the most desolate of the cities of the world, the most unsightly of them in appearance, the most detestable in climate, and the foulest in water. It is as though it were the metropolis of the owl.”³ According to a proverb, the air was so putrid that birds would drop dead when flying overhead.

Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in Acre was characterized by great suffering and bitter turmoil which “surpassed even the agonies of the Sáyáh-Chál of Tīhrán.”⁴ Disease was widespread in the barracks and a number of the believers died from the foul conditions of the water and inadequate food. In June 1870, His anguish intensified when His 22-year-old son, Mírzá Mihdí, fell through an unguarded skylight onto a crate below, receiving fatal wounds. The injured youth expressed that “his sole desire was that the gates of the prison should be opened so that the believers might visit their Lord” and entreated his Father to accept his life “as a ransom for those who were prevented from attaining the presence of their Beloved.”⁵

Shortly after that tragic death, the Ottoman authorities decided that the citadel was needed to house troops. Accordingly, in November 1870, after two years, two months, and five days in the citadel, Bahá'u'lláh and His family were moved to house arrest within the walls of Acre.

Renovation

Dominating the northwestern corner of the ancient walled city, the citadel has remained under the control of successive civil administra-



The cell of Bahá'u'lláh before the recent restoration, circa 1921.

tions. The fact that the British used the fortress to imprison Jewish resistance fighters during the first half of the twentieth century gives it a special significance in Israeli history. By the early 1990s, however, deterioration of the citadel had advanced to the point that the government of Israel decided conservation work was vital to preserve the entire structure.

For years the discussion made little headway, but then it was realized that a major undertaking to excavate and restore the Crusader buildings below the citadel had weakened the structure. And so about 10 years ago, the Israeli authorities embarked upon a project to reinforce and renovate the citadel. Because of the citadel's importance to Bahá'ís, the Bahá'í World Centre offered to collaborate on the project.

The story of the citadel's renovation offers an instructive lesson on the art of compromise in historic renovation. In this case, the fortress-prison has historic significance not only to Bahá'ís, but also to Jewish groups concerned with preserving the memory of freedom



The cell of Bahá'u'lláh following restoration in 2004.

fighters who were incarcerated and executed there during the British Mandate.

One key issue that quickly emerged during the consultative process was what time period the restoration should reflect. The Israelis wanted it to date to 1947, to coincide with the historic breakout of Jewish prisoners, while the Bahá'ís wanted it to reflect the time period around the 1870s, when Bahá'u'lláh was incarcerated.

The Bahá'í International Community conducted detailed negotiations with Israeli authorities regarding the restoration and use of the upper floor of the northwest tower, the location of Bahá'u'lláh's cell and associated rooms. Ultimately, an agreement was reached on a creative compromise under which the interior of the upper floor of the northwest tower would be restored to the situation that existed in 1920, while the exterior of the building would be restored to its condition in 1947. The period of 1920 was chosen for the interior instead of 1870 because there was virtually no documentation from the time before the arrival of the British and it seemed unlikely that much had changed during the last 50 years of Ottoman rule.

Research

Before the restoration project began, the Bahá'í World Centre commissioned a study of the site by the Architectural Heritage Center at the Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, the Technion, and consulted with a local authority on Ottoman architecture to ensure the historical integrity of the planned restoration.

Research determined that the Ottoman citadel had been built in stages during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that the northwest tower is located on top of the remains of the Hospitaller quarter of the Knights of the Order of St. John, a Crusader structure. In the Ottoman era, the citadel housed the residences of local rulers but later was used mainly as a military barracks.

The upper floor of the northwest tower of the complex where Bahá'u'lláh and His family were incarcerated was probably built about 1797, according to the Technion researchers. Architectural details, including some decorative panels, indicate that the rooms were intended for somebody of high rank, such as a military commander.

At the time Bahá'u'lláh was confined there, however, the place was dilapidated. The roof had been constructed of wooden beams and rafters covered with rubble and low quality mortar. Dust and grit from the rubble rained through the rotten ceiling timbers into the rooms below. The living quarters were dirty and the water was contaminated. Bahá'u'lláh's room in the southwest corner of the tower was part of an apartment comprising six other rooms where members of His household stayed.

Researchers looking for descriptions of the cell and the living arrangements during the time of Bahá'u'lláh's incarceration consulted contemporary reports, photographs, and accounts by Western Bahá'í pilgrims who visited in the early years of the twentieth century, as well as later historical records.

Researchers believe that there were no significant changes to the upper floor until the 1920s, when the British undertook major renovations, replacing the roof and much of the paving. More alterations were made in 1947, when the British, who were using the citadel as a prison, made part of the upper floor into the prison infirmary. After an escape of prisoners elsewhere in the citadel, the British authori-

ties changed the original frames of the doorways in the upper floor from stone arches to perpendicular concrete beams, and replaced the wooden doors and partitions with steel grilles.

In preparing the restoration project, Bahá'í experts consulted plans of the upper floor that had been made by the British administration before it undertook the alterations in the 1920s. The plans, found in local archives, documented how the floor would likely have looked in the time of Bahá'u'lláh.

There was one important detail of which the researchers were initially unsure. The British had replaced the roof from which Bahá'u'lláh's son, Mírzá Mihdí, fell to his death. The location of the skylight was not indicated in the plans found in the archives and thus its exact historical location was uncertain. The problem was solved in the 1990s with the retrieval from German aerial photographic archives in Munich of an aerial photograph taken of the citadel in 1917. The original roof, in which the skylight is clearly visible, was still in place when that photograph was taken. As part of the structural reinforcement of the building carried out by the Israeli authorities before the start of the Bahá'í restoration, a new concrete roof was cast. It incorporated the historic skylight at the location indicated by the 1917 aerial photograph.

Restoration project

The restoration of the upper floor of the northwest tower, planned under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice, began in 2003. One major consideration involved the degree to which the restoration should reflect modern building techniques and how an authentic appearance would be achieved. In general, traditional materials were used to obtain as authentic a restoration as possible. For example, one part of the work involved installing false ceilings made of *katrani* timber, the dense and heavy wood used by the Ottoman builders, under the concrete roof. White lime plaster of the type used in the nineteenth century was applied in the many places where the original had peeled off. The doorways were restored to the shape of an arch, and wooden doors in the original style were installed. In the cell of Bahá'u'lláh, six lighting and storage niches that had been sealed off were re-opened and the floor was restored

to its original type. In Bahá'u'lláh's cell, the windows now have horizontal bars as shown in early twentieth-century photographs. In other windows, the grid pattern used during the British mandate has been retained.

Another consideration during the renovation was meeting modern safety codes. The challenge was to find a way to deal with modern needs and requirements in an historical building without it looking incongruous. The solution involved using copper lanterns, discreet spot lighting, and smoke alarms that are tucked away. However, the cell of Bahá'u'lláh was exempted from such constraints, owing to its sacred status.

With the restoration complete, Bahá'í pilgrims will now have a more accurate understanding of the circumstances surrounding Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in a place where, despite maltreatment, He was nonetheless able to further His Faith and teachings. "His enemies," 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, "intended that His imprisonment should completely destroy and annihilate the blessed Cause, but this prison was, in reality, of the greatest assistance, and became the means of its development."⁶

NOTES

¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 184.

² Ibid., p. 185.

³ Ibid., p. 186.

⁴ Ibid., p. 185.

⁵ Ibid., p. 188.

⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

Bahá'í International Community Website Launches

On 20 April 2005 the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information announced the launch of a new Website, designed to function as an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith for general inquirers, researchers, and journalists and to serve as a portal to the entire family of official Bahá'í International Community sites.

"The Bahá'ís," located at <http://bahai.org/>, replaces "The Bahá'í World," previously posted at that address, as the official presence of the Bahá'í International Community on the Internet.

The new portal features improved accessibility and a more integrated presentation of the increasing volume of articles, statements, perspectives, and accounts available on the Bahá'í International Community's sites. It provides the user with concise summaries of aspects of the Faith, such as its history, institutions, and basic tenets, as well as a directory of articles cross-referenced by topic. Visitors to the site can choose whether to view a brief introduction of the central figures and institutions of the Faith or more detailed explanations on Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. There is also a wealth of information on various facets of the Faith, including beliefs and practices, administration, social teachings, and community life. The site features a set



*Verily I say,
this is the Day
in which
mankind can
behold the Face,
and hear the
Voice, of the
Promised One.*

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Coming of Age

At times, it can seem that human society is falling apart altogether. Yet developments in all arenas of life are often the source of hope and signs of an emerging sense of individual and collective responsibility. Bahá'u'lláh's writings illuminate this seeming contradiction. Like an adolescent moving to adulthood, humanity is growing up.

Around the world Bahá'ís are striving to contribute to the building of a global society that reflects humanity's coming of age. You are welcome to explore this effort.



Moral
Education for
Children



Study Circles
for Education
and Training



Community
Devotional
Gatherings



Social and
Economic
Development

of frequently asked questions and a brief explanation of the essential activities of the institute process, the collaborative learning program in which the worldwide Bahá'í community is now engaged. It also enables access to the latest Bahá'í news and feature stories.

Among the sites that can be accessed through the portal are "Bahá'í Topics: An Information Resource," a comprehensive collection of articles about the Bahá'í Faith, its teachings, history, and community; the Bahá'í World News Service; *One Country*, the quarterly newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community; and the Bahá'í Statement Library, an archive of statements by the Bahá'í International Community.

The Bahá'í Reference Library, another new addition to the Bahá'í International Community's family of official sites, is also accessible through the portal or directly at <http://reference.bahai.org/>. Launched on 2 June 2004, it is the authoritative online source of the Bahá'í sacred writings. The Website includes the sacred writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in English, Arabic, and Persian, as well as other Bahá'í publications.

The launch of the Bahá'í Reference Library marks the first time that a comprehensive authoritative library of Bahá'í scripture has

BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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Welcome to the

BAHÁ'Í REFERENCE LIBRARY

What is the Bahá'í Reference Library

The Bahá'í Reference Library is an agency of the Bahá'í International Community, a non-governmental organization that represents and encompasses the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith.

About this Site

This site provides electronic access to selected writings of the Bahá'í Faith in English, Persian and Arabic. Publications in the original languages are made available in the Persian and Arabic options under "Languages"

It is permissible to study sciences and arts, but such sciences as are useful and would redound to the progress and advancement of the people. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

— Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 26

been available on the Internet. "The site is expected to assist researchers, students of religion, and the general public worldwide in gaining greater access to the Bahá'í holy texts," said the director of the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community, Douglas Moore.

The improved organization and integration of Bahá'í material on the Web aims to enhance its use as a resource by those studying the Faith in their professional, academic, official, or personal capacities. Several previously distinct Websites have now been brought together under the common banner of "The Bahá'ís" portal, supporting the increasing needs of the Faith and the demand for information by the global community.

A Website providing information for Bahá'ís who are planning to make a pilgrimage or short visit to the Bahá'í World Centre was also launched during the year. It is accessible at <http://pilgrimage.bahai.org/>.

The Bahá'í International Community will launch two more official sites in the near future: a media bank that includes a collection of Bahá'í images for use in publications and Websites, and a glossary, which will offer definitions and a pronunciation guide to key Bahá'í terms.

Bahá'í International Community

ACTIVITIES

The United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) gives voice to the vision and concerns of the worldwide Bahá'í community at the United Nations. With more than 5.5 million members in 191 independent countries and 45 dependent territories, Bahá'ís work for the establishment of a united global community, built on a vision of human oneness and collective security, and are dedicated to the creation of a spiritual, sustainable, and ever-advancing civilization. In its diplomatic efforts, the United Nations Office seeks to assist the international community to translate this vision into reality, by lending spiritual momentum to the global processes driving the world towards peace.

The work of the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office has evolved significantly since it first became involved with intergovernmental processes at the global level. The League of Nations was the first international forum where Bahá'ís were able to promote their vision and the principles they see as underlying peaceful relations among nations—this through the establishment of the International Bahá'í Bureau in Geneva. At this early stage of its diplomatic engagement, the Bahá'í community's contributions consisted primarily of establishing the independence of the

Bahá'í Faith as a world religion and sharing its central tenets of unity and equality with a nascent global community. Following the founding of the United Nations in 1945, recognition of the Bahá'í International Community's capacity to contribute meaningfully to the organization's deliberations resulted in the granting of special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (1970), the United Nations Children's Fund (1976), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (1989), and the establishment of a working relationship with the World Health Organization. The United Nations global conferences of the 1990s provided a further opportunity for a deeper and more direct Bahá'í engagement and contribution to deliberative processes at the global level.

In recent years, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office has sought to influence thought and action at the United Nations by bringing its vision and principles directly to bear on the most pressing issues on the organization's agenda in the form of analysis and comprehensive, concrete proposals for actions and reform. Under the guidance of the Community's United Nations Office, the capacity of national Bahá'í communities to raise issues with their governmental officials has increased significantly and has thereby supported the work of the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations.

Reform processes at the United Nations

Throughout its engagement with the United Nations, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office has consistently added its voice to debates about reforms and changes to the organization. As the calls and proposals for comprehensive UN reform in the face of a dramatically changed global context have reasserted their primacy on the UN agenda, the community has grounded its contributions in the understanding of UN reform as part of an organic, evolutionary course characterized by increasing levels of integration and unity in governance structures and processes.

Over the last year, the twin issues of collective security and socio-economic development have dominated the United Nations agenda, fuelled by Secretary General Kofi Annan's sweeping reform agenda aimed at making the UN a more responsive, collaborative,

and effective organization in addressing the global challenges of the twenty-first century. In the buildup to the September 2005 High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, which will consider reform proposals and review progress since the 2000 Millennium Summit, the United Nations released four seminal reports dealing with UN–civil society relations, collective security, development, and comprehensive reform respectively.¹ The Bahá'í International Community contributed to the deliberative processes surrounding these themes by inviting Bahá'í experts to participate in panel discussions, facilitating civil society contributions to deliberations on UN reform, and submitting concrete recommendations for a more effective United Nations.

One of the Bahá'í International Community's primary areas of engagement in the UN reform agenda has been in addressing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—a set of eight quantitative targets based on the major goals agreed upon at the UN conferences of the 1990s, which have been synthesized into a global agenda for development and constitute the organizing framework for UN work in this area.² In its response to the UN regarding MDGs, the Community's United Nations Office stressed the importance of universal participation in the development process, the application of knowledge from the fields of science and religion, as well as the need for an earnest re-evaluation of global systems and processes—including governance, trade, and the private sector—that perpetuate the growing extremes of wealth and poverty. During the annual UN Department of Public Information NGO Conference, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office spearheaded and cosponsored a panel discussion titled "Getting to Yes for the MDGs," which explored different ways in which nongovernmental organizations could form effective partnerships for the achievement of the MDGs. During the NGO Forum held in preparation for the annual meetings of the Commission on Social Development, the Bahá'í International Community moderated one of the Forum's main panel discussions, which addressed the continuing relevance of the comprehensive development agenda generated at the World Summit on Social Development in 1995 to the achievement of the MDGs. In Santiago, Chile, regional representatives of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America

and the Caribbean (ECLAC) worked closely with the Conference of NGOs (CONGO) in planning the CONGO-ECLAC-sponsored seminar on "Partnerships for a New Era: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals." The Bahá'í International Community hosted a networking reception on the first evening of the seminar and offered visits to a Bahá'í-inspired project in the community of Las Condes following the seminar.

The UN's focus on mechanisms to promote global security through a broader understanding of collective security and the development of UN working methods better suited to today's global threats, provided yet another opportunity for substantive input from the Bahá'í International Community. In its response to the Secretary-General's report outlining proposals for UN reform, the Bahá'í International Community supported the UN's comprehensive approach to collective security and reiterated the Bahá'í vision of a system of collective security within a framework of global federation, in whose favor all nations of the world will have ceded claims to make war. The BIC's United Nations Office, along with 12 other NGOs, participated in a meeting with Allan Rock, Canadian Ambassador to the UN, to discuss NGO responses to the report.

In addition to comments on the proposed agenda for UN reform, the UN invited NGOs to submit issues that they deemed important for discussion and that were not already on the agenda at the High-Level Summit in September. In response, the Bahá'í International Community stressed the importance of recognizing the individual's freedom to hold religious belief of his or her choosing and the concomitant freedom to change one's religion or belief. In its statement to the UN, the Bahá'í International Community stated, "Until all people are free to openly practice and share their beliefs within the parameters of equally applied laws, as well as change their religion or belief system, development and peace will prove elusive." On a related theme, the Bahá'í International Community called on the UN to address religious extremism as a major obstacle to peace and well-being, noting, "Hesitancy to acknowledge and forcefully condemn the religious extremism motivating terrorist acts weakens the effectiveness of the UN's efforts to bring an end to international terrorism."

Human rights

The promotion of human rights continued to be a focal point for the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office, guided by the belief in the inherent dignity and noble nature of the individual as well as the equality of all human beings as the prerequisite for a just, prosperous, and sustainable world. This year, the Bahá'í International Community held the chair of the NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion, Conscience, and Belief (Geneva) and continued its active participation in the NGO Committee Against Racism and Racial Discrimination, the NGO Committee on Human Rights, and the Special Committee of International NGOs on Human Rights (Geneva).

Within its broader work on human rights, the Bahá'í International Community endeavored to protect the rights of Bahá'ís around the world to practice their own faith, addressing in particular a continuing pattern of persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran. The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, making specific mention of the situation of Bahá'ís. The Community's United Nations Offices worked closely with external affairs representatives from Canada and other parts of the world to make this possible. This year's meetings of the Commission on Human Rights, however, failed even to consider a resolution on human rights in Iran. "In view of the sharp increase of human rights violations against the Bahá'í community of Iran, it is nothing less than shocking that the Commission on Human Rights has for the third year in a row failed to renew international monitoring of the situation," said Bani Dugal, Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, in a press release. For three years, while the Commission has not presented a resolution on Iran, the situation has deteriorated, marked by a resumption of violent attacks approaching the levels of persecution experienced 20 years ago.

The Bahá'í International Community took the opportunity to submit its recommendations for strengthening the United Nations human rights machinery in response to a request from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the NGO community for suggestions as to how the Office can more

effectively discharge its mandate. In terms of structural and functional reforms, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office called for a strengthened field presence at the country level, increase in the Office's budgetary resources, and continued levels of substantive engagement with the NGO community. Beyond these reforms, however, it stressed that "the legitimacy of the United Nations human rights machinery can be restored only through an unwavering adherence to the highest principles of justice, including those elaborated in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

Advancement of women

The work of the Bahá'í International Community towards the advancement of women, one of its core programmatic areas, continued with full vigor, developing external affairs capacity and raising the profile of the Community's engagement in this issue. As chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGO-CSW), the Bahá'í International Community's Principal Representative played a pivotal role in orchestrating the participation of nearly 600 nongovernmental organizations from all over the world at this year's Commission on the Status of Women. The Community's United Nations Office provided office space for NGO-CSW staff, facilitating the coordination of this record-breaking level of civil society participation and effectively coordinating the work of nine dedicated volunteers. The diversity of NGOs, represented by more than 2,700 civil society participants, brought women's perspectives and experience to bear on the issues before the Commission and evidenced the strength, increase, and level of organization of women's advocacy networks worldwide. At this year's meeting, 191 UN member states reaffirmed their commitment to the ambitious goals articulated 10 years ago at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, and acknowledged gender equality as a prerequisite for meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Bahá'í advocacy in this area continued to stress the pivotal role of men and boys both in advancing the rights of women and in reaping the benefits of a greater equality. As stated by Abdu'l-Baha, "As long as women are prevented from attaining

their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs."

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women played a key role in coordinating the contribution of NGOs to the work of the Commission. As chair of the NGO Committee, Ms. Dugal organized a Consultation Day for NGOs, reviewing the commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action and assessing progress towards the realization of these commitments over the last 10 years. These were supplemented with daily briefings for NGOs. In an effort to recognize individuals' achievements in the area of the advancement of women, the Committee hosted a reception for more than 300 representatives of member states, at which it presented Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, with a "Person of Distinction Award." During the Commission, Ms. Dugal, as Chair of the Committee, was invited to speak at a High-Level Round Table commemorating the 25th anniversary of the CEDAW by the General Assembly as well as at a panel commemorating 30 years of UN efforts to promote gender equality. In her speeches, she acknowledged the momentum and levels of transnational collaboration generated by international conferences but noted the disconnect that exists today between implementation and ideals. She said, "States can no longer be permitted to shirk from their responsibilities on the pretext of domestic jurisdiction or cultural relativism . . . The full equality of men and women . . . is a prerequisite for the attainment of the very ends the UN was created to serve."

In January 2005, the Bahá'í International Community's Principal Representative to the United Nations was invited to speak on the subject of women's role in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace building at a conference on gender mainstreaming and the Millennium Development Goals. The conference was held in Islamabad, Pakistan, and was co-sponsored by the Pakistani Prime Minister's Office and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. As honorary guest speaker, Ms. Dugal emphasized the importance of keeping women central to the peace process, including full participation in decision making and implementation during post-conflict reconstruction, peace-building, and peacekeeping processes.

Social development

With the presence of a new representative in the area of Social Development, the Bahá'í International Community's work in this area expanded markedly during the year in review and was further strengthened by the contributions of invited Bahá'í experts.

As a member of the Executive Committee of NGOs for Social Development (with more than 40 member NGOs), Bahiyyih Chaffers took the lead role in managing the process of committee administration. In this capacity, the Community's United Nations Office worked closely with the Mission of South Africa to the United Nations, the Chair of this year's Commission on Social Development, to ensure comprehensive NGO participation in the Commission and assisted in organizing a Civil Society Forum preceding the Commission. As a result of this positive relationship, the NGO Forum during the Commission was able to take place at the UN itself, thereby raising the profile of the NGO presence.

The focus of this year's Commission on Social Development was to review progress made since the groundbreaking World Summit on Social Development in 1995, at which 115 world leaders forged a plan for a comprehensive, "people-centered development," pledging to focus international development efforts on overcoming poverty, fostering employment, and social integration. Many gathered for this year's meeting expressed concern that Copenhagen's comprehensive vision of development had been overshadowed by narrower concepts of development and that issues of global security had displaced social justice on the global agenda. In the end, member states issued a declaration upholding the main principles adopted in the Copenhagen Declaration and affirmed that the Millennium Development Goals are "crucial to a coherent, people-centered approach to development."

During the Commission, Dr. Haleh Arbab Correa, representing the Colombia-based Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences (FUNDAEC), was invited on behalf of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs to participate, alongside ambassadors and ministers, in the High-Level Round Table focused on the promotion of full employment. In her comments, Dr. Correa emphasized the role that moral education plays in the construction of a new world. She highlighted the importance of understanding

education as an holistic process that goes beyond the training of skills to include development of attitudes and concepts—such as service to humanity—that should be taken into consideration in promoting employment. Dr. Correa spoke again at an event, co-organized by the Bahá'í International Community and the Subcommittee on the Eradication of Poverty, titled, “Participation Works: International Success Stories in the Fight Against Poverty.” Describing the philosophy behind FUNDAEC, a Bahá'í-inspired organization working in socioeconomic development, Dr. Correa spoke of the role that science and religion play in development and stressed that “people should not be looked at as problems” but rather as protagonists who, with proper education, can take charge of their own and their community's development.

In order to expand its participation, and contribution to UN events, the Bahá'í International Community has increasingly called on experts within the worldwide Bahá'í community, those with specialized knowledge relevant to particular UN-identified themes or events. This year, Dr. Stephen Gonzales, a law professor and leading American expert in conflict resolution, was invited to attend and observe the proceedings of the recently formed United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII). The 16-member Permanent Forum, established in 2000, is an advisory body and subsidiary organ of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health, and human rights. It is a unique body within the UN system, representing a transnational cultural community rather than a member state. Given the history of Bahá'ís' involvement in community development work with indigenous populations, the annual meetings of the PFII present a important opportunity to learn more about the central issues of concern from indigenous people themselves.

At this year's meetings of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, the Bahá'í International Community played an active role in facilitating the involvement of faith communities in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). Coinciding with its international launch, the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Offices hosted a consultation to explore the contributions of faith communities to the aims of the

Decade. Peter Adriance, External Affairs Representative of the United States Bahá'í community and co-chair of the Faith Sector team of DESD, led the meeting. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had identified faith communities as important partners in carrying out the aims of the Decade and supported the meeting by advertising it on the UNESCO Website. The Bahá'í International Community co-sponsored two more events during the Commission, which further explored the contributions of faith communities and served to raise the profile and shape a vision of faith community involvement in the Decade.

The Bahá'í International Community continued to follow the work of the World Summit on the Information Society, which launched its first phase in Geneva, Switzerland, in December 2003. In the Declaration of Principles, 175 member states pledged to “build a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society,” where all can “create, access, utilize, and share information and knowledge.” In light of the promotion of the principles of the oneness of humankind and its physical incarnation in global systems of communication and administration, the role of information and communications technologies—particularly issues of equitable access—are paramount. In this year’s Second Preparatory Committee meetings leading up to the Second Summit in November 2005, Bahiyyih Chaffers, representing the Bahá'í International Community’s United Nations Office, became an active member of the NGO Working Group on Working Methods, which met daily to generate ideas for effective and efficient methods of NGO participation in the conference process.

Meetings

This year, the Bahá'í International Community’s Principal Representative to the United Nations was invited, as a leader within her religious community, to participate in the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. This marked the first year that the Bahá'í International Community was represented at this high-level forum. The annual meetings of the World Economic Forum bring together influential leaders from government (including heads of state), business, academia, nongovernmental

organizations, media, religion, and the arts to debate challenging issues on the global agenda, identify emerging risks and trends, and search for ways to address them. This year, under the theme "Taking Responsibility for Tough Choices," participants focused on issues of poverty, climate change, equitable globalization, and good governance. Since the first meeting in 1970, the annual meeting's participant base and focus have grown from a strictly market-driven agenda to encompass a growing diversity of actors and issues shaping the global economic, social, and environmental situation. It is particularly noteworthy that against the backdrop of a traditionally capitalist and market-driven agenda, the perspectives of religious leaders were given a hearing. Ms. Dugal, one of only three female religious representatives invited to attend, spoke on panels dealing with global governance, gender equality, and values in leadership. She also took part in a cultural event designed to celebrate religious and cultural diversity, titled a "Celebration of Faith." All four events provided a rich opportunity to introduce concepts from the Bahá'í writings and bring these ideas to bear on the challenging issues before the global community.

The Bahá'í International Community also continued its active involvement in the World Faiths Development Dialogue, which began in 1998 as an initiative of James D. Wolfensohn, former President of the World Bank, and Lord Carey, then Archbishop of Canterbury, with the aim of facilitating a dialogue on poverty and development between religious leaders and international development institutions. This year, at the fourth meeting of the World Faiths Development Dialogue, Matthew Weinberg represented the Bahá'í International Community before some 60 senior religious, policy, and political leaders from around the globe, who gathered to discuss the future direction of the Dialogue initiative and to map out possible areas for concrete collaboration. In his remarks, the Bahá'í representative emphasized that individuals and communities must be regarded as "active protagonists in tracing their own path of development, in creating and applying knowledge—knowledge that not only enhances material welfare but also deepens human solidarity." The Bahá'í International Community offered its experience of facilitating a policy dialogue on the intersection of science, religion, and development, which has proven useful in understanding

how spiritual perspectives can strengthen the theory, practice, and assessment of development.

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 21 April 2004 to 20 April 2005, the office arranged 298 special visits for some 2,561 dignitaries, leaders of thought, and prominent people from 70 countries. Visitors included diplomats, religious leaders, physicians, professors, parliamentarians, researchers, military officials, educators, students, journalists, tour guides, business people, and members of civil society and nongovernmental organizations.

The Office received 26 ambassadors from 20 countries as well as other government ministers and officials, including those from Australia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Finland, India, Latvia, Nigeria, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan.

The Office also received film crews, reporters, journalists, producers, and photographers from local and international television and radio stations. Much of the media coverage centered on the Bahá'í gardens and the Shrine of the Báb as popular tourist attractions in Haifa.

The Office of Public Information's Paris branch contributes to the work of the Bahá'í International Community by assisting with public information initiatives and training in Europe and the francophone world and through continued involvement with the European Union, UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), and Eastern Europe's Stability Pact (formerly the Royaumont Process).³ This year, the Office supported the imple-

mentation of a new Happy Hippo Show project in Bulgaria, titled "Roma and Juliet," which promoted interethnic, interreligious, and intercultural dialogue. The project included 20 performances in 11 different towns and involved about 1,100 youth.

The Office's ongoing efforts to support national Bahá'í communities in their public information efforts included organizing the 11th annual European Public Information Management Seminar, in Budapest, Hungary, in July 2004. The seminar focused on different aspects of work with the media and on interfaith dialogue. A total of 60 participants from 28 European countries representing 26 National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies in Europe participated in the seminar.

As part of its partnership with UNESCO for the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence against the Children of the World, the Paris Office continued assisting European National Spiritual Assemblies and Bahá'í-inspired associations to post their respective projects on the UNESCO Website dedicated to the International Decade.

The Office offered support to various Bahá'í-inspired nonprofit organizations in Europe and also oversaw the production and publication of the French edition of *One Country* magazine, as well as the *European Public Information Bulletin*. During the past year, the Office collaborated with the National Spiritual Assembly of France in the production of a video in English and French, entitled *Promoting Unity in Diversity*, about the two Bahá'í exhibitions held at the European Parliament in 2004.⁴

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 Website 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.⁵ 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 Websites of national Bahá'í communities are also available.

The Bahá'í World News Service continued its fourth year of publication via its Website, receiving more than 60,000 visits per month.⁶

One Country, the official newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community, entered its 16th year of publication. Published quarterly in English, French, German, Chinese, Spanish, and Russian, it reached more than 50,000 readers in at least 180 countries and maintained a presence on the World Wide Web.⁷

One Country won two awards for issues produced during 2004–2005, among them a prestigious Grand Award in the APEX 2005 Awards for Publication Excellence, which was given to *One Country* for overall excellence in the nonprofit, small office category. Just 100 APEX Grand Awards were handed out, in 16 categories, from among 5,000 entries, according to the contest's organizers, Communications Concepts. *One Country* also won an Award of Excellence in the columns and editorials subcategory, for its Perspective editorial titled "Literacy and Development," which was published in the April–June 2004 issue.

During the year, *One Country*'s stories covered a wide range of activities undertaken by Bahá'í communities worldwide. The April–June 2004 issue featured a major story on the efforts of Ugandan Bahá'ís to promote literacy through a distinctive program that also teaches steps towards practical social and economic development. The October–December 2004 issue carried a story on how the Bahá'í community of Australia has won appreciation for religious classes in state schools that emphasize moral values and respect for other cultures. Other issues during the 2004–2005 period covered the Copenhagen Plus Five and Beijing Plus Five conferences at the United Nations. Ongoing coverage of the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran was another focus of *One Country* during the period, with three such stories, including a major account of Iran's efforts to destroy the cultural heritage of the Bahá'í community there. Perspective editorials during the year discussed Bahá'í approaches to re-envisioning collective security and the challenge of extreme poverty.

NOTES

- ¹ The four reports include: *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the UN and Global Governance*, Panel of Eminent Persons on UN–Civil Society Relationships (June 2004); *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, December 2004); *Investing in Development: A Practical Guide to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, Millennium Project Report to the

Secretary-General (January 2005); *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, Report of the Secretary-General (March 2005).

- ² The eight Millennium Development Goals are: eradication of poverty, achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality, reduction of child mortality, improvement in maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing a global partnership for development.
- ³ For more information on the BIC's involvement in this initiative, see *The Bahá'í World 1998–99* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2000), pp. 145–150.
- ⁴ For more information, see *The Bahá'í World 2003–2004* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2005), pp. 113–118.
- ⁵ The site can be found at <http://bahai.org/>.
- ⁶ The site can be found at <http://news.bahai.org/>.
- ⁷ The site can be found at <http://www.onecountry.org/>.

Update on the Situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Arab Countries

The Bahá'í community of Iran has endured persecution throughout its 161-year history, including executions, imprisonments, torture, and confiscation of property; denial of the right to operate as a peaceful, law-abiding religious community; and violation of its fundamental human rights. These acts of repression and persecution continued during 2004 and 2005.

Destruction of Bahá'í holy places

In the spring of 2004, the house-like structure that marked the resting place of Quddús, or Mullá Muḥammad-‘Alí Bárfurúshí, who is revered by Bahá'ís as the foremost disciple of the Báb, was razed to the ground in Bábul, with the full sanction of the authorities. When Bahá'ís appealed to the national government to halt the action, they were assured that the remains would not be disturbed and that the site would be covered with a green lawn. However, although it appeared that the desecration had stopped, the dismantling of the gravesite continued surreptitiously until it was entirely demolished. The Bahá'í community was not even permitted to retrieve the remains of Quddús so that they could be interred with respect at another site. The Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations remarked that this act utterly

contradicted the Iranian government's claim that the human rights situation in that country is improving.

The destruction of Bahá'í holy places continued two months later, with the demolition of the house of Mírzá Buzurg-i-Núrí, the father of Bahá'u'lláh, in Tehran. This residence occupied an important place in the history of the Bahá'í Faith, as it was where Bahá'u'lláh recovered from His imprisonment in the Sýáh-Chál before beginning His journey of exile to Baghdad. Unlike the quiet, gradual destruction of the grave of Quddús, the demolition of the house of Mírzá Buzurg was carried out quickly and in the open—perhaps a measure of the Iranian government's confidence in its ability to carry out its stated plan to slowly but surely “strangulate” the Bahá'í community.¹ The demolition of this particular residence did, however, raise an outcry in several major Iranian newspapers. *Hamshahri* published a lengthy article about the life of Mírzá Buzurg and the architecture of his house, and another paper, *Etemaad*, referring to the house as a “matchless model of art, spirituality, and architecture,” termed its destruction “a tragic national and cultural calamity” because of Mírzá Buzurg's connection to the court of Fath-‘Alí-Sháh and his eminence as one of Iran's greatest calligraphers.

In response to the Iranian government's destruction of Bahá'í holy places, national Bahá'í communities around the world sponsored the publication of the statement *Cultural Cleansing: Destroying a Community, Erasing Memory* in September 2004. It stated, in part, “The hatred of the extremist mullahs for the Bahá'ís is such that they, like the Taliban of Afghanistan who destroyed the towering Buddhist sculptures at Bamiyan, intend not only to eradicate the religion, but even to erase all traces of its existence in the country of its birth.”² The goal of the publication was to call the world's attention to the destruction of cultural landmarks that are part of the heritage of the entire world. The statement appeared in newspapers in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Norway, the United States, and the United Kingdom, including the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Times* and the *Washington Post* in the US; the *London Times* in the UK; *Le Monde* in France; *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Die Zeit* in Germany; the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *Le Devoir* and *La Presse* in Canada; and *The Australian*.

Letter to President Khatami

By August 2004, pressure on the Bahá'í community by authorities had intensified to the point where individual members were being threatened and the Bahá'í community was ordered to suspend all social, educational, and community-related activities—anything beyond individual observance of religious obligations. They were told that even introducing themselves as Bahá'ís would be considered an attempt to teach their religion and was therefore an illegal act.

In this climate of repression, on 15 November 2004, the Iranian Bahá'í community addressed a letter to the president of Iran, Hojatoleslam Siyyid Mohammad Khatami. It was also widely distributed to governmental and nongovernmental authorities and agencies throughout the country. The letter, courteous in tone, reviewed the history of the persecution of the Iranian Bahá'í community, outlined the relevant principles in the Iranian constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and various other international covenants and conventions, quoted several pertinent verses from the Qur'án, and clearly stated the principles of the Bahá'í Faith—including loyalty and obedience to government. The letter concluded by stating that throughout the quarter century during which the Islamic government has held the reins of power, the Iranian Bahá'í community has always stood firm—and ready to contribute to the progress of the country:

To every act of injustice, Bahá'ís have responded with magnanimity. Faced with widespread and intense persecutions and multi-faceted iniquities, the Bahá'ís have never deviated, even by a hair's breadth, from the straight divine path, and they continue to hold fast onto the cord of patience and tolerance as dictated by their Faith and belief. They fain would expect that, over such a long period of time, which should have been sufficient to remove suspicions and misunderstandings, the esteemed authorities would have realized that the Bahá'ís firmly believe in the oneness of God and the divine nature of all religions and prophets, as well as the realm beyond as confirmed in all the divine scriptures; they obey the laws and regulations of their country in accordance with the principles of their religion; they strive to preserve the interests of their homeland by offering

cultural, social, economic, and developmental assistance; and they would never refuse any service to establish human virtues and perfections which fulfil such universal visions as world peace and the oneness of humanity.

In conclusion, the Iranian Bahá'í community made the request that the government, “based on the Constitution, will take immediate action to ensure the emancipation of the Iranian Bahá'í community, reinstating their human rights and restoring the privileges of which they have been deprived.”

Upon receiving the letter, the majority of governmental and nongovernmental authorities reacted with sympathy; however, a number of the Bahá'ís who were involved in distributing the message were arrested. In the case of one young man, authorities initially demanded approximately US\$3,400 bail to secure his release; the individual did not wish to comply, since experience indicates that such payments contribute to establishing a system of extortion from people who have no constitutional protection. Largely owing to international pressure by various governments, this young man and the other individuals who were arrested were released without bail after several weeks of imprisonment.

Arrests, attacks on individuals and communities, confiscation and destruction of individuals' property

Attacks on individual Bahá'ís, Bahá'í communities, arrests, and the confiscation and/or destruction of Bahá'í-owned property increased during 2004–2005.

The case of an individual Bahá'í in Hamadán is particularly chilling. In July 2004, a Bahá'í optician in that city was kidnapped several times and brutally attacked by strangers who threatened him with death if he did not recant his faith and become a Muslim. He went to the police, who documented the case, which was then referred to a Revolutionary Court. However, the court investigator returned the documents to the police station and instructed that such cases not be documented in the future, since the Bahá'ís would then be able to demand their rights and complain to international authorities. The Bahá'í eventually persuaded another police official to file a complaint, and this time the judge warned him repeatedly to withdraw

his complaint, or “it would cost him dearly.” Although the judge eventually allowed the complaint to be filed, the complainant was then taken to the “information division” where he was interrogated about his beliefs, strongly advised to convert to Islam—and warned that he should remember what had happened to another Bahá'í in Hamadán, who had been killed under mysterious circumstances the previous month.

It is therefore clear that Bahá'ís cannot expect protection from the government. In fact, Bahá'ís have found that government officials often express and foster negative attitudes towards Bahá'ís. For example, a report in *The Irish Times* on 20 May 2004 quotes a passage from the question and answer section of the new Website of the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei:

Q. “We have Baahi [Bahá'í] neighbors,” writes one, referring to Iran’s largest religious minority that is routinely persecuted by the authorities. “Our neighbours are good people and we have excellent relations with them. What should we do?”

A. “These people are *harem* [harám] (forbidden, unlawful) and are the enemy of our religion and beliefs,” replies Khamenei. “You should end your relationship with them.”

Several months after the distribution of the letter to President Khatami, a new wave of arrests began. Two individuals who had been arrested in November and then released were re-imprisoned; this time they were convicted in court—without legal representation—and sentenced for periods of one to three years. In early March, three prominent members of the Bahá'í community in Tehran were arrested after their homes were ransacked by the Iranian intelligence agency and documents pertaining to the Bahá'í community were confiscated.

In January and February 2005, in the city of Yazd, Bahá'ís were harassed and assaulted, and the Bahá'í cemetery was destroyed, with tombstones smashed and the remains of the interred left exposed. Bahá'í business premises were burned to the ground.

Other disturbing events during the period under review include the suspension, by an Islamic court, of the sentence given a man who murdered a Bahá'í. While the court recognized, based on

the defendant's own testimony, the crime as a "quasi-intentional" murder, and he was convicted, the sentence was suspended as time served and it was further decreed that no "blood money" should be paid to the family because they are apostates. The worry is that the theological basis of the decision will be used by Muslims to support the belief that they can kill Bahá'ís without fear of serious punishment by Iran's courts.

And in October 2004, six Bahá'í homes in the village of Katá in the Buyír-Ahmad region were confiscated by the authorities—solely on the basis of the owners' membership in the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'ís in this village have previously endured shootings, mob attacks, and the burning of their properties; since the early days of the Islamic revolution they have been subjected to pressure intended to force their conversion to Islam.

Persecution of Bahá'í students and efforts to hinder their pursuit of education

One of the social, educational, and community activities that the Bahá'ís were ordered to suspend in August 2004 was the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education, which has functioned as a private university for Bahá'í youth in Iran, who are routinely denied entrance to the country's universities.

During the same month, an individual was arrested arbitrarily for printing Bahá'í studies material. Kept for over a month in prison, he was released only after bail amounting to US\$114,000 had been posted.

Also at that time, the Iranian government devised a devious scheme to demoralize students who were applying for university admission. In the past, university entrance forms required applicants to identify themselves as members of one of the officially recognized religions in Iran—Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or Zoroastrianism. No other choices were permitted, and Bahá'ís, who refuse to lie about their religious affiliation, have thus been prevented for more than 20 years from entering universities in Iran. In 2004, the Bahá'í community was assured by government officials that the forms would be changed and that religion would not be a barrier to Bahá'í students taking the university entrance exams. Instead of being required to fill

in a slot for their religious affiliation, university applicants were simply asked which of the four approved religious subject examinations they wished to take. Bahá'ís were assured that by choosing Islam as the subject on the examination, there would be no implication that students were members of that faith. However, after the students took the exam, officials proclaimed that their action constituted a declaration of themselves as Muslims.

When the Bahá'í students learned of this duplicity and approached the authorities to correct the mistake, the government at first seemed helpful, then stalled, and finally responded that the students either had to accept the identification as it stood or give up their efforts to enter university. Eventually, the authorities offered to admit only 10 of the 800 Bahá'í students who had applied for admission to university; those 10 refused, in solidarity with their fellow Bahá'í youth. In the end, no Bahá'í students were admitted to university, in spite of government promises and the Bahá'ís' high scores on the entrance examinations. In fact, Muslim students with much lower scores were routinely admitted.

It seems clear that the entire exercise constituted a ploy on the part of the Iranian government to placate Western governments and convince them that Iran is improving the lot of the country's Bahá'í community. This is clearly not the case. One recalls the statement in the 1991 Golpaygani memorandum from the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Council on "the Bahá'í question," which states that Bahá'ís "must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís."³ Indeed, on one Iranian Ayatollah's Website, in response to a question about whether registering Bahá'ís in educational institutions is in the interests of Islam, the Ayatollah responded, "Their registration as Bahá'ís, which is an anti-Islamic intelligence organization, is not allowed and is contrary to the interests of Islam and the principles and values of the Islamic Revolution."

Media

An upsurge in attacks beginning in January 2005 appears to have been coordinated with the launching of a campaign of defamation against the Bahá'ís in the government-controlled media—and was,

in part, a response to the letter presented by the Bahá'í community in November 2004. In December 2004, an article entitled "Behind the Shadowy Letter of the Bahá'ís" on the batzab.com Website responds to the letter to President Khatami by accusing the Bahá'ís of being "used as a tool by the Zionists" and hints darkly that "if Baha'ism [sic] becomes a political tool in the hands of foreigners, it is only natural that the officials of the Islamic Republic would have to change their method of dealing with the Bahá'ís." During the same month, another article on the same Website makes similar accusations regarding "links of the Bahá'ís with the Zionists, which pose a danger to Iran" and hopes "that the security and justice officials of Iran will pay more attention to uprooting this corrupt sect." In an article in *Jomhouri-e-Eslami* (the Islamic Republic Newspaper) on 8 January 2005, the Bahá'í appeal to the Iranian President is characterized as a "provocative" activity and "part of a plan by the United States" to exert pressure on Iran. In fact, the article accuses the US government of financing the distribution of the letter to remove the government of the Islamic Republic, since it cannot do it by military force. Another article, on the Website of the Cultural Foundation of Rahpouyan of Shíráz, is devoted entirely to attacking aspects of the Bahá'í Faith and threatens retribution against Bahá'ís, saying that the Iranian people have tolerated the presence of the Bahá'ís in Iran for the past two decades but have reached the limits of their patience and will no longer refrain from assaulting them. The conclusion of the article requests the government to be proactive in preventing "apostate" Bahá'ís from manipulating the religious sentiments of the country's Muslim population.

Outside Iran, media coverage took a different tone. In France, articles in many different newspapers and on various radio stations reported on the exclusion of Bahá'í students from university and followed up on the *Cultural Cleansing* statement published after the destruction of the house of Bahá'u'lláh's father in Tehran.

In January 2005, the *Luxemburger Wort*, a church-owned paper, published an article entitled "The Hidden Face of Khatami: A Bastion against Religious Proselytism," following the president's tour of seven African countries that month. The article describes the Iranian government's concern about the "considerable presence" of Iranian Bahá'í immigrants in Africa and reports that President Khatami

“is said to have asked the heads of state of the countries he visited not to encourage the spread of the movement.” In an interview broadcast on Radio France Internationale in January, an academic from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva also commented on President Khatami’s focus during his African tour, noting that Iranian officials appear to have among the aims of their diplomatic work the exercise of pressure on African countries to halt Bahá’í activities.

In October 2004, Voice of America (VOA) broadcast an editorial, reflecting the views of the United States government, regarding Iran and religious freedom, which mentioned the fact that “Bahá’ís are special targets of abuse” in that country, that they “are not permitted to teach or practice their religion, obtain government jobs, or attend Iranian universities,” that “their property has been seized and they are victims of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment,” and that “several Bahá’í sites of great religious significance have been destroyed by Iranian authorities.” In February 2005, the VOA Persian-language service carried an interview regarding the persecution of Bahá’ís in Iran, following the recent desecration of the cemetery in Yazd.

Actions at the United Nations and by national governments

Once again this year, international agencies—with one lamentable exception—and national governments around the world continued to monitor the situation of Iran’s Bahá’ís and to speak up on their behalf.

The 92nd Session of the International Labour Organization (ILO) was held in Geneva in June 2004, at which the report of the ILO’s Committee of Experts mentioned the discrimination against the Bahá’ís practiced in Iran and urged the government to address the issue. Furthermore, it asked the government to provide current information regarding the education and the position of Bahá’ís in the labor market that will show how it is making efforts to bring their situation into line with the Convention on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation.

On 17 November 2004, the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on the human

rights situation in Iran, mentioning the Bahá'ís in two paragraphs. The resolution was co-sponsored by 39 countries, with 69 countries voting in favor, 55 against, and 51 abstaining.

On 20 December 2004, for the 17th time since 1985, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran, with specific mention of the persecution of the Bahá'í community there. The resolution, introduced by Canada, expressed “serious concern” about the human rights situation and called on Iran to “eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religious grounds,” taking note of the recent upsurge of human rights violations against the Bahá'ís. It specifically mentioned “the continuing discrimination against persons belonging to minorities, including Christians, Jews, and Sunnis, and the increased discrimination against the Bahá'ís, including cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, the denial of free worship or of publicly carrying out communal affairs, the disregard of property rights, the destruction of sites of religious importance, the suspension of social, educational, and community-related activities, and the denial of access to higher education, employment, pensions, and other benefits.” The resolution passed by a vote of 71 in favor and 54 against, with 55 abstentions—a greater margin of votes in favor than in the Third Committee session. The Bahá'í International Community's Principal Representative at the United Nations expressed gratitude for the resolution, commenting that “expressions of concern by the international community such as this remain the chief means of protection for Iran's beleaguered Bahá'í community.”

In its session in January 2005, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child considered the second periodic report of Iran on its implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. While the report asserted that there is general improvement in the rights of Iranian children, the committee expert who served as country rapporteur raised the issue of discrimination against the Bahá'ís in Iran, expressing the committee's concern about restrictions regarding freedom of religion and noting that Bahá'ís were reportedly discriminated against in regard to education, employment, travel, housing, and cultural activities. The Iranian delegation responded that since Bahá'í children were

required, along with all other children in the country, to complete eight years of schooling, there was no case of discrimination against them and that the government promotes human rights education in Iranian schools.

Unfortunately, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, meeting in Geneva in March and April 2005, once again refused to put forward a resolution condemning the human rights abuses in Iran. In an oral statement, the Bahá'í International Community urged the Commission to table and pass such a resolution, saying that "the gross, flagrant, repeated violations of human rights in Iran—including the abuses that target Bahá'ís in that country—warrant the re-establishment of a monitoring mechanism." The Bahá'í International Community's Representative in Geneva also noted that "human rights violations in Iran have again become so grave that, in our view, they warrant a clear signal from the international community"; and the Principal Representative commented, "In view of the sharp increase of human rights violations against the Bahá'í community of Iran, it is nothing less than shocking that the Commission on Human Rights has for the third year in a row failed to renew international monitoring of the situation . . . We are very disappointed at the failure of the Commission on Human Rights to live up to its mandate."

During the year, governments around the world also expressed their support for Iran's Bahá'ís. In the United Kingdom, for example, parliamentarians tabled an Early Day Motion expressing concern over the destruction of the house of Bahá'u'lláh's father in Tehran and the government's actions to prevent Bahá'í students from entering university. Parliamentary Questions were raised on the issue, and it was also brought forward in a debate on European Union relations with Iran. Dr. Denis MacShane, Member of Parliament and Minister for Europe, commented, "I hope that the whole House will send a message of solidarity to people of the Bahá'í Faith. It is a great, noble, tolerant, and peace-loving religion, and its treatment at the hands of the Iranian authorities is an insult to human values anywhere in the world." The situation of Iran's Bahá'ís was also mentioned in the government's 2004 Annual Human Rights Report, released in November 2004.

The situation of the Bahá'ís in other Muslim countries

The Bahá'í community in Egypt, which is severely circumscribed in its activities, has also been the target of much negative publicity in the newspapers. In August 2004, after a visit to Egypt by members of the American Committee for Religious Freedom, the magazine *Nisf El-Dunia* published a four-page article attacking the Bahá'í Faith, recirculating old accusations that it is a tool of British imperialism and of Zionism. The article also reported the response of two shaykhs to a question regarding the persecution of Bahá'ís by Muslims, saying,

first of all, Egypt does not know of any persecution of the followers of any denomination or religious sect, and secondly: All that has any relation with the Bahá'ís has disappeared since 1987, following their acquittal by the Egyptian judicial authorities of the accusation of conspiracy, of reopening of the Bahá'í Assemblies that were closed by a presidential decree in 1960, or trying to preach the Bahá'í [Faith]. The file was totally closed.

These assertions are false, as the record shows. And in fact, at a meeting of the Continuation Committee for the organization Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa, held in Nairobi, Kenya, in July 2004, the organization's president reported that in response to the organization's proposal to hold the next continental interfaith summit in Egypt, the Egyptian authorities had stated that they would not allow the summit to take place there as long as Bahá'ís were included among the participants.

In Kuwait, two articles published in the *al-Seyassah* newspaper attacked the Bahá'í Faith with similar false accusations but were countered by an article written by another Muslim who asserted, "It is the right of individuals of any religion or belief to request to teach this religion or belief if the country is democratic and especially if those requesting to do so are citizens."

NOTES

¹ See Bahá'í International Community, *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran* (2005), pp. 16–21, for a more complete discussion of this document and its implications for the Bahá'ís in Iran.

² See pp. 279–280 for the complete text of this statement.

³ See *The Bahá'í Question*, pp. 16–21.

ESSAYS, STATEMENTS,
AND PROFILES

Science and Morality

Graham Walker views science and morality as a pathway to social integration.

Morals—the principles which guide personal behavior—equate with ethical theory which, according to the renowned German philosopher Emmanuel Kant, should ideally be based on universal values. Morals may be derived from any combination of natural law, philosophy, altruism, utilitarianism, deontology, and theology, so it is unsurprising that currently there is no universal moral system. It is this relativity which is the source of conflict. This essay looks at how that relativity could be reduced.

Moral principles change with time, and morals from previous ages are not always appropriate to current situations.¹ For example, 2,000 years ago the population of the earth was 200 million and the doubling time was one thousand years, so it was “moral” to go forth and multiply, notwithstanding some of the social implications. Today, the population is around 6.5 billion and doubling time is 50 years, so few would consider the same exhortation to be moral now. Times have changed, but some still proscribe contraception, in spite of the starvation of huge numbers.

Morals are also gender dependent. We are aware of the different male and female roles which society has shaped, only some of which are supportable. Nevertheless, it is now widely accepted that this

division of labor should not confer different civil or human rights and that the concept of “universal morals” should apply equally to both genders.

As cities become increasingly multiracial, cultural moral relativity is causing problems. For example, imbibing alcohol is seen as immoral hedonism by one but as a harmless pleasure—almost a rite of passage—to another; the thigh-high skirt and bare midriff are wanton to some but an innocent fashion to others; honor killings and the stoning to death of female (not male) adulterers are reasoned disincentives to protect morality in some cultures, while in others adultery is accepted, but not condoned.

Morality can also be numerically as well as culturally dependent. As Steven Pinker comments in *The Blank Slate*:

If only one person in the world held down a terrified, screaming little girl, cut off her genitals with a septic blade and sewed her up leaving a small hole for urine and menstrual flow, the only question would be how severely should that person be punished. But when thousands commit the same crime on millions of girls, the enormity of the act is not magnified a million times. It is instead, attributed to culture and magically becomes less, not more horrible.²

The field of morality is of shifting sand, and its principles are sometimes artfully applied. The moralizing of political or ethnic matters has frequently been utilized to licence aggression against those with whom we disagree—with catastrophic consequences.³ Interpretation of holy scriptures by the learned for the purpose of manipulation of the public is commonplace, and healthy skepticism is always appropriate when politicians moralize.

Science and moral relativity

Science can help not only in dispelling suspicion, misinterpretation, and harmful dogma, but also in providing some evidential basis of a consistent, nondenominational morality founded on universal values. This is not a new ontology, as “macro” aspects of this relationship between science and morality surround us and are obvious and historic. For example, promiscuity is related to divorce, illegitimacy,

and sexually transmitted disease; greed and intolerance are related to violence and war. It is clear, then, that social evils are related to the absence of moral values. In the natural world, on the other hand, if one observes the holistic organization of ants and termites, one sees that these minute insects create a stable, productive community which would be impossible without high levels of communication, cooperation, and altruism. Their colonies have organized division of labor; foragers selflessly share information with others regarding the location of food; there is self-sacrifice in the protection of the community. All of these behaviors benefit the colony, and all are characteristics of civil society. (On the downside, it has to be said that the industrious and social ant has been bypassed by evolution, not having changed in 20 million years.) These two simple examples show that we only need to observe our surroundings to see the effect of morality and its absence.

What is new and less self-evident is the “micro” aspect of the relationship between science and morality: Information from the enhanced understanding of genetics, neurology, and physiology has been made possible by the rapid acceleration of technology. For example, science is able to explain the microbiological cause of sexually transmitted disease—and therefore the relation to promiscuity, which moral teaching forbids. Similarly, the intellectual disintegration associated with drug abuse is explicable by the neurological degradation visible on brain scans. The effects of the media on child behavior become clear when the large numbers are analyzed by computer. In short, science makes the case for morality more believable.

Science, however, must also be seen as a relative truth. Some of what we positively believe as undeniable scientific truth today will be discarded in the next 10 years, in the same way as we have discarded some scientific “certainties” of yesteryear. Science and morality both share relativity, but where moral relativity is the cause of disagreement and even extreme violence, scientific relativity is accepted and statistically incorporated into thresholds of certainty.⁴

Starting at the beginning

It is said that man is between two infinities: the universe on one hand and his atomic components on the other. Our natural inquisitiveness

drives a strong desire to understand this relationship and its evolution. The question of “the beginning” is perhaps best characterized as “Big Bang versus Genesis”—and, for most scientists, there is no contest. However, cosmological studies of the astounding symmetry and balance in this aspect of reality indicate to some that the chance theory of the Big Bang and evolution is statistically unacceptable and that there must be a supreme being and a grand design. Many eminent scientists ascribe to this explanation.

To look at one example in support of this perspective, there is an infinitesimally small chance that the carbon-based organic chemistry of all living matter happened by accident. From the initial moment of the expansion of the original matter (an unknown which both atheists and deists must take on faith), the particles began to form simple atoms such as hydrogen and helium, with stable nuclei and electrons. These atoms, under the influence of precise pressures and temperatures of the cosmic furnace, formed different, more complex molecules. The force of gravity accurately balanced the force of expansion. Paul Davies, professor of physics at Imperial College, London, calculated that the relation of these two forces had to be precise to 10^{60} for the universe to exist.⁵ This balance induced the formation of stars, which associated into galaxies. The compression of the material of stars caused increased temperatures and fusion of atoms to produce a greater variety of molecules of greater complexity such as nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon. The subsequent exploding supernovas distributed these further afield. After each explosion, gravity again caused the formation of more galaxies with stars, planets, and, in our case, sun and moon, in what we know as “the Milky Way.” Alternating light and darkness, warmth and cold through a 24-hour period is secondary to the harmonious spinning and orbiting of the earth amongst planets held perfectly in balance by gravity.⁶

From this seemingly ordered beginning evolved man and the uncounted varieties of plants and animals based on carbon chemistry. But the natural rate of triple collision of three helium particles to form one carbon inside a star is rare and would not produce the amount of carbon necessary for our particular chemistry. It just so happens that a phenomenon known as carbon resonance augments the collision rate, resulting in exactly the ratio of carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen needed to provide the building blocks for organic life as

we know it. "Coincidences" of this sort are innumerable throughout the physical world.

Such evidence supports the anthropic principle which postulates that for us to exist, the universe has to be precisely as it is. But this begs the question, *why* should it be precisely as it is for us to exist? Sir Fred Hoyle, the eminent astronomer,⁷ stated that the calculation of the chance of all of these "coincidences" is so great that it puts the question of a "super-intellect" beyond doubt, and if God (supreme intellect, grand designer) exists, then the moral attributes ascribed to such a deity by prophets gain credence and authority. Of course, we might accept this proof of God's existence without accepting the prophets as "official messengers," but if the world is created by God, then every creation comes from His design, including prophets.

How we recognize a true prophet is difficult to define. There have been numerous seers, mystics, minor prophets, and philosophers who have had some influence on human progress, but perhaps one of the defining characteristics by which a true or major prophet is objectively recognized is the degree of social turbulence that follows the revelation. The main religions that have appeared throughout recorded time are all associated with a named prophet, upheaval, and social reorganization.⁸ Jesus brought tolerance and forgiveness and reduced internecine tribal warfare, and Muḥammad elevated learning to the status of prayer, helped to change the existing power structure, and sped academic progress in the Middle East and thence the West.⁹

Is this logic of design sustained if we look at the other end of our two infinities? The matrix of symbiotic processes that secure our biosphere also seems too complicated to have arisen by chance. The wonder of the human organism is difficult to accept as simply the result of a series of millions of mitotic accidents starting from an ad hoc agglomeration of carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen. The atoms we have inherited from the primordial explosion make up our molecules of varied degrees of complexity, from simple salt to hemoglobin. Hemoglobin is a wonder of nature itself—able to absorb oxygen during inhalation, transport it, and liberate it at the extremities where it picks up carbon dioxide to transport it back to the lungs and release it by exhalation. The beautiful, ultra-complex double helix DNA of each of our cells controls a microscopic factory with specific products and

functions, control mechanisms, signal emitters, and receivers. Groups of such cells cooperate to form an organ that works in harmony with other organs for the good of the whole being,¹⁰ a whole which can respond successfully to a spectrum of extremes of temperature, of varied oxygen pressure in the atmosphere, of hydration, and nutrition. To many, this complexity and order, with its built-in repair, protection, and servo-mechanisms, indicate a supreme designer, not chance. Although science explains mechanisms but not rationale, it appears logical, on statistical grounds, to imply again the existence of a grand conductor of this symphony of perfection.

Hard and soft science

Hard science is the irrefutable stuff of laboratories; it is measurement that can be tested by others anywhere in the world and allied to the accepted scientific and mathematical principles applied by all scientists. In contrast, soft science may be thought of as observation that leads through interpretation to a more or less reliable conclusion. Its substrate is not scientific measurement but statistics, which make the conclusions sound. For example, the incidence of sexually transmitted disease, illegitimacy, depression, suicide, and economic status in a large number of people from widely differing backgrounds 40 years ago was compared to that in a similar number of people and similar groups today. It was found that all of these parameters had increased simultaneously with a significant rise in wealth. Therefore, it is sound to conclude that material wealth does not buy health or happiness—a theme familiar in religious doctrines and borne out by sociology.¹¹

In the same vein of soft science, the historical evidence of human evolution does not reflect an altruism driving the creation of empires. Some empires, however, proved more long lived than others, and the more durable empires are characterized by the cohesive power of a civilizing philosophy. Contrast, for example, the legacy of the Mongol and Roman Empires. In 1259 CE, the former extended from Poland and Hungary in the west to China in the east, embracing Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Russia, China, Vietnam, Tibet, Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Persia, and Iraq. These countries were subdued by the ferocity of the warlike Mongols until the death of

Tamerlane in 1405 CE, when the empire disintegrated because of its failure to unite peoples and create institutions. At no time during its 150 years was there peace, and there is little in the way of a Mongolian inheritance. The Roman Empire, on the other hand, embraced all the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, a smaller area but with a greater population. The jurisdiction lasted from 12 to 565 CE, and after Emperor Augustus there were 200 years of peace and prosperity among disparate cultures that had been united by a common language (Latin) and stabilized by international trade, the popular pursuit of knowledge, the justice and civil rights of Roman law, and strong institutions balancing government. The fall of the Roman Empire resulted in retrogression in some areas where the institutions were not sustained, but the legacy is evident in the conquered countries to this day, in their judicial systems, art, culture, and Latin usage. The civilizing effect of the Roman Empire is clearly related to the relatively moral and ethical basis of its administration, in contradistinction to the brutal but transient influence of the Mongols. Similar bases of communal stability, which have been observed in primates, will be discussed later.

The survival advantage of morality

This is soft science but nevertheless worthy of consideration. Not only does an overtly material existence fail to return the happiness sought, but it is also related to a shorter life span. Conversely, moral and spiritual beings will be at less risk of various illnesses such as sexually transmitted disease, diseases of addiction, accidents, depression, atypical pains, and obesity with the commensurate risk of heart attack and stroke. Studies show that people with such an outlook have lower divorce rates, less stress, suffer less violence, are less likely to commit suicide, and suffer less distress when dying.

The appeal of a scientific basis to morality is multifaceted. Science is replicatable and objective, and its methodology is therefore a cohesive force that unites all scientists. It is respected as a source of knowledge and unbiased opinion in the public at large. More important, it supports a common moral perspective for every culture, religion, and race by helping to dispel superstition and fear. While it may only explain small sectors of reality, it contributes

understanding of those aspects not explained by religion. Herein lies not only the compatibility of religion and science but also their mutual dependence.¹²

Neuroscience

Let us now examine some aspects of the neurology of morality. Is there, for example, a brain center for morality? Is it intelligence dependent? Is it inherited or inducible, or both? In other words, this is the old question of whether nature or nurture predicates behavioral development.

In the medical field, a modern investigatory tool called a molecular resonance imaging scan, or MRI, can be modified to show which areas of the brain are functioning. If functional MRI brain scans are taken of patients being anesthetized, activity areas progressively close down in all parts of the brain as the depth of anesthesia increases. The loss of consciousness is not associated with inactivity in any particular area. Since moral deliberation relies on conscious thought, we can conclude that morality is not related to a center but to the whole network of neurones (nerve fibers) and synapses (junctions); in other words, it is spatially diffuse. Using the same scanner, we can also observe that certain areas are active with certain thought processes. For example, an offensive or frightening image will light up a particular area called the amygdala. In computing terms, this is a small but powerful ROM center that does not react in the same way to pleasant images. More interestingly, even if the images are shown too quickly to be recognized or when the volunteer is distracted, the amygdala still lights up, implying that offense generates an emotional reaction of which we are unaware, as well as a conscious reaction. This unconscious response occurs at a level that is instinctive or non-mediated (i.e., not processed by conscious thought). It seems to be common to all those tested so far and is probably the neurological basis of the ethical sentiments we all have in common—the universals of humanness. Seeing an abandoned baby in the snow or the deformed or the injured and starving all provoke the feeling of empathy, which Ray Dolan, professor of cognitive neurology at the Institute of Neurology in London, describes as “non-mediated reactions”—the watering of the eye when one sees another person’s

eye injured or the feeling of nausea when listening to others vomiting, for example.¹³ This “gut feeling” helps define the instincts of right and wrong. It is the basis of deontological ethics or, put simply, what is right is what we all know to be right.

How does hard neuroscience sit with sociological and behavioral science? William S. Hatcher, retired Professor of Philosophy and Mathematics at Laval University, Québec, Canada, regards the simple fact that all individuals react positively to love, acceptance, and generosity as proof of the universality of these spiritual values.¹⁴ It may be argued conversely that some cultures exhibit different emotional reactions, and demonstration of these three behaviors in certain circumstances may be entirely unwelcome. However, if we define emotional reaction in terms of the intellectual content, not the stimulus, all cultures will exhibit literally hundreds of common behaviors. For example, if a person feels pleased, then the facial expression would be identified by other cultures as indicating pleasure. The stimulus will vary with culture, however; I might applaud a fine golf shot and show pleasure, but to an Amazonian Indian the same experience would be greeted with puzzlement.¹⁵ In fact, in 1989, Professor Donald E. Brown compiled a list of 364 human universals as a result of recording behavior among numerous different tribes from many countries.¹⁶ Incidentally, many universals were found in children before acculturation, indicating that we are not born with a “blank slate” but with a beginner’s set of social reactions.

Two other deductions can be made from the numerous spiritual qualities that are found on Brown’s list. First, many of these spiritual qualities are unquestionably instinctive, which belies the contention that all human instincts are animalistic. Second, the list provides circumstantial evidence of innate goodness, presumably supported by hardwired neurological circuitry.

The identification of the amygdala reaction to offense is the beginning of the mapping of particular centers for certain social functions, and many other areas of the brain having the purpose of social engagement have been described. It is also clear that these centers have numerous connections with other centers; in fact, the network grows as identification techniques become more sophisticated.

This type of basic hardware does not fully explain our complexity and variability. We need, in computer jargon, terabytes of RAM to enable behavior of the levels of sophistication seen in humans.

If we examine the brain tissue of the newborn animal or human under a powerful electron microscope, we see a few neurons with few synapses on a featureless background or matrix, but after two months, it is totally changed: There is now a rich network of neurons and a myriad of connections. And after two years, the picture is almost all neurons and synapses. These changes are the anatomical result of learning: more facts, more synapses. The network allows numerous connections to be made, some repeated reflexively, as in riding a bicycle, and some new, as in innovative thought. This is the all-important capacity known as neural plasticity. It is reasonable to expect those networks to reflect various types of experience and learning. For example, if a child is subjected to violence and deprivation, there will be synapses registering this experience, while a child surrounded by love and comfort will have formed different synapse groupings. These groups, the basis of associated memory, are called engrams and are elicited by psychiatrists through word or picture association tests. To one patient, for example, red is associated with rose, love, happiness, while a different upbringing may retrieve the sequence red, blood, pain, hate.

The gradual elaboration of memory and reasoning proceeds at a particular pace. Psychometric testing shows that levels of sophistication of reasoning are age-related. An infant would not be aware of much more than the logical presumption that crying is the agreed signal for food or nappy change. A five-year-old would be expected to be protective towards a sibling but not to appreciate why excessive consumption is destroying the planet. These stages were first described by Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychiatrist who died in 1980 and was known for, among other work, his description of the six stages of childhood development. This developmental process can also be described in terms of levels or orders of thought. For example, "I know the date" is a first order of thought, while "I know that you know the date" is a second order of thought, and so on. Higher primates are capable of second-order thought, as is a five-year-old human, while reasonably intelligent adults are capable of fourth order, which is one of the prerequisites of moral deliberation.

Second-order thought enables apes and orangutans to hold details of acceptable behavior, such as who to please and who it is safe to bully, who owes or is owed a favor—a basic moral code, in fact. The communal discipline endows the group with stability, which, in turn, allows peaceful aggregation of larger numbers. In contrast, the larger brain capacity of humans allows fourth-order thought and therefore the intellectual equipment to moralize beyond self to a moral system that embraces all humanity, detached altruism, the future of the planet, and other wide-ranging issues.

It is also clear that there are apes in their communities that obviously do not pull their weight in the provision of food, protection, and other activities; they are called freeloaders, like their human counterparts. In the ape community, there is a limit for tolerance of freeloaders and if it is surpassed, it will result in the expulsion of the individual. This “risk versus reward” assessment requires second-order thought. (Ideally, morality is its own justification, but in practice, disincentive for transgressions reinforces the system.)

Deception behavior is also observed in apes, which indicates that they have awareness of the results of transgression and the likely punishment. Nevertheless, some will make the decision to take the risk and to try deception. This is seen, for example, in young males endeavoring to find a mate amongst the harem of the alpha male.

Deception in humans has been studied by observing the difference in response delay to a question answered truthfully or dishonestly. Volunteers were instructed to answer questions truthfully or otherwise while their brain function was monitored by an MRI scanner. Scans showed a delay when volunteers lied and thus indicated that the default state of the brain was truth telling. This is not surprising, since truthful response is first-order thought, while deception requires second-order thought and a period of deliberation. Lying, therefore, is an acquired skill, and so it is unsurprising to find the frontal cortex activity enhanced on the MRI scan during deception.

To the question, what purpose does deception serve, the answer is “both good and bad.” Always to tell the truth would be difficult and occasionally brutal. On occasions, lying smoothes social intercourse. On the other hand, deception may be practiced for self-gain. To be deceived for the purpose of protecting one’s sensitivities is

acceptable, but deception for gain causes offence, even though it may confer short-term advantages for the deceiver, as seen in studies of game theory.

Game theory is a research tool which was evolved in 1944 by the Hungarian genius John von Neumann to test economic survival strategies in groups. A simple example is called the prisoners' dilemma. In this scenario, two prisoners are questioned by the police. If they stay loyal to each other and say nothing, both receive a one-month prison sentence. If, however, one defects and gives evidence against the other, he is released and the other "gets" six months; if the two of them defect, both "get" three months. Therefore, if your partner defects, you are better off if you also defect, reducing your sentence from six to three months. If your partner remains silent, you are still better off defecting. In fact, whatever your partner does, you are better off defecting. Yet if he employs the same strategy, you both end up with longer sentences than if you remained loyal. The moral implication is that pure logic is mutually disadvantageous and altruism is mutually beneficial.

Economists initially rejected the bleak conclusion these games produced, because it did not reflect the true nature of human behavior. It was then recognized that life is not a sequence of single games but similar situations that are repeated, introducing the elements of trust, forgiveness, and reputation. Now the outcomes were more optimistic, for the altruists prospered if the game was played long enough. Many games were designed to approximate life's dilemmas and decisions, and eventually Robert Axelrod organized a computerized tournament of 14 different programs, in which each played the game 200 times against the others, against itself, and against a random program. The program that won consistently was Tit For Tat, the "nicest" program—which simply cooperated for the first round and then did what the other did. It succeeded because it was clear and predictable; it was nice to nice partners, retaliatory to betrayers, and forgiving to repenters.

The extrapolation of game theory to human behavior is of limited use, but it confirms the social value of a reputation for honesty, altruism, and justice. It also indicates that reciprocity and punishment are useful social tools. Game theory shows how these factors

are advantageous, and some of the scientific data shows that they are predisposed, either by nature or nurture.

Brain capacity and morality

In survival games of various designs, where players are secretly given roles of cooperators, “honest johns,” or liars, the honest cooperators usually win and achieve a stable community. We see the same phenomenon in apes where there is a group survival advantage to this basic moral discipline of honest cooperators. It confers advantages of protection, cooperation, larger groups, and a richer gene pool to reduce harmful mutations.

The intellectual capacity to enable such cooperation can be related to the size of a particular part of the brain called the neo-cortex, also named “the social brain” by Sean Spence, Professor of Primatology at Sheffield University.¹⁷ He found that there is a linear relationship between the ratio of body weight and neocortex weight and the size of community. This holds true for monkeys, apes, and humans. Extrapolation of the graph of results for primates indicates the stable group for humans would be 150. It is impossible to assess the number of acquaintances, relatives, friends, fellow club members, and work colleagues in the same way as ape families. However, if we look at traditional gatherings such as those for celebrations of puberty, food gathering, and communal decision making in primitive tribes, we find the number is around 150. This is not simply the number of faces one can remember; it also reflects the number of people one cares about—another function of moral behavior.

An interesting experiment assessing spare brain capacity also shows inducibility. A group of adults matched for age and sex was divided into three. None were piano players. Members of the first group were shown finger exercises and practiced them three times per day on the piano. The second group were also shown the finger exercises but were only allowed to observe the piano players carrying out the piano practice three times per day. The third group were controls and were not shown the exercises nor did they play the piano. Functional brain scans were carried out on all three groups once each day for five days. While the scans taken before the experiment began were comparable with regard to the areas of the brain

which were to be studied, over the next five days groups one and two showed a gradually enlarging area of activity. By contrast, the controls showed no change. The change was evidence of new activity—new synapses rapidly developing over a short period, not only in the motor cortex (brain tissue that controls movements) but also in the social/emotional part of the brain.¹⁸

This experiment also indicated the immense spare capacity of the human brain. These findings do not accord with our accepted understanding of evolution, where functional demand precedes structural modification; rather, in the case of the brain, we seem to have been endowed with a structure far beyond the requirements of the time. If the rapid enlargement of the human brain (which occurred relatively recently in evolutionary terms) was not a response to need, why did superfluous brain tissue occur? Could one argue that this would indicate an interventionist God, Who, knowing what our future would require, equipped humans with the necessary latent capacity?

Moral impairment

Morality clearly depends on brain capacity as well as experience, and it can be impaired by damage to the social brain. Such damage may occur through physical injury, tumor growth, degenerative disease (such as Alzheimer's disease), and substance abuse. The first recorded case of behavior change after trauma was reported in 1856, when an American railroad worker by the name of Phinneas Gage was compacting dynamite into the side of a hill with an iron bar prior to excavation. The dynamite exploded, propelling the meter-long iron bar through the man's left cheek, eye socket, and frontal part of the brain. After a brief period of unconsciousness, he sat up and was helped to the local hotel. He recovered sufficiently by six weeks to return to work. However, his doctor recorded a dramatic change in his personality; from being gentle and sociable and a good husband, he changed into a violent, addictive man.¹⁹

Professor Faraneh Vargha-Khadem of the Institute for Child Health in London examined functional MRI scans of children and adults who had sustained damage to the frontal lobes of the brain, where the social brain is located. Their personality disorders, like that

of Phineas Gage, were clearly related to the damaged frontal areas of the brain.²⁰ This work also illuminates the importance of training to childhood behavior. For example, if the frontal cortex area is damaged early in childhood, there is no processing and loading of experience to the conscious, and the patient will therefore be unable to deliberate on the right or wrong of a situation. If the injury occurs later than, say, 15 years, the programming has occurred but there is still antisocial behavior. The difference is that now the patient is capable of deliberation and is aware of the misbehavior, but still he will not change. He simply does not care.

The frontal cortex receives information from the hardwired centers of the brain, from engrams, and directly from the centers that register sensory experiences. It probably processes this input, deliberates, and formulates patterns of behavior and judgments, which are normally subject to updates as new experiences or thoughts are logged. The brain retains this malleability, or the capacity to independently evolve thought processes following new information or meditation. In highly artificial circumstances such as indoctrination, this independence of thought can be disabled, and certain thoughts become inaccessible to reason and logic. This is the mental process of fanaticism and is typically used to promote the importance of dogma above the individual, or, in the Kantian concept of ethics, the elevation of means above the ends: To deliberate or not to deliberate; on one hand, to own and develop one's faith, its expression and influence on life, one's relationship to the world, and one's own responsibilities, or, on the other hand, to be owned by that faith and to be an automaton, blindly responding to another's orders.²¹

Taking the question of child training a little further, one may ask why apparently healthy children sometimes become sociopathic. Michael Penn, Professor of Psychology at Franklin and Marshall College, Pennsylvania, has argued that unless a child is able to recognize the relation between misdemeanor and punishment, he or she will eventually be unable to respond to the rationale of discipline. This situation may arise either if the child has a genetic trait that predisposes him or her to antisocial behavior, or through repetitive, irrational abuse. An example will serve to illustrate the point: A group of normal adults and psychopathic adults were informed that at the end of a 10-second countdown they would receive an unpleasant

stimulus. Skin electro-conductivity measurements in psychopaths showed little change in conductivity; in contrast, nonpsychopathic volunteers showed a significant rise in conductivity when the count-down started and an accelerating rise as the count approached the end point.²² Evidently, the physiological change associated with fear of anticipated pain is absent in psychopaths. This neurological defect seems to be in the limbic system of the brain, a center which is strongly associated with emotional development.

Another experiment which added to the understanding of training involved the state of helplessness. Normal volunteers were divided into three equal groups. Two groups were subjected to aversive events such as painfully loud noise. Members of one group, by application and perseverance, were able to find a method of ending the aversive event and continued to apply themselves to solving the problem of each event. For the second group, there was no solution; they eventually realized that they could exert no control and began to suffer the aversion passively. Members of the third group were subjected to neither and were simply the control. Researchers suggested that the real-life equivalent to this experiment is recognition of the relation of action to outcomes. The important outcomes in shaping moral behavior are reward and punishment, as we see in the hierarchical behavior control in primates. If there is a neurological deficit that prevents this logical modification of behavior, antisocial behavior disorder is the outcome, as with the frontal lobe injuries reported by Vargha-Khadem. When there appears to be no justice or logic to life's successes or failures and when good behavior and bad have the same result, then again the outcome is likely to be antisocial behavior.

Culpability and management of the two etiological types, however, are quite different, which brings up an interesting philosophical point relating to forensic aspects of behavior. The definition of antisocial behavior disorder is independent of causes. If the diagnosis relies on definitions and protocols (or is, in other words, evidence based), as is the current tendency, then there may be no difference in the management of the offender, regardless of the cause. A value-based diagnosis, however, suggests that there should be consonance between the treatment of antisocial behavior and its cause. For example, there may be a group with neurological deficit due to trauma or genetic abnormality, who cannot be culpable since they are not

conscious of the digression and are incapable of responding to corrective discipline, while those who are antisocial because of abuse are capable of response but need expert therapy.

It is frequently asserted that the media are responsible for instantiation of violence in children and its continuing expression in adulthood. Several mechanisms for this have been suggested, the most supportable of which are desensitization (repeated viewing of violent material), behavioral effects (encouragement to see aggressive behavior as the norm), and cultivation effects (developing a distorted view of the world). While there is a significant body of opinion that supports the relationship between violent behavior and the hours of violence viewed, the Commission on Children and Violence (1995) found that the context in which the violence was viewed was the primary factor. This indicates that a child in a moral domestic environment would be less influenced than one in a permissive or violent environment.

Incidentally, there is an interesting condition which seems to indicate the importance of love even to the physical growth in children. Children who are deprived of nothing except affection fail to thrive not only emotionally, which is no surprise, but also physically. This condition is called "nonorganic failure to thrive." The mechanism is unclear.

Genes and character

We have seen that there are individuals who are not equipped to be socialized because of neurological abnormalities, the locus of which may be the frontal lobes (social brain) and may be due to injury or genetic aetiology. Genes work in two ways: first, by influencing the biological structure of the brain and second, by shaping its development.

There is a variable relationship between genes and behavior abnormalities. Schizophrenia, on the one hand, has long been recognized as a Mendelian inherited dominant abnormality. This means that if one identical twin is schizophrenic then the other will also be schizophrenic, while if one fraternal twin has schizophrenia the other has a 50 percent chance of being affected, and if one parent is schizophrenic there is a 25 percent chance in each

offspring. However, according to Akira Sawa and Atsushi Kamiya, this disease is a neuro-developmental fault, involving architectural, cellular biological, and protein abnormalities, which could all stem from a gene for schizophrenia.²³ But there appear to be additional influences, including environmental factors, which are involved in the full manifestation of the symptoms of schizophrenia.²⁴ So even for schizophrenia, the psychogeneticists' "banker," there appears to be a multifactorial influence on expression, which demotes the importance of the gene. Thus, behavioral geneticists assert that most genes are probabilistic. That conclusion frustrates both sides in the "nature versus nurture" debate, for neither can claim pure expression of effect, not even for schizophrenia.

The controversy between nature and nurture is not so swiftly resolved by the assertion that there are more subtle and less predictable effects stemming from combinations of genes on adjacent sites and variable penetrance. The expression of some genes may also depend on whether the gene is inherited from the father or mother. To complicate the picture further, the expression of any gene, not just schizophrenia, may be influenced by the environment. As Dr. Craig Venter, president of the American company Celera, who defined the human genome simultaneously with the Sanger Laboratory in Cambridge, has said, "You cannot define the effect of genes without defining the effect of the environment."²⁵

Clearly, the determinist view of one gene per character trait for humans cannot be correct, as humans possess merely 30,000 genes (only twice as many as the fruit fly), even if environment does influence expression. The reductionist view that understanding the genome will allow complete explanation of human variability is equally untenable and wildly optimistic. How, then, can the sophistication and variation of human beings be explained? The answer lies in the variable penetrance, environmental effects, group effects, subtle control genes, and the large numbers of minigenes or snips (single nucleotide polymorphisms) that confer multifunctionality. The frustrating thing for eugenicists is that qualities of giftedness such as great musicianship, athleticism, or leadership are emergent—expressed only when there is a certain combination of genes and circumstantial factors.

Some genes have a narrow predictable expression, and others are more variable and subtle. One example of the former is the *DRD4* gene mutation, the effect of which is antisocial behavior and aggression. This mutation seems to have arisen about 40,000 years ago and was probably a survival advantage then, spreading quickly through the population; unsurprisingly, its expression is sexlinked.

At the other end of the spectrum, one confronts the myriad complexities of the effects of the *FOXP2* gene, which plays an important role in language and speech development and is one of a family of genes that play a role in the formation of the embryo itself. Since its influence is therefore exerted at both ends of the spectrum of development—embryological and social—the importance of this gene cannot be overestimated.²⁶ In conferring the capacity for speech, and therefore sharing knowledge and experience as well as the ability to organize and cooperate, it acted as a springboard to propel mankind forward at a pace that would otherwise have been impossible. It was the gene that probably enabled socialization more than any other, with a fundamental role in the evolution of moral behavior.

The description of the human genome, the fundament of humanness, can be written as a formula that is common to all. This, in itself, has underpinned the oneness of humankind and the elementary observation that the only qualification for human rights is to be human, not a particular color or race. Mining the human genome treasures will augment the objective understanding of human behavior.

Identical twin studies show the power of the genetic component in character and behavior. Similarities in identical twins, whether they are raised together or separated at birth, are significantly greater than in fraternal twins or in brothers and sisters. Again, virtual twins (unrelated babies, one or both adopted) who are raised together from birth show no similarities in behavior, character, or IQ, beyond that attributable to chance. The obvious deduction is that genes do influence character and behavior. Some single genes have a powerful influence on mind and a dominant expression. Most traits, however, are related to groups of less dominant genes, which are more or less influenced by other genes. For example, genes related to moral behavior that are of subtle expression are easily overwritten by upbringing. On the other hand, many studies indicate that the behavior

of profoundly antisocial individuals has shown consistency since early childhood through adulthood and has defeated the best efforts of their parents. This, again, suggests an inherited causation. A simple example of nurture trumping nature is given by Steven Pinker. The field of different strains of corn grown in a field will attain different heights because of the different genes, a single strain of corn grown in different fields, one dry the other irrigated, will show differences in height because of the environment.²⁷

Future

We have seen how science may explain our innate moral nature and how it can be evolved or compromised by experience, genes, and brain damage. To conclude this glance at a small sample of the huge volume of available science which can be adduced to this topic, let us look briefly towards the future. Carbon–silicone interface chemistry promises implantable data and intelligence. Silicone chips similar to those in our computers, loaded with information and programs, may be implanted in humans, short circuiting the onerous task of learning. Someday before too long, people may be able to buy a chip off the shelf for school matriculation exams, a law degree, or to achieve proficiency in an international language. While this may cause rejoicing in classrooms around the world, many questions immediately arise. Who, for example, loads and programs the chips? It is unlikely that any ethical body would be funded for the costs of development, even if there were acceptance. This kind of project is entrepreneurial, leaving the door open to subliminal suggestion, whether for political or commercial reasons, and resulting in individuals' loss of autonomy. Furthermore, data implantation does not endow wisdom, although in response it could be argued that eliminating the hours of learning information that is readily available from implants, or, less controversially, powerful computers the size of a wrist watch, would free us to use the time more effectively in deliberation, which begets wisdom.

Conclusion

Throughout history mankind has consistently demonstrated an instinctive thirst for knowledge, an urge to seek explanations when

confronted with uncertainty, a drive to conquer physical challenges. Much of the research cited in this essay, motivated by these factors, was aimed at the rationale of behavior. It is fortunately possible to extrapolate the findings to inform the parallel question of the nature of morality. The essay begins this process by indicating the biological substrate of moral capacity and the sociological factors in its evolution. Neurology and psychology explain aspects of dysfunction.

To find common ground for diverse moral codes, especially religious codes, proves elusive and is frequently ignored. Where distrust and suspicion exist, there is a tendency to focus on differences rather than commonalities, which increases division. Impartial science-based reasoning transcends cultural differences in other theaters of scientific endeavor, and it is hoped that the same approach will prove to be a unifying force in the area of moral conflict. The genetic and sociological data depict humankind as one family whose behavioral patterns include vastly more shared features than disparities. How can this not encourage brotherhood and integration?

The evidence relating moral living to personal and public health is clear. Similarly, scientific evidence of planet degradation exposes the lack of moral direction in governments, institutions, and industry that threatens the very survival of mankind.

Neuroscience illuminates different causes of antisocial behaviors, enabling distinctions to be made between the deliberately immoral, the misdirected, and the noncompetent person. These distinctions indicate the necessary differences in management of the individual and societal causes.

Finally, the wider acceptance of the consonance between science and religion, which latter is an important aspect of moral considerations, might encourage a more critical appraisal of extreme religious dogma. It is also clear that the problems of multiracial societies have not been solved by the assimilation approach, as in France, nor multiculturalism, as in the UK. Integration seems to be the most promising model, and this body of research may be a small impetus to this end.

NOTES

- ¹ In referring to this subject, the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith refer to two kinds of religious teachings: the first are eternal and unchangeable, while the second "relate to the material affairs of humankind. These are the material or accidental laws which are subject to change in each day of manifestation, according to exigencies of the time, conditions and differing capacities of humanity." '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, 1982), p. 106.
- ² Stephen Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Denial of Human Nature and Modern Intellectual Life* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 273.
- ³ As the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, wrote of what he termed the "triple gods" of nationalism, racialism, and communism, "Their high priests are the politicians and the worldly wise, the so-called sages of the age; their sacrifice, the flesh and blood of the slaughtered multitudes; their incantations, outworn shibboleths and insidious and irreverent formulas; their incense, the smoke of anguish that ascends from the lacerated hearts of the bereaved, the maimed, and the homeless." *The Promised Day Is Come* (rev. ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 186.
- ⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá cautioned listeners about such attitudes in a speech He gave in the United States in 1912, saying, "Mathematicians, astronomers, chemical scientists continually disprove and reject the conclusions of the ancients; nothing is fixed, nothing is final; everything is continually changing because human reason is progressing along new roads of investigation and arriving at new conclusions every day." *Promulgation*, p. 21.
- ⁵ Paul Davies, "What Happened before the Big Bang?" in *God for the 21st Century*. Russell Stannard, ed. (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000), pp. 10–12.
- ⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement, "All the orbs and luminaries in this illimitable universe are, likewise, obedient to nature's regulation," supports this interpretation. *Promulgation*, p. 351.
- ⁷ Fred Hoyle, Plumian Professor of Astronomy, Cambridge University. Founder of the Institute of Astronomy.
- ⁸ As Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "Witness how every time the Day Star of Divine bounty hath shed the light of His Revelation upon the world, the people of His Day hath risen against Him and repudiated His truth. They who were regarded as the leaders of men have invariably striven to hinder their followers from turning unto Him Who is the Ocean of God's limitless bounty." Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 56.

- ⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "until the European religionists withdrew from the East, leaving ashes of desolation behind them and finding their own nations in a condition of turbulence and upheaval. Hundreds of thousands of human beings were killed and untold wealth wasted in this fruitless religious warfare." *Promulgation*, p. 265.
- ¹⁰ Compare this statement: "In the human body every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so, the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it." The Universal House of Justice, *Wellsprings of Guidance: Messages from the Universal House of Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 37–38.
- ¹¹ See, for example, the following passage: "For a long time the religious world had been weakened and materialism had advanced; the spiritual forces of life were waning, moralities were becoming degraded, composure and peace had vanished from souls, and satanic qualities were dominating hearts; strife and hatred overshadowed humanity, bloodshed and violence prevailed." *Promulgation*, p. 95.
- ¹² 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said, "Put all your beliefs into harmony with science; there can be no opposition, for truth is one. When religion, shorn of its superstitions, traditions, and unintelligent dogmas, shows its conformity with science, then will there be a great unifying, cleansing force in the world which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discords, and struggles—and then will mankind be united in the power of the Love of God." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 146.
- ¹³ Raymond Dolan, lecture given at "The Science of Morality" conference, College of Physicians, London, 2002. See also Raymond Dolan, "On the Neurology of Morals," *Nature* 2:11 (November 1999), pp. 927–929.
- ¹⁴ William S. Hatcher, lecture given at "The Science of Morality" conference, College of Physicians, London, 2002.
- ¹⁵ Stephen Pinker, in *The Blank Slate*, pp. 435–439.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Robin Dunbar, "The Evolution of the Social Brain," *Evolutionary Anthropology* 6 (1998), pp. 178–90.
- ¹⁸ Susan Greenfield Dana, Chapter 1, "How to think about the brain," in *Guide to Brain Health* (Washington: Dana Press, 2002), pp. 5–16.
- ¹⁹ Images and text at the Warren Anatomical Museum, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Harvard University, Massachusetts, USA.
- ²⁰ Antoine Bechara et al., "Characterization of the decision-making deficit of patients with ventro-medial prefrontal cortex lesions," *Brain* 123, pp. 2189–2202.
- ²¹ In this regard, the Bahá'í writings caution, "O Son of Spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if

thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart how it behooveth thee to be." Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), pp. 3–4.

- ²² Robert Hare, "Twenty Years of Experience with the Cleckley Psychopath," in W.H. Reid, *Unmasking the Psychopath* (W.W. Norton, 1986).
- ²³ Akira Sawa and Atsushi Kamiya, "Elucidating the pathogenesis of schizophrenia," *British Medical Journal* (2003) 327: 632–633.
- ²⁴ H. Karlsson et al., "Retroviral RNA identified in the CSF and brain of individuals with schizophrenia," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, USA* (2001) 98: 4634–39.
- ²⁵ Craig Ventnor, in conversation with Mark Henderson, *The Times* (21 February 2001), News 5.
- ²⁶ C.S.L. Lai et al., "A novel forkhead domain gene is mutated in a severe speech and language disorder," *Nature* (2001) 413: 519–523.
- ²⁷ Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, p. 49.

World Watch

Ann Boyles looks at some current views of the opportunities and challenges presented by “progress.”

Webster's dictionary defines “progress” as movement nearer to some aim, or a supposed gradual advancement or improvement in the condition of mankind, especially from a scientific or material standpoint. The latter half of the twentieth century, in particular, has seen unprecedented advances in science and technology, the fruits of which have been diffused throughout the world. The increase in material wealth that this has brought to the First World is generally seen as the benchmark of progress, and with the expansion of global markets and communications networks, that materialistic concept has been widely promoted through the media, business and technology sectors, and social and economic development theories and initiatives. People everywhere now desire something akin to the material comfort they see in Western movies and television shows; allied to this are (to a greater or lesser degree) expectations connected to work, wages, education, living standards, democratic governance, and human rights. As one writer has observed, “progress in the Western sense has become a virtually universal aspiration”¹—even though its achievement may still be a distant dream for the vast majority of the world's peoples. But is it, in fact, an entirely desirable or sustainable aspiration, or do we

perhaps need to reconsider our view of progress and the criteria we use to measure it?

First, the good news. In *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, Thomas L. Friedman posits that a recent technological advance, the development of “a global, Web-enabled playing field that allows for multiple forms of collaboration—the sharing of knowledge and work—in real time, without regard to geography, distance, or, in the near future, even language,” is one of the biggest steps forward that humanity has ever made. And while he admits that it is not yet accessible to everyone, he argues that “it is open today to more people in more places on more days in more ways than anything like it ever before in the history of the world.”² This leveling of the playing field (or “flattening of the world”) through technology provides humanity with greater opportunities than it has ever had before—and could even promote peace. According to Friedman’s slightly tongue-in-cheek “Dell Theory of Conflict Prevention,” no two countries that are part of a just-in-time global supply chain for any large corporation would ever want to wage war because it would entail such serious disruption to their economic well-being in a competitive, interdependent world.³ In short, he argues, “we are now connecting all the knowledge centers on the planet together into a single global network, which—if politics and terrorism do not get in the way—could usher in an amazing era of prosperity and innovation.”⁴

Gregg Easterbrook also sounds a positive note in his recent book *The Progress Paradox*—even though, as the volume’s subtitle *How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse* suggests, progress has not necessarily made us happier. But while we may think things are getting worse (a perception promoted in the media), Easterbrook contends that conditions for many people are getting much better. He admits that “more than a billion people live on \$1 a day,” but, he continues, “In 1975, 1.6 billion people lived at what the United Nations classifies as ‘medium development,’ meaning with reasonably decent living standards, education, and health care. Today 3.5 billion people do—a stunning increase in the sheer number of human beings who are *not* destitute.” He also cites a long list of other signs of progress: the spread of democracy in the developing world, a rise in global adult literacy from 47 percent in 1970 to the

current 73 percent, the big increase in school enrollment for girls, the spread of modern communications, the decline of infant mortality, a rise in life expectancy, a drop in the percentage of people who are malnourished, nuclear disarmament, a decrease in the number of armed conflicts, and lower annual global military spending.⁵

In contrast to Friedman's and Easterbrook's largely upbeat perspectives, however, a spate of recent publications have sounded the alarm about current notions of "progress" and humanity's prospects if we continue to follow our current path. Ronald Wright's *A Short History of Progress*, Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, and Jane Jacobs' *Dark Age Ahead*, for example, all offer somber warnings.

Wright's and Diamond's discussions are organized largely around threats to the environment. In *A Short History of Progress*, Wright separates the threats into three categories developed by archaeologist Joseph Tainter in his analysis of past societal collapses.⁶ The first category, the Runaway Train, portrays a catastrophic course from which society cannot depart; in Wright's view, today's upsurge in population and pollution, the acceleration of technology, and concentration of wealth and power are our society's "linked runaway trains."⁷ The second category, the Dinosaur, describes a government or rulers that cannot evolve to meet changing needs and conditions; in our world, "the dinosaur factor" is evident in vested interests' opposition to change and "inertia at all social levels" in the face of current crises.⁸ The third category, the House of Cards, denotes the society's weak infrastructure, contributing to its rapid and complete demise;⁹ Wright notes that as we place higher and higher demands on our environment and ecosystems, we are becoming more and more vulnerable to "natural fluctuations" such as crop failures caused by increasing weather instability (droughts, floods, fires, and hurricanes), pollution surges, and disease.¹⁰ Progress, then, has created grave problems that need our full attention and commitment, or we stand in danger of becoming yet another cautionary example on the long list of failed societies.

In his 1996 Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Jared Diamond looked at environmental factors that contributed to the rise of certain civilizations; in 2005, with *Collapse*, he has turned to their demise. Are there lessons we can learn, he asks, about what

makes a society vulnerable, about ways to avoid committing “ecocide,” about recognizing indicators of approaching collapse, and about devising effective measures to stave it off:¹¹

Damage to the environment and the ways in which a society deals with its environmental problems, climate change, and the presence of friendly or hostile neighbors are all common factors in the survival or collapse of past societies, says Diamond;¹² we would be wise to give them careful consideration. And attached to these larger elements are 12 more specific, linked problems, which have all arisen because of our success as a society—our progress—and must be addressed if we are to avoid environmental catastrophe today: the destruction of natural habitats (or their conversion to man-made habitats); unsustainable or mismanaged wild food stocks (especially fish); the loss of species and biodiversity; the loss of arable land through erosion; the dwindling of affordable fossil fuel sources; the depletion of fresh water sources; the overuse of earth’s limited photosynthetic capacity for human purposes, to the detriment of natural growth; the release of toxins into the natural environment; threats posed by the introduction or inadvertent transfer of alien species; problems associated with global warming; the demand of an increasing human population on natural resources; and the effects of high-impact living on the environment.¹³

The urgency of our situation is evident when we consider the following facts: people in the First World consume 32 times more resources and generate 32 times more waste than people in the Third World, and “if the people of China alone achieved a First World living standard while everyone else’s living standard remained constant, that would double our human impact on the world.”¹⁴ Of course, people in the Third World want to live like people in the First World, and they are encouraged in this hope by First World and United Nations development agencies; yet, Diamond says, the prospect is unsustainable. In fact, the First World itself cannot continue much longer on the same course, since it is rapidly using up both its own resources and those from the Third World. “What will happen,” Diamond asks, “when it finally dawns on all those people in the Third World that current First World standards are unreachable for them, and that the First World refuses to abandon those standards for itself?”¹⁵

The challenges are serious but not insurmountable. In some ways, Diamond writes, we are at lower risk than past societies, thanks to the positive effects of technology, globalization, modern medicine, and our wider knowledge about past and other modern societies. On the other hand, the “unintended destructive effects” of that same technology, our heightened interdependence because of globalization, our dependence on modern medicine, and our huge population all serve to increase our risk.¹⁶

In her recent book *Dark Age Ahead*, renowned urban anthropologist Jane Jacobs focuses on problems facing contemporary North American society through the lens of culture rather than environment. “We show signs,” she warns, “of rushing headlong into a Dark Age”—“a culture’s dead end,”¹⁷ as five essential “pillars” of culture are being weakened to the point of irrelevance.

The first pillar, family and community, has been undermined by factors such as the disproportion between housing costs and median income and by automobile culture.¹⁸ The second pillar, higher education, now focuses on “credentialing” rather than “educating” students—gearing degree programs to lead to high-paying jobs and leaving society short-changed, since “A vigorous culture capable of making corrective, stabilizing changes depends heavily on its educated people, and especially upon their critical capacities and depth of understanding.”¹⁹ Third, in the fields of science and science-based technology, we have sloppy scientific practices even while we claim to venerate science almost to the point of worship, and in the modern interconnected world, the consequences of such bad science may be “devastating.”²⁰ Fourth, the disappearance of subsidiarity (“the principle that government works best—most responsibly and responsively—when it is closest to the people it serves and the needs it addresses”) and fiscal accountability (“the principle that institutions collecting and disbursing taxes work most responsibly when they are transparent to those providing the money”) has seriously reduced the effectiveness of government at all levels.²¹ And fifth, the lack of self-policing in learned professions such as accounting has contributed to a culture of greed and dishonesty in the high echelons of North American business, where “a presentable image makes substance immaterial.”²²

Jacobs' concerns relate to the undermining of integrity in the human support networks that form the basis of society, in education that nurtures thoughtful citizens who can advance society, in scientific practice that should protect our physical well-being, in governance that should be responsible and accountable to those who elect it, and in the corporate world that should nurture honest leaders. Absent such integrity, problems such as "racism, profligate environmental destruction, crime, voters' distrust of politicians and thus low turnouts for elections, and the enlarging gulf between rich and poor along with attrition of the middle class"—which she sees as symptoms of the decay—assume greater and greater ascendancy.²³

Easterbrook also attributes rampant dishonesty and bad character in business leaders in America to our intense pursuit of material progress, while other negative consequences include the lack of social justice associated with poverty, near-poverty, and the lack of universal health care.²⁴

One final point about integrity. Francis Fukuyama has devoted an entire volume to a discussion of trust as a necessary element in successful relations—whether economic or social, at the local, national, or international level. His focus is social capital, "a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society" and is "created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms like religion, tradition, or historical habit." In communities that share ethical values, social capital arises from mutual trust arising from "prior moral consensus" rather than "a rational investment decision."²⁵ Furthermore, Fukuyama argues, such social capital has an impact on the economy: "If people who have to work together in an enterprise trust one another because they are all operating according to a common set of ethical norms, doing business costs less."²⁶ Conversely, if there is no trust in society, doing business costs more, since relationships must be governed by formal, enforced regulations. Thus, values directly affect the cost and pace of "progress."

Thomas Friedman, while largely focusing on the opportunities brought by technological advances, identifies another kind of threat inherent in our interconnected world, namely that technology "superempowers" both innovators and those bent towards more destructive ends,²⁷ and creates instability by increasing the gap between

the haves and the have-nots.²⁸ How can we deal effectively with these threats? His response is as much a warning as an answer:

We need to think more seriously than ever about how we encourage people to focus on productive outcomes that advance and unite civilization—peaceful imaginations that seek to “minimize alienation and celebrate interdependence rather than self-sufficiency, inclusion rather than exclusion,” openness, opportunity, and hope rather than limits, suspicion, and grievance.²⁹

As he puts it, “there may be nothing more dangerous today than a failed state with broadband capability.”³⁰

Another somber note is sounded by Ronald Wright, who concludes *A Short History of Progress* with the warning:

Things are moving so fast that inaction itself is one of the biggest mistakes. The 10,000-year experiment of the settled life will stand or fall by what we do, and don't do, now. The reform that is needed is not anti-capitalist, anti-American, or even deep environmentalist; it is simply the transition from short-term to long-term thinking. From recklessness and excess to moderation and the precautionary principle.³¹

And while Jared Diamond is similarly concerned, his tone is cautiously optimistic at the conclusion of *Collapse*, where he argues that since we ourselves have created the problems we face with the environment, we also control our handling of them. In that connection, we face two crucial types of choices. Like Wright, Diamond contends that the first is “the courage to practice long-term thinking, and to make bold, courageous, anticipatory decisions at a time when problems have become perceptible but before they have reached crisis proportions.”³² The second is “the courage to make painful decisions about values”³³—to ask which of our traditional values are suited to this new situation and which should be discarded or changed. For example, we need to reassess the extent to which we will be able to retain the values and standards of the First World's consumer society. Diamond sees hope in the expanding diffusion of environmental awareness and in the opportunities we have, because of our interconnectedness, to learn from each other's mistakes before it is too late.³⁴

As we have noted, Jane Jacobs' worries about where we are headed also stem from values-related concerns. She concludes her book with the following caution:

History has repeatedly demonstrated that empires seldom seem to retain sufficient cultural self-awareness to prevent them from overreaching and overgrasping . . . a society must be self-aware. Any culture that jettisons the values that have given it competence, adaptability, and identity becomes weak and hollow. A culture can avoid that hazard only by tenaciously retaining the underlying values responsible for the culture's nature and success. That is a framework into which adaptations must be assimilated.³⁵

Thomas Friedman would agree. While he is a huge booster of globalization and the interconnectedness it brings, he also admits that "a flat, frictionless world" can "pose a threat to the distinctive places and communities that give us our bearings, that locate us in the world." In other words, values and culture may be in jeopardy:

Some obstacles to a frictionless global market are truly sources of waste and lost opportunities. But some of these inefficiencies are institutions, habits, cultures, and traditions that people cherish precisely because they reflect nonmarket values like social cohesion, religious faith, and national pride. If global markets and new communications technologies flatten those differences, we may lose something important. That is why the debate about capitalism has been, from the very beginning, about which frictions, barriers, and boundaries are mere sources of waste and inefficiency, and which are sources of identity and belonging that we should try to protect.³⁶

Again, long-term thinking is necessary, and careful, deliberate consideration needs to be given to which "inefficiencies"—or values—are too important to allow to be discarded, either deliberately or inadvertently, in the name of "progress." In the introduction to *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, Lawrence E. Harrison writes, "Integrating value and attitude change into development policies, planning, and programming is . . . a promising way to assure that, in the next fifty years, the world does not relive the

poverty and injustice that most poor countries, and underachieving ethnic groups, have been mired in during the past half century.”³⁷ However, Harrison notes, “the extent to which cultural change should be integrated into the conceptualizing, strategizing, planning, and programming of political and economic development” is highly controversial—especially when proposals for such changes are initiated by the First World.³⁸

Cultural relativists argue that “each culture defines its own goals and ethics, which cannot be evaluated against the goals and ethics of another culture”³⁹ and fear that promoting value changes will obliterate cultural diversity. In response to such objections, Harrison points out that, in fact, 50 years of steadily improving global communications have ensured that Western notions of progress have spread all over the planet, and furthermore, it is patronizing to believe that the concept of progress as encompassing “a longer, healthier, less burdensome, more fulfilling life” is not found in many cultures.

The controversy highlights the challenge of finding the balance between standing aside and doing nothing to assist a society to advance and the temptation to exercise excessive, paternalistic control over its development. Surely the solution to the dilemma is to work with a society to help it clarify its own values in light of its current situation, to chart its own course of progress, and to provide desired assistance without any strings attached.

While scientific, technological, and other material advancements are obvious fruits of progress, it is clear that the “progress” we see around us carries great threat as well as great promise—and that is perhaps its nature. Gregg Easterbrook refers to the “unsettled character” of progress: even though “we’d like to think progress causes problems to be solved in a final sense,” more often we find that “for each problem solved, a new one crops up.”⁴⁰ Because the problems in our modern world are greater in scope and therefore potentially much more dangerous than those in previous eras, given our interdependence, we need to think carefully about the kind of “progress” we pursue.

Rather than looking at progress purely from an economic vantage point, some experts are attempting to develop measurements based on less tangible but no less important factors that are not found in the GDP (Gross Domestic Product)—the international standard of

progress and achievement. Some of these alternative efforts have incorporated the concept of social capital as a measure of progress. One index, called the Measure of Domestic Progress (MDP), “adjusts personal consumer expenditure to account for a variety of economic, environmental, and social factors not included in the GDP.” It “adds in the benefits of household labor, accounts for income inequality, subtracts social costs (such as crime, congestion, family breakdown) and environmental costs (such as air pollution, resource depletion, and the ‘hidden’ costs of climate change) and makes adjustments for long term investment and economic sustainability.”⁴¹ While critics object that these sorts of indices are of limited use because intangibles cannot be reliably quantified, surely their use in addition to purely economic indices is helpful in painting a more complete picture of society’s real progress, including social and environmental indicators.⁴²

Such measures accord with Gregg Easterbrook’s assessment that humanity must move beyond the purely material measures of progress that have preoccupied us. In earlier stages of history, we assigned top priority to material security, comfort, and health, and second place to “the great questions of meaning.”⁴³ Now, however, we have arrived at a point where we want both:

[S]ociety is undergoing a fundamental shift from “material want” to “meaning want,” with ever larger numbers of people reasonably secure in terms of living standards, but feeling they lack significance in their lives. A transition from “material want” to “meaning want” is not a prediction that men and women will cease being materialistic; no social indicator points to such a possibility. It is a prediction that ever more millions will expect both pleasant living standards and a broad sense that their lives possess purpose.⁴⁴

Easterbrook sees this shift as “progress on an historically unprecedented scale—involving hundreds of millions of people” and a transition that “may eventually be recognized as a principal cultural development of our age.”⁴⁵

While Lawrence Harrison admits that “an end to poverty is clearly one of the universal goals, and that inevitably means higher levels of consumption,” he does not wish to limit the definition of

progress to “the affluent consumer society.” Rather, he looks to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for broader parameters:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person . . . human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief . . . All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection . . . Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives . . . Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services . . . Everyone has the right to education.⁴⁶

In Harrison’s view, then, we can best measure progress by the extent to which people enjoy the rights enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights. This, in turn, leads more and more people not only towards material progress but also towards more meaningful lives, in which we are better able to address “big” questions such as these: What does it signify, to exercise stewardship over the earth? How do we foster wise, moral leadership in our societies—whether in governance, academic life, or business? How do we educate our brightest youth so that they think effectively about and become committed to addressing the broader questions of society rather than simply becoming trained for lucrative jobs? How can we learn to live together on this planet as one people—one human family—so that everyone feels justly treated? How do we balance the pursuit of material well-being with that of social justice?

Religion would seem to be a force that might help us answer such questions. Yet religion has often been identified as a force that impedes progress, especially when religious feelings isolate followers from humanity as a whole. Friedman, for example, cautions, “Religions are the smelters and founders of imagination. The more any religion’s imagination—Hindu, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist—is shaped in an isolated bubble, or in a dark cave, the more its imagination is likely to sail off in dangerous directions.”⁴⁷ And Diamond writes, “Religious values tend to be especially deeply held and hence frequent causes of disastrous behavior.”⁴⁸

The world-governing council of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, would agree. In a letter to the world's religious leaders in 2002, it wrote:

[R]eligious institutions have too often been the chief agents in discouraging exploration of reality and the exercise of those intellectual faculties that distinguish humankind. Denunciations of materialism or terrorism are of no real assistance in coping with the contemporary moral crisis if they do not begin by addressing candidly the failure of responsibility that has left believing masses exposed and vulnerable to these influences.⁴⁹

Yet at the same time, the Bahá'í writings refer to religion as “the light of the world” and state clearly that human happiness, achievement, and the progress of society come from obedience to divine law.⁵⁰ Reaching “to the roots of motivation,” says the Universal House of Justice, religion is “the seminal force in the civilizing of human nature,” and “is also capable of profoundly influencing the structure of social relationships. Indeed, it would be difficult to think of any fundamental advance in civilization that did not derive its moral thrust from this perennial source.”⁵¹

The concept of progressive revelation, which lies at the heart of the Bahá'í Faith, teaches that the Founders of all the world's great religions have been sent by God at different points in human history to guide us towards the next stage of our social as well as our spiritual development. In this day, Bahá'ís regard the principle of justice—one of their religion's central tenets—as “the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked.”⁵²

Given such teachings, Fukuyama's concept of social capital and its importance in relationships resonates strongly with Bahá'ís. As the Bahá'í International Community has stated:

Social advancement . . . arises from the ideals and shared beliefs that weld society together. Meaningful social change results as much from the development of qualities and attitudes that foster constructive patterns of human interaction as from the acquisition of technical capacities. True prosperity—a well-being founded on peace, cooperation, altruism, dignity, rectitude of

conduct, and justice—flows from the light of spiritual awareness and virtue as well as from material discovery and progress.⁵³

Indeed, while Bahá'ís applaud the scientific, technological, and material advances that have been made throughout the past century, they also share many of the concerns voiced by Diamond, Wright, Jacobs, Friedman, and Easterbrook, recognizing in progress as it is currently defined a force capable of both great good and great destruction. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá observed:

[W]hen thou lookest at the orderly pattern of kingdoms, cities and villages, with the attractiveness of their adornments, the freshness of their natural resources, the refinement of their appliances, the ease of their means of travel, the extent of knowledge available about the world of nature, the great inventions, the colossal enterprises, the noble discoveries and scientific researches, thou wouldst conclude that civilization conduceth to the happiness and the progress of the human world. Yet shouldst thou turn thine eye to the discovery of destructive and infernal machines, to the development of forces of demolition and the invention of fiery implements, which uproot the tree of life, it would become evident and manifest unto thee that civilization is conjoined with barbarism. Progress and barbarism go hand in hand, unless material civilization be confirmed by Divine Guidance, by the revelations of the All-Merciful and by godly virtues, and be reinforced by spiritual conduct, by the ideals of the Kingdom and by the outpourings of the Realm of Might.⁵⁴

For humanity to achieve true prosperity and progress, Bahá'ís believe, all peoples must have the opportunity to develop their capability “to participate in the generation and application of knowledge,” so that “all of the earth's inhabitants [can] approach on an equal basis the processes of science and technology which are their common birthright.” And like Friedman, Bahá'ís see technology as contributing to this forward movement. As the Bahá'í International Community has written, “the accelerating revolution in communication technologies now brings information and training within reach of vast numbers of people around the globe, wherever they may be, whatever their cultural backgrounds.”⁵⁵

In line with its view that both spiritual and material advancement are necessary for the achievement of genuine well-being, the Bahá'í community supports efforts to re-evaluate the indices used to measure progress, particularly in development work. While recognizing the usefulness of accepted indicators in monitoring and shaping progress, Bahá'ís see the need “to extend the boundaries of what is valued and measured, to make development indicators more reflective of what actually constitutes individual and community progress” including “human capital, social capital, culture, social integration, and community well-being.”⁵⁶ As the Bahá'í International Community writes, such indicators should be “based on universal principles which are essential to the development of the human spirit and therefore, to individual and collective progress” and should “emerge from a vision of development in which material progress serves as a vehicle for spiritual and cultural advancement.”⁵⁷

Since numerous global action plans generated at recent United Nations summits mention governmental commitment to spiritual as well as social and economic development, the Bahá'í community feels that it is timely to explore, with other religions and development agencies, the elaboration of nonmaterial indicators to measure human progress. In that connection, the Bahá'í International Community has put forward five principles that could serve as a foundation for spiritually based indicators: unity in diversity, equity and justice, equality of the sexes, trustworthiness and moral leadership, and independent investigation of truth (freedom of conscience, thought, and religion).⁵⁸ Indicators based on those principles could then be developed to address policy areas such as economic development; education; environmental stewardship; meeting basic needs in food, nutrition, health, and shelter; and governance and participation.⁵⁹

While efforts to identify and use spiritual indicators of development are geared to society as a whole, Gregg Easterbrook also stresses the practical value of individuals' acquisition of spiritual qualities such as forgiveness and gratitude. Of the former, he says,

Even when someone wrongs you, feeling fury or experiencing hate only causes your life to descend into unhappiness and resentment. Then you are the one who suffers, not the person you're angry at. Forgiving, on the other hand, lifts the burden. Perhaps when Buddha, Jesus, Baha'u'llah, and other great spiritual figures

taught followers to forgive those who sin against them, this wasn't only the pronouncement of holy philosophy—they were giving practical down-to-earth life advice.⁶⁰

And of gratitude, Easterbrook writes, “Grateful people tend to suffer less anxiety about status or the accumulation of material possessions. Partly because of this, they are more likely to describe themselves as happy or satisfied in life.”⁶¹ But beyond their benefit to individuals, he concludes, such qualities also profit humanity as a whole:

Spiritual awareness generally links, in research, to increased chance of happiness, lower stress, and less depression. In turn, the more people who appreciate the interconnectedness of all life, the greater the chance that society as a whole will be a clement place.⁶²

Having glanced at a number of perspectives on issues connected to progress, we come again to the question: What prospects lie before us? Will society become more clement, more populated with forgiving, grateful, happy, less stressed people? Will we moderate our expectations of material wealth to allow for a more equal distribution of resources? Will the “flattening of the world” usher in the “amazing era of prosperity and innovation,” as Thomas Friedman predicts, or will our society collapse from the weight of our overconsumption and resource depletion, as Ronald Wright and Jared Diamond fear? The answers are as yet unclear, but, as Diamond writes,

[B]ecause we are rapidly advancing along this non-sustainable course, the world's environmental problems *will* get resolved, in one way or another, within the lifetimes of the children and young adults alive today. The only question is whether they will become resolved in pleasant ways of our own choice, or in unpleasant ways not of our choice, such as warfare, genocide, starvation, disease epidemics, and collapses of societies.⁶³

And Ronald Wright echoes the point:

We have the tools and the means to share resources, clean up pollution, dispense basic health care and birth control, set economic limits in line with natural ones. If we don't do these things now,

while we prosper, we will never be able to do them when times get hard. Our fate will twist out of our hands. And this new century will not grow very old before we enter an age of chaos and collapse that will dwarf all the dark ages in our past.⁶⁴

These two predictions resonate with Bahá'ís, who recall a similar observation made in 1985 by the Universal House of Justice in a statement titled *The Promise of World Peace*. It said:

Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. At this critical juncture when the intractable problems confronting nations have been fused into one common concern for the whole world, failure to stem the tide of conflict and disorder would be unconscionably irresponsible.⁶⁵

To address the problems we face and provide us with the impetus to move forward in a wise manner, we need a compelling vision. But where can such a vision be found today? Some may look to the globalization movement, but Friedman condemns its failure "to play any constructive role in shaping the global debate on how we globalize, precisely when such a role has become even more important as the world has gotten flatter." And while globalization is not going away, it does need to become "more compassionate, fair, and compatible with human dignity." In short, says Friedman, "There is a real role today for a movement that could advance the agenda of how we globalize—not whether we globalize."⁶⁶

Bahá'ís see the Bahá'í Faith as such a movement, with teachings and principles appropriate to this interconnected world. As Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote in 1931:

Surely the world, contracted and transformed into a single highly complex organism by the marvellous progress achieved in the realm of physical science, by the world-wide expansion of commerce and industry, and struggling, under the pressure of world economic forces, amidst the pitfalls of a materialistic civilization, stands in dire need of a restatement of the Truth underlying all the Revelations of the past in a language suited

to its essential requirements. And what voice other than that of Bahá'u'lláh—the Mouthpiece of God for this age—is capable of effecting a transformation of society as radical as that which He has already accomplished in the hearts of those men and women, so diversified and seemingly irreconcilable, who constitute the body of His declared followers throughout the world?⁶⁷

The experience of the Bahá'í community offers compelling evidence “that humanity can live as one global society, equal to whatever challenges its coming of age may entail.”⁶⁸

United by its belief in one God Who has progressively revealed His will through a series of Divine Educators, its conviction that we are all members of one family, and its commitment to establishing a just world where all people can live in dignity, the Bahá'í community is working with some urgency to promote an understanding of “progress” that encompasses both the spiritual and the material aspects of life, for, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá warned:

[U]ntil material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities, and violent afflictions are imminent.⁶⁹

Thoughtful observations and warnings by commentators such as Jared Diamond, Ronald Wright, Jane Jacobs, Thomas Friedman, and Gregg Easterbrook can only serve to raise greater awareness of serious issues surrounding our well-being—if not our very survival; to fuel discussion about the kind of society we want; and to spark positive action while there is still time.

NOTES

- ¹ Lawrence E. Harrison, Introduction to *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. xxvi.
- ² Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), pp. 176–177.
- ³ Ibid., p. 420.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 8.
- ⁵ Gregg Easterbrook, *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2004), pp. 68–74.
- ⁶ See Joseph Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 59; cited in Ronald Wright, *A Short History of Progress* (Toronto: Anansi, 2004), p. 107.
- ⁷ Wright, p. 128.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 129.
- ⁹ Ibid., pp. 107–108.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 130.
- ¹¹ Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005), p. 8.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 11.
- ¹³ For a detailed discussion of each of these points, see Diamond, pp. 486–96.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 495.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 496.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 8.
- ¹⁷ Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2005), pp. 3–4.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 38.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 63.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 99.
- ²¹ Ibid., pp. 103 and 124.
- ²² Ibid., p. 136.
- ²³ Ibid., pp. 24–25.
- ²⁴ Easterbrook, p. 255.
- ²⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 26.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 27.
- ²⁷ Friedman, p. 8.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 279.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 443.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 435.
- ³¹ Wright, p. 131.

- ³² Diamond, p. 522.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 523.
- ³⁴ Ibid., pp. 522 and 525.
- ³⁵ Jacobs, p. 176.
- ³⁶ Friedman, p. 204.
- ³⁷ Harrison, p. xxxiv.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. xxx.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. xxvi.
- ⁴⁰ Easterbrook, pp. 84–85.
- ⁴¹ http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/well-being_mdp.aspx. See also <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/> for another proposed measure, the Genuine Progress Index.
- ⁴² These new measuring tools have been implemented in some cities in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, and even at the national level in Bhutan. For an interesting article on the introduction of this kind of index in Bhutan, see Andrew Revkin, “A New Measure of Well-being from a Happy Little Kingdom,” *The New York Times* online (4 October 2005).
- ⁴³ Easterbrook, p. 210.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. xix.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 211.
- ⁴⁶ Harrison, p. xxvi.
- ⁴⁷ Friedman, p. 463.
- ⁴⁸ Diamond, p. 432.
- ⁴⁹ The Universal House of Justice, *To the World’s Religious Leaders* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2002), p. 2.
- ⁵⁰ Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 71.
- ⁵¹ *To the World’s Religious Leaders*, pp. 6–7.
- ⁵² Bahá’í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind* (1995), section 2.3
- ⁵³ Bahá’í International Community, *Overcoming Corruption in Public Institutions* (2001).
- ⁵⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 297.
- ⁵⁵ *The Prosperity of Humankind*, section 4.4.
- ⁵⁶ The Bahá’í International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*. A concept paper for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18–19 February 1998 (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1998), II, p. 10.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., III, p. 12.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., IV, pp. 14–18.

⁵⁹ Ibid., v, pp. 19–24.

⁶⁰ Easterbrook, p. 231.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 239.

⁶² Ibid., p. 239.

⁶³ Diamond, p. 498.

⁶⁴ Wright, p. 132.

⁶⁵ The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985), p. 1.

⁶⁶ Friedman, p. 387.

⁶⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 47.

⁶⁸ *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 20.

⁶⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, pp. 297.

Promoting the Evolution of Culture:

INTEGRATING THE ARTS

INTO BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY LIFE

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have called the arts “a gift of the Holy Spirit.”¹ Indeed, Bahá’u’lláh wrote that “the mere revelation of the word ‘Fashioner’” releases sufficient power to “generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce” and that “its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected.”² Bahá’ís, then, see a close link between the divine creative impulse and individual expressions of artistic creativity. Of course, there are many varieties of artistic expression, but in the Bahá’í perspective, “These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose, when showing forth the praise of God.”³

Artistic endeavors have long been valued in the Bahá’í community, as members have striven to give creative expression to their belief. There have, of course, been notable figures in the arts who have embraced the Bahá’í Faith throughout its short period of existence, and the richness of their work is recognized.⁴ Yet, community and culture are evolutionary in nature, and because the Bahá’í community is still so young and relatively small, most artistic contributions have been “grassroots” expressions of the creative impulse.

As late as 1957, a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi stated clearly, “there is no cultural expression which could be called Bahá’í at this time (distinctive music, literature, art, architecture, etc., being the flower of the civilization and not coming at the beginning of a new Revelation).”⁵ Twenty-eight years later, the Universal House of Justice reiterated this point in a letter to an individual, writing that “Bahá’í art, music, architecture or culture . . . will doubtless emerge in the future as a natural outgrowth of a Bahá’í civilization.”⁶

By the time of the worldwide Bahá’í Four Year Plan (1996–2000), the community had evolved to the point where the Universal House of Justice asked Bahá’ís to “give greater attention to the use of the arts,” which, “[a]t the level of folk art, . . . can be pursued in every part of the world, whether it be in villages, towns, or cities.”⁷

As a result of this guidance, the Bahá’í community is now making a concentrated effort to integrate the arts into its life—particularly through the institute process, a collaborative learning program being pursued by Bahá’ís around the world. Individuals are encouraged to develop and give greater expression to the creative impulses that each of us possesses. As members of Bahá’í institutions are also engaged in this process, all elements of the community are working in harmony, and study has fostered the development of creativity at all levels.

The development of the arts enhances community life, forging heartfelt connections among individuals, whether children or adults. Artistic expression creates a sense of intimacy and an atmosphere of trust, which can revolutionize relationships—whether the artist’s view of him- or herself, the creator’s relationship to the material he or she is seeking to express, or relationships among audience members who view the work. Artistic presentations based on the history of the Bahá’í Faith, for example, convey not only information and knowledge, but also a feeling of identification with historical figures, which strengthens people’s faith—the writer’s, the actors’, and the audience’s. And for those who strive to express something important to them—whether a spiritual insight or an episode in the life of a historical figure—the artistic effort contributes to personal growth through the learning of new skills, even by people who may have felt they had no talent in this area. Expressions do not need to be grand in scope. Encouragement of crafts as well as the arts is found within the institute process, and participants who claim they had absolutely

no creative talent or skill have reported their surprise and satisfaction at learning to fashion items as simple as greeting cards.

When Bahá'ís seek to teach or proclaim the spiritual truths of their Faith, the arts can communicate those truths in a powerful way that goes beyond intellectual comprehension or appreciation. Grassroots artistic initiatives such as local youth dance workshops can help people address serious social issues such as the equality of the sexes, drug and alcohol abuse, and war. Bahá'ís have also explored other approaches to social issues through the arts. In Ethiopia, a number of Bahá'í artists, journalists, and writers have established an arts group aimed at youth, with the goal of promoting behavioral transformation and encouraging the unprejudiced search for truth, and in Mongolia, the volunteer group Youth Can Make a Difference Against Alcohol, of which most members are Bahá'ís, has offered workshops and performances at secondary schools on the issue of alcohol abuse.

And finally, purely as entertainment, the arts can create feelings of joy both in artists and in those who share the fruits of their efforts. In fact, Bahá'ís are finding that grassroots arts initiatives introduce a



Some of the musicians at a national Bahá'í youth conference in Guinea.

spirit of dynamism and creativity at all levels of community life and foster greater receptivity and appreciation for the arts in general.

A key point regarding the artistic expressions being promoted in the Bahá'í community is the encouragement that they be culturally varied and appropriate. The universal principles and common history of the Faith find lively expression through a wide diversity of cultures. In Armenia, for example, participants in an institute campaign learned Armenian songs, read Armenian poems, looked at Armenian paintings, and viewed Armenian classical films, to explore connections between spiritual education and their own cultural heritage. And sometimes gatherings become joyous multicultural celebrations. A Councilfire gathering in August 2004 in Washington State, USA, featured Makah traditional songs, but also Celtic music, songs from Kenya and Tonga, Persian chanting, and prayers in French, Spanish, Makah, Tsimshian, and languages from Southwestern tribes and from Togo—and well into the night, participants were enthusiastically learning Persian dancing. In many communities around the world, native drumming, singing, storytelling, and other cultural activities have become part of regularly planned activities.

One Bahá'í artist, Istvan Dely, describes a gathering with a group of Saamaka Bush Negroes at the Bahá'í center in Kambalua, in the heart of upper Suriname. Five days previous, the junior youth in another village downriver took one of the quotations from the Bahá'í writings in the first book of the Ruhi Institute curriculum, *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, in their own language, and set it to music. Since then, two other villages have learned it and added their own compositions in their traditional musical styles. Now, to the accompaniment of Mr. Dely—a Hungarian-born, Afro-Cuban-trained percussionist visiting Suriname—and a local Saamaka tutor, who are beating traditional apinti and apuku drums, almost the entire village has gathered, is learning the words (“Say: O brethren! Let deeds, not words, be your adorning”), and is joining in. The air is electric with the music. As he drums, Mr. Dely records the music on a cassette recorder so that other communities can learn it, too. “This process,” he writes, “simple as it looks, is nothing short of creating new folklore”; the sacred word, planted at the heart of a culture, has begun the process of transforming its members. That is why, writes Mr. Dely, the Universal House of Justice has stated

repeatedly that the systematic and grassroots focused use of the arts is an essential part of the institute process.⁸

Within the institute process, in which the Bahá'í community is engaged in all parts of the world, reside three core activities: study circles (a decentralized training program centered around spiritual themes), devotional meetings for prayer and worship, and classes for the spiritual education of children. These activities are open to all who are interested, whether Bahá'ís or not. Of course there are many other types of gatherings that also form part of Bahá'í community life, but these core activities have been a major focus during the past several years, and Bahá'ís have been experimenting in ways to make the arts an integral part of them.⁹

Study circles have been called “[a] natural channel through which the friends can express their artistic talents and sentiments,”¹⁰ and tutors are encouraged to introduce the arts in ways that will stimulate participants’ spiritual development, help them to become aware of ways they can render meaningful service, to open up “creative channels through which can flow inspiration,” and to help release “the force of attraction to beauty.”¹¹ A few examples will illustrate the point. One tutor took up ballet again, which she had loved as a child, after reading about this encouragement of the arts. A study circle participant began to compose music, while another held an exhibition of his paintings, and another tutor decided that even though he didn’t feel he was naturally gifted as an artist, he would take a pottery class. He reported that when he completed his first project, he was surprised at how enjoyable it was to create something. Furthermore, he was able to make connections with artists whom he could invite to his study circle to share their knowledge and skills. On the same theme, a tutor attended a workshop on cardmaking, to learn how to integrate the arts into her study circle. Although she claimed to be not at all artistic, she found the activity enjoyable and felt empowered, by the end of the workshop, that she had actually made something she could give away—a feeling that was heightened by the enthusiastic reception of one of her cards, when she presented it to a friend. And in Nunavut, one of the northern territories in Canada, participants in a program initiated by an individual Bahá'í that encourages children to express themselves through painting are also experiencing the joy that comes through developing their cre-

ative power. In small communities where services are limited, youth suicide is a serious problem, and opportunities for artistic expression are limited, the program has become very popular.

Experience has shown that arts activities reinforce learning. Participants in one study circle developed artistic presentations based on one aspect of a Bahá'í quotation that they had been learning and found that their comprehension of the passage was greatly enhanced. In Honduras and Nicaragua, young people from Garifuna background have responded enthusiastically to the incorporation of dance, music, songs, painting, drama, and storytelling in their study. At a tutor training session, drummers and dancers analyzed their own cultural story dances, such as those performed at funerals, for movements and story elements upon which they could build dances appropriate for Bahá'í sacred occasions. As a result of this analysis and experimentation, the youth's attitudes, sense of inspiration, and their appreciation for reverence and beauty grew markedly. The development of dramatic skits has also helped study circle participants relate the materials they are studying to situations in their local communities.

Sometimes even basic attempts to encourage creative expression can change group members' views of, and relationships with, each other. When one tutor asked study circle participants to write down their interests, she discovered that one was interested in filmmaking, another wrote poetry, and one composed music—and even though the participants knew each other, they weren't aware of each other's interests and talents. Now they were able to encourage each other, share their work, and draw on the various talents of group members in collective projects.

Puppetry, knitting, embroidery, creating art from recycled materials, various kinds of music, and storytelling are some of the many other types of artistic expression that have been used in study circles around the world. One study circle even enlisted the help of a professional animator to develop pictures to enhance the members' storytelling efforts.

Bahá'ís have found that the arts help to establish a spiritual, uplifting atmosphere in the devotional gatherings that they have organized, which have taken many different shapes in various parts of the world and to which Bahá'ís and their friends contribute



At the Arts Academy in the UK, performers Shirin Youseffian-Maanian from Greece and Bill George from Pennsylvania, USA, show a young participant a puppet used in Bill's theater work.

poems, music, sacred stories, and other appropriate artistic offerings. For example, communities in Tanzania often perform a traditional dance called the “bwasi bwasi” after their devotional meetings outside the Bahá'í centers.

Children in spiritual education classes all over the world respond eagerly to arts activities. In Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, children's classes have begun to make extensive use of dramatic skits to learn their lessons, and have performed their plays, choral presentations, and puppet theater in several schools in the area, including one for handicapped children, while in Kiribati, the children in a local Bahá'í class put on a show that included a dance on the subject of racial disunity and a play based on a local song. In Bermuda, a Bahá'í-initiated children's program entitled “A Peace of Art,” uses the arts to promote a deeper understanding of moral virtues.

On a wider scale, in Australia, the Bahá'í Education in State Schools (BESS) initiative has incorporated the arts into its spiritual education program, drawing on skilled individuals from the Bahá'í and the wider community, including resources developed through



A children's performance at a summer school in Slovakia.

the institute process. One school holiday program in Western Australia, called “Art Beat,” featured a four-day “Creative Expressions” workshop that included dance, role-playing, cooperative games, and drama, while a second program focused on textiles, creative writing and storytelling, creating treasure boxes, and claywork. All incorporated Bahá’í themes such as the oneness of the human family and gems of virtues, and parents enjoyed an exhibition and performance of the children’s work at the end of the week.

Children’s festivals sponsored by Bahá’ís in Cambodia and Sabah have used the performing arts extensively, including instruction in Khmer traditional dances, traditional musical instruments, dramatic performances, songs, and storytelling, with chants for prayers and sacred writings composed by the youth themselves.

Throughout the world, Bahá’ís are holding “reflection meetings” at regular intervals to review and analyze what they have learned from their study and actions within the framework of the institute process and to develop forward-looking plans. As with other events, the arts are gradually becoming an important element of these meetings. Skits and artistic presentations by children and youth are often

incorporated, as are displays of artwork done in study circles, with some participants sharing insights about their artistic efforts. They are sometimes even used as an aid to the study of recent documents pertaining to the institute process. One reflection meeting in the northern coastal region of Colombia featured songs and Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh chanted by a local musical group, while youth from a study circle presented local dances. In Australia, a youth choir and dance workshop formed with the specific goal of performing at the next reflection meeting, where they were warmly received. While rehearsing for the event, the older and younger youth got to know each other much better, enhancing their identity as Bahá'ís and the unity of the entire community.

Building on this increase in artistic capacity that has been nurtured through the institute process, many communities have incorporated the arts into the devotional portion of the Nineteen Day Feast to make it more creative and uplifting, and in Papua New Guinea skits have been performed at Feasts to facilitate community education about Bahá'í teachings and laws. The arts are also becoming central elements of Bahá'í holy day commemorations around the world.

National gatherings have also been enlivened by artistic contributions. A recent National Convention in Tonga not only featured music and devotions in preparation for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly, but there was also a musical festival that included singing and poetry readings. In Angola, delegates and observers at the National Convention sang songs, drummed, and played other traditional instruments. More and more National Conventions report that artistic elements—particularly music—heighten the spirit of the event.

In the United Kingdom, the annual National Bahá'í Festival regularly incorporates the arts, including choirs, dramatic monologues of Bahá'í heroes and heroines, and performances of full-length dramatic works on themes relevant to the current plan. That national community is now able to draw upon greatly increased artistic resources, thanks to both the institute process and the very successful annual summer Arts Academy it holds, in which participants have explored subjects such as drama, creative writing, mask-making, music, painting, and dance in classes facilitated by experts in these



Participants in a “Performing with Masks” workshop at the Arts Academy in the United Kingdom.

areas. In Germany, the annual summer festival at the European House of Worship in Langenhain also regularly features music, drama, and the arts.

And even institutional meetings and conferences have been enlivened by the arts. One in the British Columbia/Yukon region of Canada included not only artistic transitions but also the dramatic presentations of reports, a coffee house, and interactive theater, while works of art produced by a junior youth arts workshop provided the backdrop to the plenary sessions. At a conference in Macau, youth opened each session with an “artistic moment,” including singing, creative centerpieces, drama, and poems, which established a sense of reverence before morning prayers. Such activities helped participants learn practical ways to integrate the arts into study circles and devotional meetings.

During the past few years, the Bahá'í community has been celebrating significant anniversaries of the establishment of the Faith in various countries, and artistic contributions have featured prominently on the programs around the world, particularly traditional dances and choral presentations. In Samoa, the program also featured youth performing a drama dedicated to the Bahá'ís of Iran. An original drama on the life of Bahá'u'lláh was created by three young women from Pointe Noire, in the Republic of Congo, for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Faith in that country, while celebrations in Laos included a presentation of the history of the Faith on the stage through drama, with background slides and music. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 50th celebrations featured stories, film, songs by Bahá'í choirs, dances and dramatic presentations on the general theme "moving towards unity and peace."

The Mixed Bag Company, a group of artists from the United Kingdom, traveled to the Faroe Islands for the 50th anniversary of the Bahá'í community there, to offer the population a unique gift: a music-dance composition based on excerpts from the poetic-prose work "The Tower on the Edge of the World" by internationally acclaimed Faroese writer William Heinesen. The group also ran a "tranquility zone" devotional meeting while in the Faroes. Celebrations in the Canary Islands featured a special commemorative video of the past 50 years as well as "musical moments," including one based on verses from the Book of Psalms, performed by a renowned soprano from Gran Canaria. Bahá'ís in Belarus saw their 25-year history through a multimedia program, while also enjoying a performance of the youth dance workshop, classical guitar music, and exhibitions of books and photographs. Jamaica, on the occasion of its 60th anniversary, also welcomed a junior youth dance workshop to the festivities.

Fiftieth anniversary celebrations in Tonga were replete with artistic contributions, including a traditional Tongan dance, a performance of the hoop dance by a native American Bahá'í visitor, presentations by local choirs as well as one from New Zealand, a choir competition, crafts displays and sales, and a series of workshops on music, cinematography, teaching through the arts, and the development of the Bahá'í community.

Bahá'í summer and winter schools around the world are also concentrating more on the arts. At one winter school in the Mariana Islands there was a poetry reading, singing, skits, and a local artist presented his work, while classes in Chinese black ink drawing and flower arranging were part of the program. In Canada, the Maxwell International School in British Columbia has, for the past several years, offered a youth summer school focused on the arts, called the Eagle Arts Academy.

Intensive conferences and training sessions on the arts have been held all over the world, with some focused specifically at youth and others at different cultural groups. Participants at an institute training course for indigenous Bahá'ís in South Dakota, USA, were encouraged to create songs, poems, and dramatic sketches to express what they had learned. Conferences on Persian Arts and Letters in the United Kingdom, Germany, Brazil, and Botswana have featured music and poetry, talks on Persian music and poetry, and biographies of historians, writers, and poets of the first Bahá'í century.

An arts institute for youth and junior youth in South Africa trained participants in the skills of being a master of ceremonies, in modern and traditional dance, in producing an original drama, and in music and singing. At a series of youth forums in the USA, youth and junior youth produced dramatic skits on Bahá'í heroes and heroines or illustrating principles such as the harm that results from backbiting. They also wrote poems and music, and created inspirational drawings. Participants planned to teach the new songs they had learned to others at feasts, devotional gatherings, and children's classes.

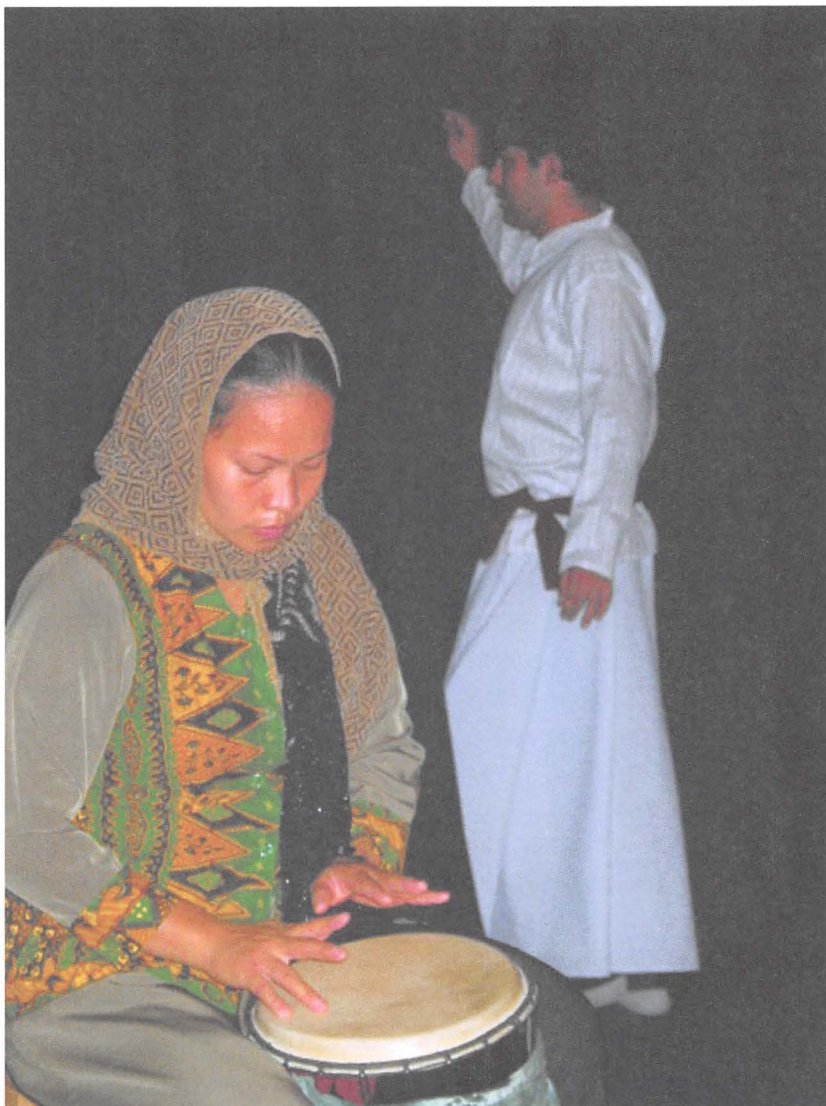
At an Arts and Spirituality conference in New Zealand, adult and youth workshops focused on writing, poetry, Maori flax weaving, painting, and claywork, while children learned songs, acted in dramas, participated in a dance workshop, and experimented with art materials. In the Philippines, a gathering on the same theme featured training in the performing arts, with a public presentation at the conclusion. And in Limoges, France, an intensive five-day course trained participants in ways to promote the arts within the Bahá'í community by integrating them into core activities. Workshops focused on dramatic expression (including puppetry, shadow theater, tableaux, and storytelling), handcrafts (such as masks, origami,

mobiles, and candles), “plastic arts” (collage, stained glass, stencils, and cardmaking), and the use of drama in memorization (from classical theater to role-playing, interactive theater, and mime). Following this workshop, several participants went home and facilitated a creative workshop for youth and young professionals in Belgium.

Bahá'ís who work professionally in the arts also appreciate the opportunity to meet and discuss the connection between art and their belief. That is the impetus behind the annual weekend conferences for Bahá'ís in the recording industry, sponsored by the Bosch Bahá'í School in California, USA. The conference features many live performances and workshops on both spiritual and practical topics, such as putting the Bahá'í writings to music, roles and responsibilities of the artist, incorporating the arts in the community, and touring the college circuit.

Youth drama and dance workshops have formed around the world, allowing members to address serious issues such as substance abuse, family violence, oppression of women, and the oneness of religion and of humankind through their artistic efforts. Workshop members generally go through training that focuses on both physical and spiritual aspects; the spiritual component now often centers around study of the sequence of institute courses. The dance workshop format has become increasingly popular with youth and has spread all over the world. The Diversity Dance Workshop, for example, which aims to offer moral and social education through dance, has expanded to more than 100 troupes in various countries, each adapted to the situation of the locality in which it is based.

Workshops have performed in a wide variety of venues to audiences of all ages—from schools to tourist resorts to a school for disabled children in Fiji; to a Native Friendship Center in British Columbia, Canada; to the opening of new buildings on the campus of the Ocean of Light International School in Tonga, where the local Bahá'í youth dance workshop choreographed a new dance called “education,” showing the importance of a balance between spiritual, physical, and academic education; to a rehabilitation center for trauma and torture survivors in Denmark, in connection with the UN day for Torture Victims; to a conference examining offensive weapons, drugs, and violence in the USA; to public squares in cities in Albania; to the National Cultural Center in Guyana, at a



Corinne Padilla, Philippines, and Nemat Hossieny, India, perform a scene from “Quest of the Spirit,” a production by the musical theater group Inspirít.

performance in aid of Kids First, an NGO run by the country’s First Lady, which helps children in need of urgent medical care.

To facilitate cross-national training, three members of Portugal’s Geração Viva dance workshop traveled to Brazil to train Bahá’í youth

and their friends there in dramatizing social issues through dance. The training comprised three components: spiritual (including the importance of the integration of the group, using texts from the institute courses); physical (including dance practice); and training in generating love, cooperation, and unity in the group. Public performances in the seven Bahá'í communities visited by the youth trainers met with enthusiastic responses. In a similar vein, Canada's Wildfire Dance Theater group offered shows to youth and adults and also conducted dance workshops for local youth during a visit to Guyana.

Since 2000, *Beyond Words*, an international Bahá'í youth performing arts and empowerment initiative, has toured extensively in cities, townships, and rural areas throughout South Africa, performing dances on drug abuse, sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS, gang violence, equality of men and women, poverty, and racism. They also facilitate interactive dramas, encouraging audience participation, on domestic violence, racism, equality, and suicide, performing songs in Zulu, Xhosa, Nyanja, SiSwati, Afrikaans, Tswana, and English. During 2003, *Beyond Words* also performed at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, where it was showcased as one of the sustainable development projects run by the Bahá'í community. By 2004, *Beyond Words* was assisting with an institute campaign at a local high school in Mafikeng. The group also performed at 50th anniversary celebrations in South Africa and Lesotho.

In Senegal, a youth performing arts group named *Les Etincelles* (Sparks) was formed under the direction of Jean Jacques Yem and the *Afrika Bikonda* troupe.¹² Including Bahá'ís and youth from various religious and national backgrounds, from 8 to 16 years of age, the group has performed its original material, based on contemporary and traditional rhythms of West African dances, at universities, schools, cultural centers, and dance festivals. Mr. Yem, an author and playwright living in Mali, also trained a youth theater group at a 2004 youth summer conference in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to perform a play about the diversity of religions, which humorously illustrates the tension that arises from strained relations between them and offers the Bahá'í response. This kind of theater has proven to be an effective way of reaching out to both Christian



Les Etincelles, a Bahá'í dance troupe from Dakar, Senegal, performing at the opening of the new Bahá'í center in Bakau, Gambia.

and Muslim groups. In Greece, a youth music theater group named Phoenix, under the direction of Helen Kontos, has for two summers performed a musical play on human rights. Venues included public spaces, other spaces provided by municipalities or in collaboration with NGOs, and a Roma camp outside Thessaloniki.

Mana (which means “the Almighty” or “the Powerful” in most Polynesian languages) is a Bahá'í music and cultural performing arts group based in Sydney, Australia. Its members are mostly youth whose roots lie in Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands—a diversity mirrored in their music, which is a blend of Polynesian rhythms and sounds fused with pop. The group grew out of a study circle in 2001, in which a number of Bahá'í Polynesian families were studying *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* together. They found that putting the quotations to music greatly assisted their memorization, so they asked the mother of some of the participants, who is a well-known singer-songwriter in the Pacific, to compose melodies for them. Eventually, group members decided that it would be helpful

to the Bahá'í community to produce a CD of their songs and make it available as a tool for others memorizing the quotations in the book. So far, Mana has released two CDs, *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* and *Arising to Serve* (based on the first two books in the Ruhi Institute curriculum), and aims to release a CD for every book in the sequence of courses. Mana has also performed all over Australia and toured Samoa, combining its unique sound with traditional dances and performances of the Pacific. The seventh book of the Ruhi curriculum, *Walking a Spiritual Path*, presents the idea that appreciation of beauty is a spiritual force that can lift individuals to higher levels of existence. To strengthen this force, Mana aims to create music that can be integrated into study circles, participants' learning, and activities of the whole community.

While the seven Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the world have long-established choirs that perform at services in the temples, the development of choral music in the Bahá'í community and the establishment of choirs around the world were given impetus by the uplifting performances of the international choir formed for the Second Bahá'í World Congress in New York City in 1992. The Voices of Bahá choir, for example, under the direction of Tom Price,



Adrienne Ewing-Roush of the Voices of Bahá gospel choir performs a solo during a performance in Stuttgart, Germany.



A family of percussionists perform during the “Embrace the World” tour in North America. (Left to right) Shango, Istvan, and David Dely.

who directed the choir at the World Congress, is an international choir that comes together for several weeks each year to travel to different parts of the globe. It has performed in venues such as the National Music Auditorium in Madrid, Spain, and Carnegie Hall in New York, USA. The Voices of Bahá gospel choir, from the United States, has also traveled to Europe to perform, while the Celebration! Congo Choir traveled from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the USA in April 2005.¹³

Many more national, regional, and local choirs have formed in countries all over the world, performing at anniversary celebrations, Bahá'í holy day commemorations, Nineteen-Day Feasts, and other local events. In the Eastern Caroline Islands, the choral music from the World Congress has been received enthusiastically by a population that is accustomed to singing in church. In Tanzania, members of a youth choir accompany themselves with local instruments that they have fashioned.

Tours by Bahá'í musicians and musical groups are also increasing in number. During a recent tour to California, USA, the Millero Congo musical group, formed by Istvan and Leonor Dely of Colombia, South America, offered concerts that included music inspired by

the verses of Bahá'u'lláh. The group also performed at a devotional meeting, which they opened with instrumental prayers expressing African and Native South American spirituality on gaita flutes and drums, and prayers sung in Haitian Creole and Spanish. In 2004, an "Embrace the World" concert tour brought together musicians from various countries for a tour that covered major cities in the western USA and Canada.¹⁴

As noted earlier, the materials used worldwide in the institute process have sparked an explosion in the production of indigenous Bahá'í songs in communities all over the world, as Bahá'ís have put passages from the sacred writings of their Faith to music and composed new Bahá'í poems and songs. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, members of the Pygmy tribe inspired participants at one gathering with an original song that said, "Never refuse tests from God, as their purpose is to develop your capacity. If you do not experience them, you may never become what God intended you to be." Participants in a study circle that completed a course that examined the lives of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb were moved to compose their own poems and songs about the sufferings of Bahá'u'lláh. Some small geographic areas have collectively even written their own "anthems," which they sing at their reflection meetings. And in Papua New Guinea, Bahá'ís have held traditional "sing-sings" that have created such a joyful atmosphere that they have continued into the early hours of the morning.

As seen with the group Mana from Australia, participants in some study circles have taken selections from the Bahá'í writings and have set them to music, producing CDs and cassette tapes so that others can learn and enjoy the songs, too. In Fiji, a CD of music with passages from the Bahá'í writings in Hindi has stirred the hearts of Indian families who attend devotional meetings there, and selections have also been aired on a Hindi-language radio station. A CD of chanted prayers was also made and released in Laos, and the Hidden Words and Bahá'í prayers have been recorded in Setswana, for distribution in southern Africa.

Youth in Malaysia, inspired by the visit of the Voices of Bahá choir, formed their own choir and made four CDs of devotional songs—two in English and two in Malay, and music on a Bahá'í cassette from Nepal inspired the creation of a spiritual dance in the

Sikkim/Himalayan region of India. Bahá'ís in the Russian Federation produced a CD with songs composed or sung by Bahá'ís about different principles of the Faith. The recording also included prayers, Hidden Words put to music, and traditional Russian and Ukrainian songs.

In Canada, individual initiative saw the production of a series of audiobooks containing selections from the Bahá'í writings, including those used in the Ruhi curriculum, with background music. Another individual had a CD made with 14 Bahá'í prayers in Japanese, to make available as gifts to the more than 9,000 Japanese tourists who visit Canada's Northwest Territories each year. And in 2003, a CD made by Bahá'í artists and musicians to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's incarceration in the Síyáh-Chál was presented to all Local Spiritual Assemblies in British Columbia and the Yukon, in Canada.

Bahá'í music is also gaining wider exposure as the result of another individual initiative: radIONUR, which provides live streaming programming over the internet 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and features music by a diverse range of Bahá'í recording artists from all over the world.

'Abdu'l-Bahá called the stage "the pulpit of the future," and there has been a great upsurge in dramatic productions throughout the Bahá'í world, which seems to have been sparked especially by the Second World Congress in 1992. Some have been created and performed by professionals, while others are more simple, grassroots efforts, but all have sought to give expression to some aspect of Bahá'í belief.

Susan Hegarty, an actress from Los Angeles who performed at the World Congress, took her one-woman play entitled "What Can I Do with My Heart?" to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2002. The drama, which tells the story of Juliet Thompson, an early member of the American Bahá'í community, was short-listed for the Fringe's Amnesty International Freedom of Expression Award. One theater critic described the piece as making "a strong case for one woman's decision to live her life in the service of art and spirituality." Another one-woman play, entitled "A Woman and Her Words," about the renowned Persian poet and Bábí Ṭáhirih, was performed by its creator, Muhtadia Rice, at the 2002 Maitisong Festival in Botswana;

and "Respect," a play by Dorothy Marcic depicting, through music, the progress made by women throughout the twentieth century, has also been performed throughout North America.

In 2001, Arts for Nature in the United Kingdom arranged for the performance of a drama paying tribute to the life of 'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, who was a supporter of the organization, for HRH Prince Philip, diplomats, and invited guests. In the performance, four actresses personified four major aspects of Rúḥíyyih Khánum's life and character, using words taken from her own lectures and writings, while four other women, from Botswana, Macau, Bolivia, and Iran, wove a floral tapestry as the story unfolded—a metaphor for Rúḥíyyih Khánum's rich and varied life.

ZIPOPO, an interactive form of drama that promotes the discussion of moral issues in a positive atmosphere, was originally developed by Shamil Fattakhov for Russian television but has now spread to more than 20 countries. The format uses one-act dramas that freeze at a crisis point in the action to promote discussion of a wide variety of moral and social issues common in people's daily lives.¹⁵ At a four-day interactive ZIPOPO training workshop in Panchgani, India, students and teachers of the Kisan Veer College of Shivaji University produced nearly 30 English and Marathi scripts on issues such as caste prejudice, the education of girls and the equality of men and women, environmental problems, and ethnic and religious unity, incorporating traditional dances, songs, music, and costumes. In Austria, ZIPOPO workshops were sponsored by GLOBART, an NGO dedicated to "connecting art and sciences," as a social service for schools in three cities for students aged 12 to 19. The public performance that followed one workshop centered on racial and ethnic conflicts. GLOBART also presented Mr. Fattakhov with an innovation award for his participation in the peacemaking process in the Balkans from 1998 to 2001. Another project featuring interactive dramas about social issues is People's Theater, initiated by the Bahá'í community in Offenbach, Germany.¹⁶

Some theatrical productions have grown directly out of the institute process. In Finland in 2004, the Naantali Amateur Theater troupe performed a play called "The Seven Valleys" by Tuula Kuitunen. The idea for the play, which is based on a work by Bahá'u'lláh that depicts the journey of the human soul, arose when



Members of the Naantali Amateur Theater troupe in Finland perform Tuula Kuitunen's play, "The Seven Valleys."

the author and other members of a Bahá'í study circle started holding devotional meetings open to the public. A theater critic for the regional newspaper called the piece "food for the soul" and said that he had "never experienced a similar feeling in theater or in any other event." And during an institute campaign in Darjeeling, India, junior youth created two dramatic works: the first about the problems of superstition and the second about Badí', a young hero in Bahá'í history. After each performance, participants reflected on the script and the presentation and consulted about ways to improve it.

As with drama, efforts in the field of visual arts range from those created by professional artists to those by children and others who may never have attempted any kind of art.

Bahá'í artist Sima Baher of Uruguay took inspiration from the Bahá'í writings for her 2004 exhibition "The earth is but one country" at the Pacifico Gallery of the Borges Cultural Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The exhibition, with paintings on themes such as world peace, the unity of mankind, the equality of men and women, nature and the environment, religion, and the situation of the world, also included quotations from the Bahá'í writings that inspired the artist in her work. When the same exhibition was shown later in the city of Adrogué, Ms. Baher met with members of the Theater Department at the House of Culture and challenged them to develop a drama based on selections from two books she had authored on the themes of world peace and the unity of humanity. Audiences found the resulting performance very moving. At an informal gathering following the exhibition, which was attended by people who had shown interest in her work, Ms. Baher introduced the main concepts of the institute program and invited people to participate in a study circle and to bring their children to the spiritual education classes that were being held by the Bahá'ís.

Professional photographers have also turned their talents towards the expression of their belief and support for the institute process. Francisco Gonzales Peres of Spain has traveled around the world for a number of faith-based projects, including a book of photographs of Bahá'í Houses of Worship. Another publication focuses on the native peoples of America and the important role assigned to them by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the emergence of a united and diverse world civilization. Photographer Denny Allen has assisted Bahá'í communities in southern Africa to consolidate their sense of Bahá'í identity by producing and arranging for the distribution of Bahá'í photographs to families throughout the region.

On Palm Island in North Queensland, Australia, study circle tutors created posters of all the quotations in *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, decorating them with indigenous and tropical drawings. Participants liked them so much that they asked that they be laminated so they could be enjoyed by other groups, too. Posters with quotations and colorful illustrations were also popular in Auckland,

New Zealand, where participants in a project to visit families in their homes made posters to share during the visits.

In Sri Lanka, an art competition was based on the images and quotations in a coloring book that had been printed for children's classes. And in Brazil, students at the School of the Nations were challenged to create posters to illustrate each of the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in honor of UN Human Rights Day. The resulting display, shown in one of the main corridors of the Federal Chamber of Deputies, also included a poem written about each article by a popular poet from the northeast of the country.

Young Bahá'í filmmakers in Canada and Australia have organized film festivals based on their conviction that this art form has great capacity to uplift people. Organizers of the Australian festival say that they are striving to promote a message of peace and to encourage people to discuss issues surrounding harmony and unity. The theme of their 2005 festival is "woman," and entrants were advised that a useful starting point in their exploration of the theme was *The Promise of World Peace*, a message issued in 1985 by the Universal House of Justice that highlighted an important relationship between the role of women and the establishment of world peace. At the 2003 Canadian festival in Edmonton, Alberta, participants held a workshop on filmmaking and a panel discussion on individual initiative within the Bahá'í community and the importance of the arts. Among the themes explored at the festival were the spiritual nature of human beings, the equality of men and women, the elimination of prejudice, world peace, life after death, the harmony of science and religion, and the history of the Bahá'í Faith.

While grassroots arts initiatives have multiplied within the Bahá'í community, other Bahá'í artists have achieved national and international renown for the excellence of their creative expression. One of these is Norwegian Bahá'í composer Lasse Thoresen. Among his more recent accomplishments, in 2004 Mr. Thoresen was given a three-year appointment as composer in residence of the prestigious Music Festival of Radio France. In 2001, his oratorio "Terraces of Light" was performed at the inauguration of the Bahá'í Terraces on Mount Carmel. Furniture craftsman Philip Koomen, of the United Kingdom, was among a select group of British designers invited to

a special event in November 2004 at Buckingham Palace, held in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II, to celebrate excellence in design education and practice. Mr. Koomen attributes the Bahá'í International Community's statement *The Prosperity of Humankind* as the inspiration behind an exhibition of his recent work entitled "Out of the Woods." And the highly original architectural design created by Canadian Bahá'í architect Siamak Hariri for the Bahá'í House of Worship in Chile has brought accolades from more than 40 major architectural publications. An estimated 100,000 people viewed an exhibit of the design, arranged at the invitation of the College of Design in Toronto.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote that when the Word of God "manifesteth itself in the mirrors of the hearts of craftsmen, it unfoldeth new and unique arts."¹⁷ It is impossible at this time to see what arts will develop in the dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. Yet even from the few examples shown here, it is clear that the Bahá'í community, with guidance and encouragement from its international institutions, has intensified and systematized its efforts to develop its members' capacity for creative expression—thus contributing to the evolution of Bahá'í culture.

NOTES

- ¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as recorded by Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1954), p. 167; in *The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith* (Thornhill: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1999), no. 23, p. 10.
- ² Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), LXXIV, pp. 141–142; in *The Importance of the Arts*, no. 4, p. 4.
- ³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *The Importance of the Arts*, no. 23, p. 11.
- ⁴ For a brief discussion of some early Bahá'í artists, see "The Language of the Heart: Arts in the Bahá'í World Community" in *The Bahá'í World 1994–95* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1996), pp. 243–272.
- ⁵ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States of America, 21 September 1957; in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, p. 82.
- ⁶ Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 23 June 1985; cited in *The Importance of the Arts*, no. 57, p. 26.
- ⁷ Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, 21 April 1996; cited in *The Importance of the Arts*, no. 69, p. 34.

- ⁸ Istvan Dely, “New Lore—New Folk = New Folklore: Music in the Institute Process,” at <http://www.upliftingwords.org/Articles/Folklore.htm>.
- ⁹ For more on the Bahá'í community's efforts in connection to the institute process, see “Creating a Culture of Growth: The Institute Process in the Bahá'í Community” in *The Bahá'í World 2000–2001* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), pp. 191–199.
- ¹⁰ Letter of the International Teaching Centre to all Continental Counsellors, 5 November 2001.
- ¹¹ “Promoting the Arts at the Grassroots,” in *Walking Together on the Path of Service*, Ruhi Institute curriculum, p. 131; cited in letter of the International Teaching Centre to all Continental Counsellors, 5 November 2001.
- ¹² For more on Afrika Bikonda, see *The Bahá'í World 1994–95* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1996), pp. 252–253.
- ¹³ For more on the Celebration! Congo Choir's tour, see p. 92 of this volume.
- ¹⁴ For more on the “Embrace the World” tour, see pp. 92–94 of this volume.
- ¹⁵ ZIPOPO is also known by the names “The Happy Hippo Show” and “Stop and Act.” For more on this initiative, see *The Bahá'í World 1996–97* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 1998), pp. 229–33 and *The Bahá'í World 1998–99* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2000), pp. 146–150.
- ¹⁶ For more on People's Theater, see pp. 89–91 of this volume.
- ¹⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Importance of the Arts*, no. 1, p. 3.

PROFILE:

The Nosrat Foundation, Mali

In countries all around the world, national educational systems are decreasing in performance and effectiveness—and failing the increasing numbers of children they are meant to serve. In Mali, for example, UNICEF estimates that between 1996 and 2003 primary school enrolment and attendance comprised 39 percent of the eligible population, with the total adult literacy rate in 2000 standing at 26 percent. And while there are about 12,000 towns and villages in the country, there are only some 2,000 public schools. Clearly, children in Mali are at a great disadvantage.

To help meet the high demand for schooling and to fill the gap in the many villages without government-run schools, the national government decreed in 1994 that schools established in communities with more than 60 children would be officially recognized. In response, USAID and other donors mounted a program to establish community-based schools, which succeeded in more than doubling the number of schools in the country. Still, the need for many more remained.

In 2000, working within the parameters of the government-endorsed, community-based school program, Chahine and Donush Rassekh established the Nosrat Foundation. Mrs. Rassekh, who serves



Students, parents, and teachers gather at the inauguration of a community school in Mali, established with the help of the Nosrat Foundation.

as co-director of the Foundation with her husband, had previously worked for the USAID program and had seen first-hand that although the initiative was supported by the national government, there was initially some resistance at the level of the local school system—in part, because the concept was new in Mali and most of these schools relied on foreign pedagogical and teacher training methods. She saw an opportunity to work with eight villages where there are strong Bahá'í communities. The goal was to establish schools that would use a participatory approach to develop human resources and capacity. They would also adopt a universal approach to the development of capabilities and would emphasize moral education. Inclusion of Bahá'í principles such as the education of girls and the participation of women on the school boards, Bahá'í procedures for the election of school boards, and the practice of consultation would be other features of the schools. As an outgrowth of that initial effort, Nosrat has helped to establish five more schools in villages where there is no Bahá'í community—but regardless of whether or not there is a Bahá'í population, the schools are open to all children.



One of the teachers welcomes those attending the inauguration of a community-based school established by the Nosrat Foundation.

Although the Nosrat Foundation is small, run only by the co-directors and three trainers, the story of this Bahá'í-inspired agency's evolution is encouraging. Within four years of its establishment, and with funding from the government of Luxembourg, the Foundation had set up 13 schools in villages in the Koulikoro, Kayes, and Sikasso regions of Mali, where there were no primary schools. By the start of the 2004–2005 school year, 339 girls and 587 boys—a total of 926 students—were enrolled in the community schools' kindergarten and grades 1–3. Another 126 were involved in literacy programs aimed at junior youth, aged 12 to 15.

Nosrat's founders attribute the organization's ability to reach so many students in just four years to the approach that it has adopted. Rather than putting all its energy into running one school that would reach no more than a few hundred children and parents a year, the Foundation wants to help develop the capacity of others to run their own schools. Thus, Nosrat is currently developing and assessing a series of classroom materials and training manuals that can be adapted locally as each community builds its capacity.



First grade students line up to enter their classroom in one of the community-based schools established by the Nosrat Foundation.

With this vision and approach, the Nosrat Foundation has focused on work at three levels. First, it develops materials for teacher training, for parent awareness, for the management of community-based schools, and for the use of students and teachers in the classroom. Second, Nosrat conducts training of trainers, of parents and of teachers. And third, it conducts testing of the materials it has developed in the field at community-based schools.

Community involvement

The schools that Nosrat has established are owned by the community. The villagers themselves provide many of the construction materials for the buildings, which generally consist of three classrooms and latrines. Parents make mud bricks and do the actual construction, while Nosrat provides what is difficult to find or provide locally, such as cement and iron to cover and protect the walls and sustain the long-term roofing; specialized labor; tables and benches; didactic materials such as maps, books, and notebooks; and training, monitoring, and evaluation.

Each village has an Association of Parents, which manages the project at the community level. The Association's responsibilities include requesting official status from regional and communal authorities and choosing teachers and paying them regularly. School fees and recurring costs are covered mostly through monthly dues, with the amount decided by the parents themselves. Schooling is in high demand in Mali, and so commitment on the part of parents is deep. Another factor contributing to the sustainability of the schools is that regional school authorities have begun to take greater ownership of them by providing additional books and paying some of the teachers' salaries.

Because most parents are illiterate and have no experience in managing a school, Nosrat conducts training for the community and its school board members. The goal is to build human resources at the grassroots, increasing the capacity of the board to manage the school and make it grow in a spirit of unity and service.

This training takes place at the local level, with a 20-session program. Twelve sessions are held before the school opens the first year and the remaining 8 occur during the first year, to help the board solve operational problems that may arise, to improve the quality of the school, and to plan for its growth.

All of the training modules rest on a spiritual foundation. For example, the module on conducting a school board meeting is based on the Bahá'í concept of consultation; the module on managing school finances is based on the quality of trustworthiness; and the module on equality in schooling is based on the Bahá'í concept of equality of the sexes, the advancement of women, and the importance of girls' education. Parents discuss the role of women on the school board and the importance of seeking female teachers, who are rare in rural settings. Teachers discuss how not to discriminate against girls and how to encourage them in the classroom.

Teacher training

Generally, teachers hired by the community-based schools established with the help of the Nosrat Foundation have a one-year renewable contract with their community. Most come from the village or the area near the school and are youth who have not finished high

school and who would otherwise go to town looking for work in the dry season.

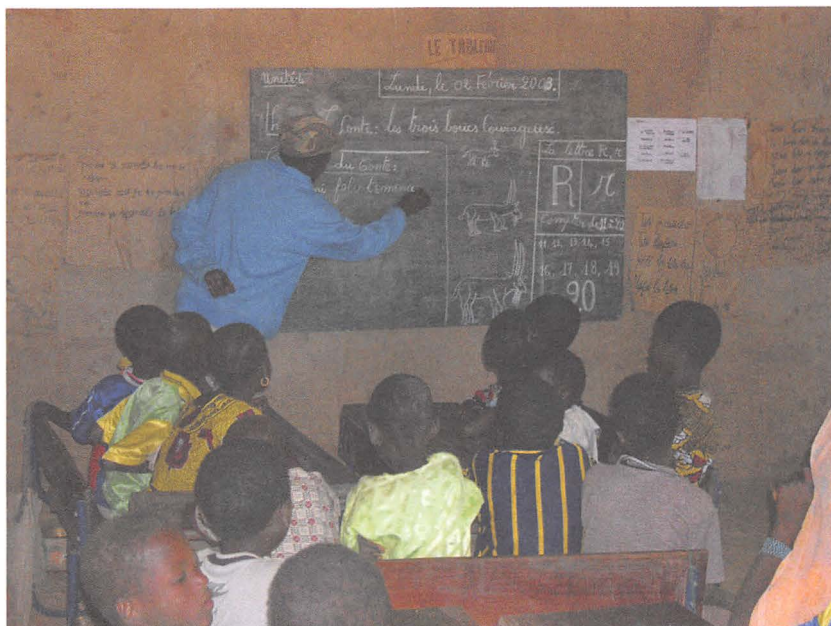
Like the training at the community level, the teacher training conducted by the Nosrat Foundation is morally and spiritually oriented, attempting to instill an attitude of teaching as an act of service to the community. Training sessions, intended to develop the capabilities of the teachers, are participatory and equip teachers with exercises to assist the children with comprehension. Sessions also instruct the teachers in how to tell stories. After the initial training, which is conducted from July to September, teachers go into the classroom. They then participate in two-week “refresher/reflection sessions” held each year during the December and March school breaks.

Although few of the teachers in the community-based schools are Bahá'ís themselves, all receive training in two books of the Ruhi curriculum, which is being used by Bahá'í communities all over the world. The first book in the series, entitled *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, looks at the spiritual nature of human beings and covers topics such as the nature of the soul, our relationship to our Creator, and life after death. The third book in the Ruhi curriculum provides practical training for teachers of first-level children's classes. These two books are supplemented by *Concepts for a Positive School Environment* and *Qualities and Attitudes of Teachers*, developed by the Uganda Bahá'í Institute for Development. Teachers are also trained in grade-specific texts that they will use with their students, as well as the materials from all previous grades, so they know what the pupils have learned prior to coming into their class.

To monitor the schools, Nosrat's staff members visit each one at least once a month, observing in classrooms and holding consultative meetings with teachers and discussions with parents. This process helps the staff identify strengths, concerns, and the parents' degree of involvement in their community's school, and enables teacher training to continue in the field on an evolving and applied basis.

Pedagogy and curriculum development

The classrooms inside the mud brick schools are by no means elaborate. Aside from benches and tables, materials are limited to a few notebooks. Most of the walls are covered with black paint so that



In the classroom, students consult about the text of the story they are learning. Texts from previous stories “owned” by the pupils can be seen on sheets of paper on the walls.

they can be used as blackboards. Although classroom materials may be scarce, it is clear that the students are eager to learn.

The pedagogical approach used by the Nosrat Foundation is simple but effective. Each Monday morning, the teacher gathers his or her first-graders and, using pictures, tells them a new story, either in their local language or in Bambara, Mali’s national language. Then he or she asks them some basic questions about it, to check comprehension. The next morning, the children discuss the moral theme of the story, and in the afternoon, they prepare group role-plays of it. On Wednesday, the children dictate a summary of the story to the teacher, who helps them to decide collaboratively about the chronology of events and the best wording. Through consultation, the class comes to an agreement about the text and takes full ownership of the story, which the teacher transcribes on the classroom blackboard or on sheets of paper on the walls. As the weeks pass, the new text of each story is added to the previous one, until all of the blackboards are full or the walls are covered. At that point, the teacher writes the text in a notebook or a few notebooks, which slowly begin to constitute the class’s reading corner.

Through this process, the children also begin to read—a new letter each week—and identify each new letter in all previous texts on the blackboard. They learn to write the letters, first by tracing them in the air, then by writing outside in the dirt, then with chalk on the classroom blackboards, and finally with pencils in their notebooks. They progress rapidly, and within five or six weeks they are able to read simple words. At the same time, they have become familiar with the texts of the stories they've heard and understand their meaning because they have taken ownership of them through a consultative process.

In addition to learning the alphabet, the children study about parts of the body, colors, numbers, about the world around them (such as the usefulness of water), and moral qualities such as humility and politeness. Other topics covered in the stories are shapes, work (professions and trades), the diversity of people's homes, and cultural diversity, such as various kinds of dress and ornaments that people wear in different parts of the world. Projects have children ask elders about the origins of their village or other topics, and collaborative projects develop skills of consultation and problem solving. All of this is accomplished through a child-centered, participative methodology. And since people have no access to written materials or posters, teachers are trained to use objects at hand, such as those found in the natural world outside the classroom, to teach subjects such as mathematics.

Using a team approach and working with the new curriculum being developed by Mali's Ministry of Education as a basis, the Nosrat Foundation has developed materials that expand on the moral aspects of the curriculum, that are relevant to the children's lives, and that are based on the development of specific capabilities. While the curriculum is certainly Bahá'í-inspired and Bahá'í principles are included, there is no direct mention of the Faith. All materials have been shared with, and evaluated by, the Ministry.

In the first grade, spiritual qualities such as courage, sacrifice, politeness, humility, and kindness to animals are emphasized in the stories that form the heart of the curricular materials. For example, a boy named Moussa has a dream that he is making fun of his friends who are all different, but then a magician comes along and makes them all the same. When Moussa wakes up, he has a greater

appreciation of the diversity of his friends. In another story, Ali goes to school but also helps his father, who is blind, to make beautiful baskets. Simple fables are also used. One that illustrates the power of people working together features an old man who tries to pull up a big yam plant, but he can't do it alone. He asks an old woman to help him, but the two of them are still not strong enough. She asks her granddaughter for help, and the granddaughter asks the goat, who asks the cat, who asks the mouse for assistance. Together, with everybody's help, they are finally able to pull up the yam. Other fables in the curriculum include the commonly known ones about the lion and the mouse and the tortoise and the hare.

In grade two, the students study the same stories and qualities that they learned in grade one, but this time in French, Mali's international language. Familiarity with the stories helps them pick up the new language more quickly and easily. Vocabulary and grammar from the stories make up the French lessons, while math, sciences, and humanities are more advanced than the previous year.

By grade three, the children know enough French to work directly from their workbooks. At this level, for the first time, all texts are included in the student workbook, and activities for all subjects are integrated. The story of two children runs throughout the entire workbook. Through their story, which includes details about what the children eat, where they live, and their cousins who are refugees from ethnic conflict, students learn sciences, including the digestive system, mouth, and teeth; about healthy foods and various fruits, trees, and plants—including medicinal plants; geography, and other topics. They also learn about topics such as the origins of their parents, the need to love and accept people from different backgrounds, similarities among people (shown through Venn diagrams), the virtue of helping others, how to make a trip to the market, how to cook, and how to take care of a sick relative. Math exercises on division, multiplication, buying and selling, numbers up to 100,000, and simple games are also woven into the curriculum.

Junior youth spiritual empowerment and literacy program

In 2004, the Nosrat Foundation decided to develop a program in the same villages where the schools have been established, to reach

the junior youth, aged 12–14, who are too old to attend the school in their village. The first level of this literacy program uses a workbook entitled *Breezes of Confirmation*, originally developed at the William Masetlha Foundation in Zambia, which has been translated into Bambara. The pedagogical approach is similar to that used in the schools: During the first year of the program, there is a 5–6 week program in Bambara, and in the second year, the youth study the same text in French. As the program expands, additional books aimed at junior youth, including *Walking the Straight Path* (developed in Macau) and *Drawing on the Power of the Word* (developed in Colombia) will also be used, in French. Nosrat has found that the youth in this age range learn quickly, especially when they are first exposed to the material in their local language.

As with the organization of the school, each village is responsible for the survival and growth of the literacy program, with the goal of having all the junior youth acquire the ability to read and write. The Association of Parents manages the project at the community level, finds the tutors, who also have a one-year renewable contract with the community, and pays them.

Next steps

While opportunities have arisen for the Nosrat Foundation to build more schools, it has opted to monitor and improve existing community schools rather than to expand the number. Fifth and sixth grades will be added to the schools in 2006 and 2007 respectively.

Project evaluation carried out in June 2004 indicated a high degree of parental involvement and satisfaction with their schools, their children's academic performance, and their attitudes and behavior. In fact, some parents commented that the second-grade students in the schools set up by Nosrat read and write at a higher level than fifth-grade students in the public schools system. To build on this strong start, it has been suggested that parental involvement be increased by training teachers about relations with parents and by inviting members of the community to share their traditional knowledge with the children, whether songs, stories, medicinal plants, or other topics. The establishment of small libraries in each of the schools,

recommended in the evaluation, was begun during the 2004–2005 school year and will be continued in 2005–2006.

The Nosrat Foundation's future plans include the development, assessment, evaluation, editing, and publication of materials for grades 1–6. Gradually, the materials are being edited to give them a more professional appearance for printing, making them easier to disseminate, and are being translated into English so that they can be used more widely. A second area of focus is on training school initiators and teachers in Mali, as well as sharing the Nosrat Foundation's experience with other like-minded organizations in francophone Africa.

With its solid, spiritually oriented, community-supported, and culturally rooted program, the Nosrat Foundation has stepped forward to meet a real need in villages in Mali. As the Foundation builds its own capacity to manage increasingly complex actions, it will become more and more adept at assisting villagers to equip themselves with the qualities and capabilities to lead productive lives, to be knowledgeable and engaged citizens, and to bend their energies towards becoming, in the words of the Bahá'í writings, "a source of social good."

Freedom of Religion

*The Bahá'í International Community's response
to the United Nations Development Programme's
2004 Human Development Report, 25 May 2005.*

Over 50 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights boldly proclaimed the inherent dignity and the equal rights of all members of the human family. Guided by the vision of equality for all, the Declaration enshrined the fundamental right of every human being to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Despite the international community's unanimous¹ adoption of this Declaration and its codification in subsequent instruments of international law,² the world bears witness to persistent intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, the proliferation of violence in the name of religion, the manipulation of religion in the interest of political ideology, and increasing tensions between religion and State policies.³ The rising tide of religious extremism has fuelled these developments, threatening security, human development, and efforts towards peace. Widespread violations of this right—most often targeting women and minorities—have continued. Given the interdependence of human rights, such violations have compromised, among others, the right to education, employment, peaceful assembly, citizenship, political participation, health, and, at times, life itself. Indeed, the promise of freedom of religion or belief for all remains one of the most contested and pressing human rights of our time.

The freedom to hold beliefs of one's choosing and to change them is central to human development. It is the individual's search for meaning and the desire to know who we are as human beings that distinguishes the human conscience. As such, we applaud the United Nations Development Programme for its 2004 Human Development Report titled *Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*, which, for the first time in the Report's 15-year history, acknowledged cultural liberty as a "vital part of human development" and affirmed the "profound importance of religion to people's identities."⁴ Indeed, the concept and analysis of human development throughout the Human Development Reports have evolved dramatically out of a materialist approach centered on wealth and income to embrace the concept of development as the expansion of human freedoms. By including cultural freedom in its analysis—including the freedom of religion or belief—the UNDP once again broadened the conceptual framework underpinning the evaluation of progress in human development.⁵

The UNDP's focus could not be more timely. Human development and security—two issues at the heart of today's global agenda—have refocused the attention of the international community on the question of human freedom. In the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the ensuing Millennium Development Goals, the nations of the world identified freedom as a "fundamental value essential to international relations in the twenty-first century."⁶ Similarly, the widely noted 2002 Arab Human Development Report—a pioneer effort by Arab scholars—identified freedom as both the "guarantor and the goal" of human development and human rights, singling it out as a primary requisite for development in the region. In preparation for the comprehensive review process at the upcoming High-Level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, the Secretary General, in two pivotal reports to the General Assembly, stressed the critical relationship between development, security, and human freedom.⁷ Indeed, there can be no development without security, no security without development, and both must be anchored in a firm commitment to the protection of human rights and freedoms for all.

The UNDP Report has set the stage for an earnest re-examination of the role of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in human development—an examination anchored in the recognition of the dignity of the human conscience, and guided by the standard

of equality set by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a worldwide religious community, which regards the human conscience as sacred and believes in the independent search for truth, we urge the UNDP to give serious consideration to four critical issues intimately related to its Report: (1) the right to change one's religion or beliefs; (2) the right to share one's beliefs with others; (3) the responsibilities of the international community and national governments vis à vis marginalized and peacefully organized religious communities; and (4) the responsibilities of religious leaders vis à vis the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief. We will address each issue in turn and conclude with recommendations for United Nations' work in this arena.

The right to change one's religion or beliefs

The Human Development Report defines cultural liberty as the "capability of people to live and be what they choose, with adequate opportunity to consider other options."⁸ The Report, however, focuses primarily on cultural exclusion⁹ based on "external" manifestations of one's religion or belief while omitting from its discussion the core dimension of cultural exclusion—namely a denial of the "internal" right to change one's religion or belief.¹⁰ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Article 18, explicitly affirms that

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.¹¹

The right to change one's religion or belief is accorded the status of a non-derogable right—a right that is protected unconditionally and is, at no time, subject to government regulation.¹² The special measure of protection accorded to this right reflects its place in safeguarding the dignity of the human being. Indeed, the individual's search for truth and meaning is an activity most intimately linked with the human conscience and with the desire to see the world through one's own eyes and to understand it through one's own faculties of perception and intelligence. As such, it is inextricably linked with all facets of human development.

Due to pressure from dissenting States, however, subsequent United Nations treaties have used weaker language to define this right, failing to uphold the unambiguous standard set by the Declaration.¹³ Even the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion and Belief issued by the General Assembly does not explicitly affirm the right to change one's religion or belief.¹⁴ In what is perhaps the most comprehensive articulation of the right to date, the Human Rights Committee has identified the freedom to change religion or belief, freedom to manifest beliefs, noncoercion in matters of religion, and non-discrimination on the basis of religion as core components of this right as provided for in the Declaration.¹⁵ Alongside United Nations jurisprudence, global conferences and gatherings¹⁶ over the last 15 years have generated near universal commitments to promote and respect freedom of religion or belief. As signatories to the Universal Declaration and subsequent treaties and global commitments, governments bear the primary responsibility to create, safeguard, and promote the necessary conditions for the enjoyment of the freedom of conscience, religion, or belief for all of their citizens.

The right to teach one's religion or beliefs

Intimately connected with the freedom to hold and to change one's religion or belief is the freedom to share those beliefs with others. Within the broad range of activities potentially encompassed by the freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs, the right to teach one's religion or beliefs has been particularly contentious.¹⁷ While the Declaration calls for the unconditional protection of the "internal" right to freedom of religion, the "external" right to manifest one's beliefs is subject to limitations: governments are permitted to place restrictions on this right for purposes of "meeting the just requirements of morality, public order, and the general welfare in a democratic society."¹⁸ This latitude extended to states, however, has too often been abused in efforts to quell minority populations and has raised questions about what constitutes legitimate governmental interference in manifestations of religion or belief.

States argue that limiting the teaching of religions and the sharing of beliefs is necessary to preserve particular traditions and to protect

the rights of the targeted populations, yet the right to freedom of religion or belief is necessarily contingent on the exposure to new ideas and the ability to share and receive information.¹⁹ Limitations on the basis of “maintaining public order” and “morality” have also been applied with considerable latitude and in a matter inconsistent with the principle of nondiscrimination.²⁰ Nondemocratic and theocratic states in particular have repeatedly issued such reservations without the burden of proof, calling into question not only their interpretation of this right but also their protection of related rights and freedoms such as the right to employment and education, and the freedom of speech and peaceful assembly, to name but a few.²¹ While the ability to place restrictions on the freedom of religion or belief can be meaningfully applied, states’ abuse of these restrictions only exacerbates the marginalization of oppressed minorities.

The protection of the freedom of religion or belief must also entail vigilance in safeguarding citizens from the forces of extreme orthodoxy. Incitement to violence, extremism, or hostility in the name of religion must be forcefully sanctioned and unreservedly condemned.²² Similarly, states must consistently uphold the equality of women and men as a moral principle and article of international law, condemning actions in the name of religion, which deny human dignity and freedom of conscience to women. Ultimately, a long-term preventive strategy must be rooted in efforts to educate children and adults alike, equipping them with literacy skills and opportunities to learn about other systems of belief. Within a culture of education, people who can read the writings of their own religion as well as those of others, who are free to question and discuss, and who are able to participate in the generation and application of knowledge will be better prepared to counter the forces of ignorance and fanaticism.²³

Marginalized religious minorities

The challenge before states, and one of their central concerns as addressed in the Human Development Report, is the maintenance of social cohesion and national unity in the face of increasing cultural pluralism. The report cites the threats of social instability and violent protest as a primary imperative for States’ need to accommodate

minority claims. Indeed, marginalized groups seeking redress can become violent, forcing states to address their claims in order to prevent social unrest and potential threats to national security. Yet this reactive mode breeds a dangerous pattern and itself gives a preference to violence, particularly where peacefully organized groups find their pleas repeatedly ignored. It increases the level of discrimination as groups find themselves excluded on the basis of religion and ignored as a result of nonviolent modes of seeking redress.

The actions of states therefore must go beyond purely material and practical considerations and be guided by the force of moral principles and the rule of law. Foremost among these principles is that of unity—at the local, national, and global level—grounded in the peaceful accommodation of cultural diversity. States must discard outmoded notions of cultural homogeneity and ideological uniformity as a guarantor of peace and security and come to embrace a plurality of identities and beliefs, gathered together under the canopy of just laws and universal human rights, as the foundation for a cohesive and prosperous society.

Religious leaders

The responsibility to uphold universal principles of freedom of religion or belief rests not only with states but with religious leaders as well. In a world harassed by violence and conflict in the name of religion, leaders of religious communities bear tremendous responsibility for guiding their followers towards a peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding with those who think and believe differently. Too often, those acting in the name of religion have fanned the flames of hatred and fanaticism, themselves serving as the greatest obstacles in the path of peace. Despite these painful truths, we bear witness to the fact that the religions and faiths of the world with which the majority of the earth's inhabitants stand identified, have imparted a vast spiritual, moral, and civilizational legacy, which continues to succor and guide in these troubled times. Indeed, religions have reached to the roots of human motivation to lift our vision beyond purely material conceptions of reality to embrace higher notions of justice, reconciliation, love, and selflessness in the service of the common good.

Given the weight of culture and religion in shaping motivation and behavior, it is clear that legal mechanisms alone will not engender the commitment and mutual understanding required to sustain a culture of peaceful coexistence. The role of religious leaders as partners—in word and deed—in the creation of a culture of respect for human dignity and freedom of conscience, religion, or belief cannot be understated. The forces of history now challenge every person of faith to identify spiritual principles within his or her own scriptures and traditions that answer the difficult questions posed by an age hungering for unity and justice in human affairs. In this common undertaking, based on an understanding of the inherent dignity, reason, and conscience of every human being, religious leaders must uphold the sacred nature of the human conscience and unreservedly accord each individual the freedom to search for truth.

Recommendations

Urgent action is now needed to reaffirm the vision of equal rights for all without discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. As a first step, the United Nations must unequivocally affirm an individual's right to change his or her religion or belief under international law.²⁴ Such a clarification would help to remove fallacious interpretations of this right and lend moral force to the condemnation of state policies and practices that violate the principle of nondiscrimination in matters of religion or belief.

Following this clarification, concrete actions—investigative, legal, and operational—must follow. First, research and analysis are needed to clarify minimum standards for compliance with international law and to develop indicators marking the presence or absence of freedom of religion or belief. An annual world report, prepared by the United Nations, assessing the state of this freedom throughout the world would provide further substance and facilitate comparisons over time and across geographic regions.²⁵

In addition to clarifying the questions above, the United Nations needs to comprehensively and definitively address religious extremism as a major obstacle in the processes of peace.²⁶ While the United Nations has denounced religious intolerance and persecution, it has been hesitant to acknowledge and forcefully condemn

religious extremism motivating violent and terrorist acts.²⁷ As women often bear the greatest burden of religious extremism and ensuing violations of human freedoms, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women should consider formulating a comment on issues specific to women's freedom of religion or belief.²⁸

We fully support the Secretary-General's call for a Human Rights Council with a view to restoring the primacy of human rights as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations.²⁹ Alongside the proposed reforms, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should undertake steps to strengthen the role of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion, increasing funding for her mandate to allow for the closer monitoring of trends worldwide and at a country level.³⁰ Given that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur represents one of the principal means of bringing issues of religious freedom to the attention of the United Nations, we recommend that more attention be given to the implementation of recommendations put forth by the Special Rapporteur. The High Commissioner may consider expanding the mandate of the Special Rapporteur beyond reporting strictly on violations to include reports of states' efforts to implement her recommendations. In general, the rapporteur's reports would significantly benefit from a more substantial and interactive debate between the rapporteur and states in question. For their part, beyond cooperating with United Nations human rights mechanisms, States should allow any visits requested by the Special Rapporteur and endeavor to meet her full investigative needs in the process.

By focusing on cultural liberty and religious freedom as core components of human development, the 2004 Human Development Report paved the way for a timely discussion, highlighting the interdependence of freedom, development, and security in today's world. In an effort to push the debate further, we have brought to the fore the standard of equality articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its implications for the construction of a culture respectful of the dignity and conscience of every human being. We believe that the protection of the right to freedom of conscience, religion, or belief is not merely a legal exercise or a pragmatic necessity; it is part of a much larger and essentially spiritual undertaking of shaping attitudes and practices that allow human potential to

emerge and flourish. The human mind, endowed with reason and conscience, must be free to search for truth and to believe.

NOTES

- ¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Doc. A/810 at 71 (1948). New York: United Nations. The Declaration was adopted with no dissenting votes, with eight countries abstaining from approval: Poland, Byelorussia, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, and the Soviet Union.
- ² No fewer than 28 international human rights instruments contain provisions specifically pertaining to freedom of religion or belief.
- ³ *Civil and Political Rights, Including Religious Intolerance*. Report submitted by Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, Special Rapporteur, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution, 1998/18, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1999/58 (1999).
- ⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *2004 Human Development Report: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ⁵ The report debunked myths about multicultural policies as a threat to national unity and security. It presented best practices and emerging models of culturally inclusive policies around the world focused on five policy areas: political participation, religion, access to justice, language, and access to socioeconomic opportunities.
- ⁶ United Nations Millennium Declaration, UN Doc. A/RES/55/2 (2000).
- ⁷ *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*. Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, U.N. Doc. A/59/565 (2004); *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*. Report of the Secretary General, UN Doc. A59/2005 (2005). In the latter, the Secretary-General stressed the enduring relevance of the United Nations' Charter call to "promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom," and the interrelatedness of development, security, and human rights. The former report, calling for a more holistic vision of human security, framed development as "the indispensable foundation for a new collective security."
- ⁸ *2004 Human Development Report*, p. 4, *supra* note 4.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6. The Report notes two forms of cultural exclusion: "living mode exclusion" and "participation exclusion." Living mode exclusion, "denies recognition and accommodation of a lifestyle that a group would choose to have"; participation exclusion occurs when "people are discriminated against or suffer disadvantage in social, political, and economic opportunities because of their cultural identity."

- ¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 56–57. While the Report notes that “individuals must be free not only to criticize the religion into which they were born, but to reject it for another or to remain without one,” the issue of the “internal” right of freedom of religion or belief is referred to only in passing and without further elaboration. As a core dimension of cultural liberty, this issue merits greater consideration. As the Report itself acknowledged, “The normative weight of freedom can hardly be invoked when no choice—real or potential—is actually considered.” (p. 17)
- ¹¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18, *supra* note 1.
- ¹² A non-derogable right is not subject to governmental regulation, even in times of a national emergency.
- ¹³ The freedom to change one’s religion or belief has not been expressed with such clarity in any international instrument since the Declaration. For example: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) provides for the individual’s freedom “to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice”; the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966) guarantees that the rights in the Covenant “will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to ... religion.”; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) calls on states parties to take all appropriate measures to guarantee women “the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men”; the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) affirms the “right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion”; the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) includes in its definition of genocide, “acts committed with intent to destroy ... a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Notably, regional treaties such as the American Convention on Human Rights (1969) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) explicitly provide for the freedom to change one’s religion or belief.
- ¹⁴ Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, UN Doc. A/36/684 (1981). The Declaration affirms the “freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.” It is unfortunate that this Declaration has not yet attained the status of a legally binding covenant.
- ¹⁵ Human Rights Committee, *General Comment* 22, Article 18, UN Doc. HRI/GEN/1/REV.1 at 35 (1994). The remaining core components of this right include: the rights of parents, legal status, limits on government’s permissible restrictions, and non-derogability.
- ¹⁶ Global conferences, declarations and programs of action that have affirmed the right to freedom of religion or belief include the following: Declara-

tion on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981); Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993); Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action (1995); the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000); Millennium World Peace Summit—Commitment to Global Peace (2000); Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (2001).

- ¹⁷ *General Comment 22* (*supra* note 15) states that, “the practice and teaching of religion or belief includes acts integral to the conduct by religious groups of their basic affairs, such as the freedom to choose their religious leaders, priests and teachers, the freedom to establish seminaries or religious schools and the freedom to prepare and distribute religious texts or publications.” The 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief explicitly provides for the right to teach one’s religion.
- ¹⁸ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 29, *supra* note 1. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights similarly provides for limitations “as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others” (Article 18).
- ¹⁹ A change of identity resulting from conversion does not constitute a violation of the individual’s human rights. Rather it is one’s desire to maintain an identity that requires legal protection. Similarly, states cannot use the rationale of preserving particular traditions, religions, or ideologies to support limitations on freedom of religion or belief.
- ²⁰ Limitations on the basis of preserving “morality” are the most controversial and lend themselves to abuse as one religiously based moral principle can be used to override another’s religious belief. The Human Rights Committee’s *General Comment 22* asserts that, “limitations on the protection of FRB must not be based on principles deriving from one single tradition,” *supra* note 15.
- ²¹ States have also issued blanket reservations on entire conventions based on the state’s application of religious law. This is incompatible with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which provides for limitations that are proscribed by law and are “necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.” Furthermore, in its General Comment on Article 18 of the ICCPR, the Committee on Human Rights notes that any limitations on the freedom to manifest a religion or belief for the purpose of protecting morals “must be based on principles not deriving exclusively from a single tradition.”
- ²² The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits, “any advocacy or national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.” Similarly, as called for in the United

Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960), states should condemn and forcefully sanction those who, in the name of religion, use education and the media to oppress freedom of conscience and to promote division, hatred, terrorism, violence, and bloodshed.

- ²³ The former Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, emphasized education—particularly concerning human rights—as a key component of establishing a culture of tolerance and nondiscrimination. Mr. Amor convened the 2001 International Consultative Conference on School Education in relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance, and Nondiscrimination and called on participants to design an worldwide education strategy for combating intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. (UN DOC. E/CN.4/1999/58).
- ²⁴ To definitively clarify the status of the right to change one's religion or belief under international law, the appropriate United Nations body could request the International Court of Justice to give an advisory opinion on whether this right has attained the status of customary international law or *jus cogens*. Under Article 96 of the United Nations Charter, the General Assembly, Security Council or other United Nations organ authorized by the General Assembly may request advisory opinions of the Court "on legal questions arising within the scope of their activities." Article 36 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice provides for the jurisdiction of the Court in legal disputes concerning, among others, questions of international law.
- ²⁵ Civil and Political Rights, Including Religious Intolerance, *supra* note 3.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 125 (a).
- ²⁷ The UN has been reticent to identify religious fanaticism as a source of terrorism, referring to it indirectly, as for example, "terrorism motivated by intolerance or extremism" (S/RES/1373 (2001)). Even the various resolutions issued by the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights in response to the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001, failed to identify religious fanaticism as the force fuelling these acts.
- ²⁸ Bahia G. Tahzib-Lie, "Dissenting Women, Religion or Belief, and the State: Contemporary Challenges that Require Attention" in T. Lindholm et al., eds. *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook* (Oslo, Norway: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004).
- ²⁹ *In Larger Freedom*, *supra* note 7.
- ³⁰ Only a small fraction of member states have ever been monitored for compliance with the articles of the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

Response to *In Larger Freedom*

*The Bahá'í International Community's response
to the Secretary-General's report*

In Larger Freedom: Towards Development,
Security, and Human Rights for All.

Submitted to the United Nations

Nongovernmental Liaison Service

New York, 30 April 2005.

The Bahá'í International Community welcomes the opportunity to offer comments and observations on the Secretary General's report to the General Assembly titled, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security, and Human Rights for All," in the hopes of stirring further reflection, debate, and action. We understand the processes of UN reform as part of an organic, evolutionary course characterized by increasing levels of integration and unity in governance structures and processes. In this light, we are encouraged by the report's holistic approach—stressing the interdependence of development, freedom, and peace; emphasizing human solidarity as the basis for effective and sustainable solutions to global challenges; and presenting a bold vision of new mechanisms and methods of work for the organization. We offer comments on each section of the report in turn.

Freedom from want

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (§ 28–32)

The Bahá'í International Community welcomes the efforts of the United Nations to set forth concrete goals for development, in the form of the MDGs, which seek to focus the work of the organization

with the aim of restoring justice and dignity to every human life. Material goals in themselves, however, are not sufficient to inspire and sustain processes of comprehensive development at the local, national, and global levels. Equally important are aims to foster universal participation in the development processes, the development of individual capabilities to contribute to these processes, and the application of moral and intellectual resources from the fields of science and religion—two knowledge systems that have propelled our progress over the centuries. Ultimately, each individual, with the benefit of access to education, must be regarded as a protagonist in his or her own development and that of the community.

Alongside the concrete development targets set by the MDGs, it is imperative to attend to the realization of moral or spiritual principles needed for constructive development. At the heart of such principles is the understanding that human nature is essentially spiritual and that a vision of development must be responsive to this reality. These principles may include: fostering unity in diversity, equity, justice, gender equality, moral leadership, and freedom of thought.¹

Efforts to eradicate poverty must be accompanied by an earnest re-evaluation of global systems and processes—including governance, trade, and the private sector—that perpetuate the growing extremes of wealth and poverty. Specifically, there is a need for strong binding corporate rules at the national and international levels. Greater corporate accountability must not be restricted to the environment and labor standards but must also take into account the full panoply of human rights.

GENDER (§ 40)

We strongly support the promotion of gender equality as a prerequisite to development. Emphasis should be placed on the substantive involvement of women at all stages of peace-building and conflict resolution efforts, particularly postconflict reconstruction. As women are intimately aware of the needs of their families and communities, plans for transition to a peaceful society must include their critical perspectives. Indeed, only as women take their rightful place in decision making at all levels will the moral and psychological climate favorable to the establishment of peace emerge.

Freedom from fear

The Bahá'í International Community welcomes the report's more comprehensive vision of collective security, based on the understanding that in our interconnected world, a threat to one State is a threat to all. The Bahá'í Faith envisions a system of collective security within a framework of global federation, in which national borders have been conclusively defined and in whose favor all nations of the world will have willingly ceded claims to make war.

DEFINITION OF TERRORISM (§ 91)

We support the Secretary-General's call for member states to adopt a definition of terrorism and to conclude a comprehensive convention on terrorism. We agree with the Secretary-General's characterization of terrorism as any action, "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act." Moreover, problems such as terrorism should be consistently addressed within the context of other issues that disrupt and destabilize society. Nations must look beyond responding separately to disparate problems and move towards the building of a comprehensive international order based on social justice and collective security.

SECURITY COUNCIL (§ 167)

We acknowledge the need for urgent reform of the Security Council. The proposals in the report, however, do not ultimately address the democracy deficit and relentless politicization of the Security Council, which thwart the execution of its duties and undermine the trust and respect it needs to exercise its mandate. To address these deficits, the United Nations must boldly and intelligently move towards adopting a procedure for eventually eliminating permanent membership and veto power.²

Freedom to live in dignity

RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT (§ 135)

We strongly support the "emerging norm of the collective responsibility to protect" and accompanying efforts to establish a principled

framework about how and when to intervene justly and effectively to protect human rights. We agree that no legal principle, not even sovereignty, should ever be allowed to shield genocide and human suffering. Indeed, the Bahá'í Faith offers the concept of the oneness of humanity as an underlying principle of relations between states. Furthermore, we support the concept of a federated world polity responsive to the needs of an ever-changing world. The aim of such a polity, far from stifling intelligent patriotism or national autonomy, is rather the collective subordination of national impulses to the wider needs of an increasingly interdependent world.

The Bahá'í writings assert that “the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.”

HUMAN RIGHTS

Human Rights Council (§ 181–183)

We support the Secretary-General's proposal to elevate the consideration of human rights to the same level accorded to security and socioeconomic development. In order to restore the effective functioning of the discredited Human Rights Commission, we support the creation of an elected, standing Human Rights Council and the elaboration of *minimum criteria* for membership. Candidates for membership in the Council should demonstrate strong adherence to human rights standards; specific criteria may include the ratification of key human rights documents or a statement of intent to do so within a given period of time. Members of the Council that repeatedly violate human rights should not be allowed to remain on the Council.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (§ 142–146)

We agree that the OHCHR is ill-equipped to respond effectively to the human rights challenges facing the international community. As such, we support the Secretary-General's call for more resources to train country teams within the OHCHR³ and urge the OHCHR to establish a strong *field presence* at the country level, providing leadership and coordination on matters of promotion and protection of human rights. Second, Special Procedures should receive adequate budgetary and administrative support. Government cooperation with

Special Procedures should not be limited to access, but should also include full implementation of recommendations made.⁴

Third, the OHCHR should continue its productive engagement with NGOs, which has contributed positively to the work of the Office and to the development of NGO capacity to interact meaningfully in this context.⁵ Fourth, the ambitious mandate of the OHCHR must be supported by appropriate budgetary resources.⁶ Fifth, the Public Information section of the OHCHR should be developed to allow resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights/Human Rights Council, recommendations of the Special Procedures and concluding observations of the treaty monitoring bodies to be accorded more prominence in the media.

DEMOCRACY (§ 158–161)

We commend the Secretary General and the international community for their commitment to democracy and to a freely elected government as a universal value. We support in principle the creation of a democracy fund at the United Nations. At the same time, we note that democracy in its truest sense must be rooted in moral values, intertwined with responsibilities, and concerned with social welfare both within and beyond the nation state. Without this principled anchor, it is vulnerable to the excesses of unbridled individualism and nationalism, which tear at the fabric of the community—both nationally and globally.

Other points for consideration at the Millennium + 5 Summit

That the Secretary-General chose to frame his report in the context of freedoms is significant. Certainly the want of freedom from fear, poverty, and oppression has been a dominant factor in the turmoil of the times. There is no doubt as to the high importance of freedoms to constructive social processes. Yet the freedoms with which we are privileged are concomitant with responsibility—the responsibility to exercise our freedoms in a way that enables all to attain to happiness and to fulfill their purpose in their individual life and in their collective functioning as a society. It is the abuse of freedoms and the denial of responsibilities with which elected and

appointed officials at both national and international levels have been vested that must remain at the forefront of deliberations about United Nations reform.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

The Secretary-General's report does not make mention of one of the central and most challenging issues shaping inter- and intra-state relations today, namely the freedom of religion or belief. At a time when religious extremism, intolerance, and discrimination are threatening peace and security in many parts of the world, it is imperative for the United Nations to address this issue openly and earnestly. Until all people are free to openly practice and share their beliefs within the parameters of equally applied laws, as well as change their religion or belief system, development and peace will prove elusive.

CONDEMNING RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

While the United Nations' human rights machinery has been used to condemn religious intolerance and persecution, United Nations' development policies and programs have barely begun to address religious extremism as a major obstacle to peace and well-being. Hesitancy to acknowledge and forcefully condemn the religious extremism motivating terrorist acts weakens the effectiveness of the UN's efforts to bring an end to international terrorism. Only by identifying and understanding the motivation behind such acts can they be effectively combated.

We are grateful for the opportunity to submit the above comments. The Bahá'í International Community looks forward to being engaged in the debate and implementation of proposed reforms, with a view to creating a United Nations capable of meeting the changing needs and growing aspirations of the generality of humankind.

NOTES

- ¹ *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*. A concept paper written by the Bahá'í International Community for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue at Lambeth Palace, London. (Oakham: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998).
- ² *Turning Point for All Nations*. Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office, New York, 1995. An interim measure may include not using

veto power when voting on questions of genocide or other gross threats to international peace and security.

- ³ *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security, and Human Rights for All*, report of the Secretary-General, Para. 142. UN Doc. A/59/2005.
- ⁴ The OHCHR should take steps to bolster interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteurs. The dialogues should include member states' reports on the status of implementation of recommendations.
- ⁵ Similarly, NGO involvement in the work of the proposed Human Rights Council should not be diminished.
- ⁶ The core functions of the Office should be independent of voluntary contributions. Governments should decrease the percentage of earmarked funds, according more latitude to the Office in determining its needs.

Cultural Cleansing

DESTROYING A COMMUNITY, ERASING MEMORY

*This statement by the Bahá'í community
appeared in newspapers around the world
in September 2004.*

For 25 years the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has persecuted the Bahá'ís, a peaceful, law-abiding religious minority. More than two hundred leading Bahá'ís have been put to death, tens of thousands have lost their jobs, tens of thousands more have felt compelled to leave their homeland, Bahá'í youth have been denied access to higher education, and retired workers have had their pensions summarily canceled. In 1991 an official government document signed by Supreme Leader Khamenei spelled out measures aimed at slowly strangling the community.

The hatred of the extremist mullahs for the Bahá'ís is such that they, like the Taliban of Afghanistan who destroyed the towering Buddhist sculptures at Bamian, intend not only to eradicate the religion, but even to erase all traces of its existence in the country of its birth. It was for this reason they demolished the House of the Báb in Shiraz, center of pilgrimage for the Bahá'ís of the world and a gem of the city's cherished past. This is why they confiscated Bahá'í cemeteries and bulldozed the graves of Bahá'í heroes and saints. This is why they desecrated the resting place of Quddús, one of the apostles of the faith.

This June a wrecking crew descended upon a historical monument, a precious example of Islamic-Iranian architecture, “a matchless model of art, spirituality, and architecture.” “How is it,” a brave Tehran newspaper article asked, “that in the middle of the day . . . the very essence of our cultural heritage is being destroyed?” The answer is heartbreakingly simple.

The demolished building was the house of a great nineteenth-century statesman, calligrapher, and literary figure, Mírzá ‘Abbás Núrí. Although he was born and died a Muslim, his son, Bahá’u’lláh, founded the Bahá’í Faith, a religion that promotes abolition of all prejudice, independent investigation of truth, equality of women and men, universal education, harmony of religion and science, and universal peace. For this the clerical bigots have declared Bahá’ís, followers of Bahá’u’lláh, to be heretics and apostates, deserving of death.

In their determination to rid Iran of the Bahá’í community and obliterate its very memory, the fundamentalists in power are prepared even to destroy the cultural heritage of their own country, which they appear not to realize they hold in trust for humankind. Surely the time has come for Iranians everywhere to raise their voices in protest against such willful desecrations.

For more information, please visit <http://news.bahai.org/>.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Obituaries

SÍRU'D-DÍN 'ALÁ'Í

On 22 December 2004, in Rome, Italy.

On 16 March 1906 in Tehran, Iran, Síru'd-Dín 'Alá'í was born into a Bahá'í family of several generations. His father was a high ranking military physician, and Síru'd-Dín himself graduated from the Tehran Military Academy. As a young man, he was active in the Bahá'í community in Iran, serving as chairman of the National Youth Committee and as a member of the National Pioneering Committee. In 1947, he took a four-month leave of absence from his work to pioneer to Baghdad and Khaneghein, Iraq. During his stay there, he was imprisoned for his beliefs, and later he was also imprisoned twice as a Bahá'í in Iran. In 1951, he moved to Shiraz, where he was elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly, and the following year he married Tahirih Jazab. In 1955, four months before he was due to be promoted to the rank of brigadier general, he resigned from the army so that he and his wife could pioneer to Italy, where they assisted with the formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly in Milan. They also assisted with the formation of Local Assemblies in Lugano, Switzerland, in 1971 and Lucerne in 1984. In Italy, Mr. 'Alá'í also served on the Local Spiritual Assembly of Rome and on the National Spiritual Assembly. He and his wife were active in maintaining good relations with the media and people of prominence in Rome, including academics and high ranking Vatican officials, and sharing the peace statement of the Universal House of Justice. He received four medals in appreciation of his humanitarian and community

services and, in June 2003, was honored by the municipality of Rome, its mayor, and officials from the Vatican. Upon his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, “His many international pioneer labors and cultivation of cordial relationships with religious officials and people of prominence are lovingly remembered.” He leaves behind his wife, Tahirih.

ABU’L-QÁSİM AFNÁN

On 2 October 2004, in Swindon, England.

Abu’l-Qásim Afnán, a kinsman of the Báb, was born on 19 March 1919 in Shíráz, Iran, and, like his father before him, served as custodian of the House of the Báb in that city—an honor and responsibility he carried for some 30 years. He also served on several committees of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Shíráz, as a member and secretary of that Assembly, and, from 1972 to 1979, as a member of the Auxiliary Board. After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, he moved to Oxford, England. While living in Iran, he collected many important tablets and historical materials, especially relating to the Báb, which he sent to the Bahá’í World Centre. As one of the few people able to interpret the commercial notation (*siyáq*) used by the Báb and the Afnán family, he was able to offer special assistance to the Bahá’í World Centre, and he provided Hasan Balyuzi with research material for his books about the history of the Faith. Mr. Afnán wrote his own biography of the Báb, *Ahd-i A’lá*, which contained much previously unpublished material, as well as other works including *Black Pearls*, *Chahár Risálih dar bárih-yi Táhirih Qurratul’Ayn*, and numerous articles. An accomplished poet in the Persian language, Mr. Afnán encouraged literary activity among Iran’s Bahá’ís and was in contact with a number of distinguished Iranian non-Bahá’í literary and academic figures. He frequently addressed Bahá’í conferences in Europe and North America and was an inspiring and humorous speaker. He was married to Minú Bazyar, with whom he had two daughters, Maryam and Laleh. Upon his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote of his “long record of distinguished service” and his “valued contributions in the field of Bahá’í scholarship through the articles and treatises he authored on the early history of the Faith.”

ELSIE AUSTIN

On 27 October 2004, in San Antonio, Texas, USA.

Helen Elsie Austin was born on 10 May 1908 in Tuskegee, Alabama, USA, where her mother and father were teachers at the Tuskegee Institute. She was, in many ways, a trailblazer: the first African-American woman to graduate from the University of Cincinnati’s College of Law, where a scholarship fund was later established in her name to assist minority law students; the first to be appointed assistant attorney-general of the State of Ohio; and the first to serve

as a senior attorney with the General Counsel's Office of the National Labor Relations Board. After a legal career with several federal government agencies, she spent a decade in Africa as a Foreign Service officer, where she initiated the first Women's Activities Program of the US Information Agency, working with leaders and women's organizations in 13 countries. She was awarded two honorary doctorates, doctor of humanities from the University of Cincinnati and doctor of laws from Wilberforce University, and served as the National President of Delta Sigma Theta, a national public service sorority. Dr. Austin encountered the Bahá'í Faith in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1934. Nineteen years later, in 1953, she met the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, during her pilgrimage to Haifa, Israel, and that same year, she earned from him the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for introducing the Bahá'í Faith to Morocco. Her experience on Bahá'í administrative institutions was extensive: she was elected as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States from 1946 to 1953 and of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of North and West Africa from 1953 to 1958; she served on Local Spiritual Assemblies in the US, Morocco, Nigeria, Kenya, and the Bahamas; and she was one of the first members of the Auxiliary Board, assisting Hand of the Cause of God Músá Banání in that role for four years. A participant in many international women's conferences, she chaired the Bahá'í delegation at the 1975 International Women's Conference in Mexico City. She also authored a number of articles which appeared in legal journals and Bahá'í publications, including one about Hand of the Cause of God Louis Gregory, whom she considered her mentor. On her passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "We recall with deep admiration her wise and dignified teaching and proclamation initiatives on both continents. The shining example of her sacrificial life will remain a source of inspiration to her fellow believers for generations to come," and directed that memorial services be held in her honor at the Bahá'í Houses of Worship in the United States and Uganda.

ERIK BLUMENTHAL

On 27 June 2004, in Germany.

Born on 9 September 1914 in Stuttgart, Germany, Erik Blumenthal wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father and study medicine, but even though the family was Protestant he was not permitted to attend university because of his father's Jewish origins. Instead, he trained as an industrial manager and worked in that field until 1952, when he was finally able to undertake studies in psychology at the University of Tübingen. Dr. Blumenthal became a Bahá'í in November 1952, a decision that profoundly affected his study and practice as a psychologist. He chose the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler because it coincided most closely with his belief that science and religion are in ac-

cord. Renowned in his field, he served at different times as the President of the Swiss Society for Individual Psychology and the Second Vice-President of the International Society for Adlerian Psychology, as well as working in private practice and lecturing in psychology at the University of Würzburg. The books he authored on the education of children, self-education, marriage, old age, and encouragement have been translated into numerous languages and are popular worldwide, connecting psychology and religion while emphasizing spiritual development. Titles include *Peace with your Partner: A Practical Guide to Happy Marriage* and *Believing in Yourself: A Practical Guide to Building Self-Confidence*. In 1943, he married his first wife Dolores, who passed away in 1957; there were four children from this union. He married again in 1959 and had two more children with his second wife, Marianne. His service to the Bahá'í Faith included membership on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany from 1955 to 1963 and pioneering to Greece, where he was elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Athens from 1958 to 1960. In 1957, he was appointed as a member of the Auxiliary Board, and from 1968 to 1985 he served on the Continental Board of Counsellors for Europe. Upon his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "The guidance he provided as a prominent psychologist, the high standard of personal excellence he set, and his kind and gentle manner served as an example for all those with whom he interacted," and requested that a memorial service be held at the European House of Worship to honor his memory. He is survived by his wife Marianne, four children, fourteen grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

KAYKHUSRAW DEHMOBEDI

On 9 March 2005, in London, England.

Born on 28 April 1931 to a Bahá'í family in Rahatabad, Yazd, Iran, Kaykhusraw Dehmobedi pioneered to Diu Island, off the coast of Gujarat's Kathiawar peninsula in India, during the Ten Year Crusade. For this act of devoted service, he earned from Shoghi Effendi the accolade Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. He married Nahid Rashidpour, with whom he had a son, Faridoon, and a daughter, Neda. Mr. Dehmobedi eventually moved to the United Kingdom, where he served as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Havering from 1980 to 2005 and as a member of the committee for the upkeep of the Guardian's resting place in London. Upon his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote that his "exemplary courage during the beloved Guardian's Ten Year Global Crusade, dedication to the Cause, and sincere efforts to promote its vital interests will be long remembered with loving appreciation."

GLORIA FAIZI

On 29 July 2004, in Brisbane, Australia.

Gloria Alá'í was born on 12 March 1921 in Tehran, Iran, the daughter of Rahmatu'llah Khan and Najmieh Alá'í. She had the honor of meeting the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, when, as a young child, she accompanied her father to the Holy Land. A student at the Tarbiyat School in Tehran until it was closed by the government, she was later tutored privately until she left to attend school in Beirut, Lebanon. At the age of 17, she married Abu'l-Qásim Faizi, who later became a Hand of the Cause of God. They had two children, Naysan and May. The Faizis' service to the Bahá'í Faith included assisting with the establishment of Bahá'í communities in remote regions of Iran and then pioneering to Bahrain for 15 years. Later, Mr. Faizi's duties as Hand of the Cause required them to live in Haifa, and after his passing, Mrs. Faizi moved to India, where she traveled widely in service to the Faith and ran residential institute programs for new Bahá'ís. A Fellow of the Institute of Linguistics, Mrs. Faizi was fluent in a number of languages and was a highly respected scholar, writer, and teacher. She authored a popular introductory book about the Bahá'í Faith, which has been translated into 21 languages and has sold more than 200,000 copies; a collection of stories about early followers entitled *Fire on the Mountain Top*; and six other books. She was working on her ninth volume, a biography of her late husband, at the time of her death. Upon her passing, the Universal House of Justice recalled "her many contributions to the progress of the Bahá'í communities, including her pioneering in Bahrain with her illustrious husband, her work at the Bahá'í World Centre, and her devoted travels far and wide as a teacher of the Cause." Mrs. Faizi was predeceased by her husband in 1980; she is survived by her two children and four grandchildren.

ZABÍHU'LLÁH GULMUḤAMMADÍ

On 28 February 2005, in London, England.

Zabíhu'lláh Gulmuḥammadí was born into a Bahá'í family on 13 January 1927 in Iran. In 1946, at the age of 19, he took up his first homefront pioneer post in Rasht, Iran, and two years later he left to serve as an international pioneer in the Arabian Peninsula, where he remained from 1948 until 2005. He lived first in Kuwait and then in Bahrain, where he was elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly. Later, he was appointed a member of the Auxiliary Board and, from 1981 to 1991, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Asia. He also served as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Arabian Peninsula from 1957 to 2003. Traveling extensively throughout

Asia, he visited the Sakhalin Islands, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Azerbaijan. In the Philippines, he helped to find the land for the Bahá'í radio station and the site of the future House of Worship of that country, while in Azerbaijan, he served as a special representative of the Universal House of Justice and helped with the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly. He married Amineh Panahi Gulmuhammadí in 1948; the couple had five children. Upon his passing, the Universal House of Justice paid tribute to his “sincerity, wisdom, loving nature, and enthusiasm,” noting particularly his travels to Azerbaijan as a special representative of the Universal House of Justice, “ensuring that the Faith was established on a secure foundation in that country.”

VIOLET HOEHNKE

On 4 June 2004, in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Violet Hoehnke was born on 19 November 1916, the ninth child of Prudence Alice Richards and Henry Hoehnke of Queensland, Australia. From an early age, she had a deep love of religion through her reading of the Bible. After primary school, she attended the Technical College in Brisbane and then moved to Sydney to train as a nurse after working for the Red Cross during World War II. She was very disturbed about the situation that had caused the war and prayed to find a reason why she should live; shortly thereafter she was introduced to the Bahá'í Faith by James Heggie and embraced it in 1939. Her encounters with Martha Root and Clara and Hyde Dunn confirmed her in her new-found Faith. A homefront pioneer in both Melbourne and Ballarat, Violet assisted in the establishment and development of those Bahá'í communities while working as a nursing matron. After attending an inter-continental conference in India in 1953, she arose to pioneer to the Admiralty Islands (now Manus Province, Papua New Guinea), becoming the first Bahá'í to settle there, for which she earned the title of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. Violet Hoehnke remained in PNG for more than 50 years, becoming a citizen in 1975. She was known widely as “Sister Vi,” not only because of her professional background in nursing, but also because of her love and care for the spiritual health of the people of Papua New Guinea. She traveled widely within the country and other Pacific islands and corresponded with many people in all walks of life, winning people's affection and trust by accepting invitations to their homes—unusual for Europeans at that time. In 1965 she was appointed as the first member of the Auxiliary Board resident in PNG; she was elected to the country's first National Spiritual Assembly in 1969, and from 1973 to 1979 she served on the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia. Even in the last years of her life, she continued to nurture Bahá'ís, and her home was always open to all. Upon her passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, “Future generations will glory in her accomplishment in setting the foundation

for the growing Bahá'í community now found in more than three thousand towns and villages of her adopted nation," and called for memorial gatherings to be held for her throughout PNG as well as at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney, Australia.

ELLY MEERBURG-BECKING

On 23 March 2005, in Veenendaal, the Netherlands.

Elly Becking was born on 2 April 1918 in Mamoedjoe, in the former Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). She became a Bahá'í in 1951 and two years later pioneered to Dutch New Guinea (now Irian Jaya), where she remained until 1959. She and her husband, Lex Meerburg, whom she married in 1954, were both designated by Shoghi Effendi as Knights of Bahá'u'lláh for arising as the first Bahá'ís to settle in Dutch New Guinea. A trained and skilled secretary, Elly Meerburg found work at her pioneer post in the office of the Dutch Governor. Later, when she and her husband moved to the Netherlands in 1959, she was able to find other positions that utilized her secretarial talents. As an early member of the nascent Dutch Bahá'í community, Mrs. Meerburg was much beloved and served for many years on the Local Spiritual Assemblies of Amsterdam and Zaandam. After her passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote of her efforts in the international field, that "Future generations of believers in that region [Dutch New Guinea] will recall with gratitude and admiration her pioneering achievements." She was predeceased by her husband in 1996. The couple had one child.

DR. SÍRÚS NARÁQÍ

On 18 August 2004, in Sydney, Australia.

Born in Iran in 1942, Sírús Naráqí was deeply devoted to the Bahá'í Faith, which inspired him in his life's work. Having completed his postgraduate medical training in the US and practiced at the University of Illinois Medical Center in Chicago as a specialist in internal medicine, he then pioneered to Papua New Guinea for more than 15 years. There, he practiced as a specialist in internal medicine, taught medicine at the University of Papua New Guinea, spent much of his free time visiting remote villages to provide treatment to those with limited or no access to medical care, and made significant contributions to research in malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS, and rural health issues. He also arranged for the training of 18 specialists in internal medicine, who occupy all the specialist and academic posts in PNG, including the first indigenous Professor of Medicine and the Director of Health Services in the national government. In 1999, in recognition of his work in PNG, Queen Elizabeth II awarded him the high honor of Commander of the British Empire (CBE). The previous year, in 1998, he and his family had moved to Australia, where

he took up a position as Professor of Medicine and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Sydney Western Clinical School. There, he co-established a research foundation and was highly regarded as a teacher. The esteem in which he was held was demonstrated by the well-attended symposium in his honor that was organized by his medical colleagues less than a week before he died. During his career, he published more than 100 scientific and medical papers and gained an international reputation for his scientific presentations. Dr. Naráqí's service directly to the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í community was also extensive. Appointed as a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia in 1985, he traveled tirelessly throughout the region to offer guidance and support to National Spiritual Assemblies and communities. Upon his passing, which followed a long illness, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "He was renowned for his commitment to encouraging and nurturing capable indigenous believers to take responsibility for the work of the Cause and for the love and kindness he showered on all members of the community." The House of Justice directed the National Spiritual Assemblies in Australia and Papua New Guinea to hold memorial gatherings in his honor and said that memorial services should also be held in the Houses of Worship in Samoa and Australia. Dr. Naráqí is survived by his wife Mitra, four children, and one grandson.

HILDA XAVIER RODRIGUES

On 4 December 2004, in Darque, Viana do Castelo, Portugal.

Hilda Carmen Summers was born on 26 November 1916 in Lisbon, Portugal. As a young woman, she trained as a shorthand/typist/correspondent/translator, which qualified her to work as a private secretary and an administrative secretary in both Portugal and Angola. She became a Bahá'í in 1948, at which time she joined the first administrative group of Lisbon; the Local Spiritual Assembly was formed the following year, and she remained a member until 1953, when she pioneered to Guinea-Bissau, for which she was designated a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. She remained in that country until 1955, subsequently pioneering, from 1956 to 1960, to Luanda, Angola, where she served on the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Luanda. After returning to Portugal in 1960, she was appointed to the Iberian Teaching Committee, served on the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Amadora from 1961 to 1964, and was elected in 1962 to the first National Spiritual Assembly of Portugal, of which she remained a member until 1983, serving as its secretary. During these years, she was also appointed to various national committees and was elected to Local Spiritual Assemblies in Viana do Castelo and Lisbon. She married José Caetano Xavier Rodrigues in 1951, and the couple had four children. Mr. Rodrigues predeceased her in 1985. After her passing, the Universal House of Justice referred

to her as “an outstanding early believer in Portugal” and wrote, “Her courage in arising to take the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to the people of Guinea-Bissau, together with her husband, José Xavier Rodrigues, earned her the accolade of Knight of Bahá’u’lláh. She will be remembered with gratitude for her distinguished services to the Cause and the example of her sacrificial life.” The National Spiritual Assemblies in Portugal and Guinea-Bissau were asked to arrange befitting memorial gatherings in her honor.

GOLNAR SAHBA

On 25 March 2005, in Toronto, Canada.

Golnar Rafiei was born into a Bahá’í family on 17 October 1949 in Isfahan, Iran, and was active as a young Bahá’í, serving on several Bahá’í committees. After earning a bachelor of arts in graphic design from the College of Decorative Arts, she went on to produce animated films for children and, with her future husband, co-founded *Varqa* children’s magazine, serving as its art director. She and Fariborz Sahba were married in 1970 and had three children, Naysan, Shamim, and Shirin. The family pioneered in India from 1979 to 1987 during the construction of the Bahá’í House of Worship in India, of which Mr. Sahba was the architect. Later, they moved to Haifa, Israel, during the construction of the Terraces connected with the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel, which were designed by Mr. Sahba. Mrs. Sahba collaborated artistically with her husband, designing fences, gates, and benches for the Indian Temple, as well as the content and graphic design of the panels in the information center associated with the House of Worship. In Haifa, she worked with her husband on the final detailing and production of gates, fountains, ornaments, paving and other design features of the Terraces, which were completed in 2001. Most recently, the couple had settled in Canada. After her passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, “Her radiant heart and saintly character left an indelible impression upon all who crossed her path. The devoted and selfless services she rendered, including the artistic collaboration on the Temple project in India and culminating in the design of the ironwork and gates beautifying the Terraces on Mount Carmel, have left a lasting testimony to her love for the Blessed Beauty,” and advised the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of India to hold a memorial service in her honor at the House of Worship in New Delhi.

JAN SIJSLING

On 12 December 2004, in Groesbeek, the Netherlands.

Born on 13 February 1919 in Amsterdam, Jan Sijssling became a Bahá’í in 1952 and played an important part in the history of the Dutch Bahá’í community. His administrative services to the Faith were numerous: he served on the Local

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Amsterdam from 1952 to 1962 and then on the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Delft from 1964 to 1972, on the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Benelux Countries from 1957 to 1962, as a member of the Auxiliary Board from 1961 to 1964, and on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Netherlands for varying periods from 1962 to 1990. Professionally, he worked as an export manager, a property/real estate developer, and was a president of Eurotel. Mr. Sijssling applied his expertise to render service to his Faith through purchasing or developing properties for the Dutch Bahá'í community, including the national Bahá'í center in The Hague, the site of the future House of Worship in Zoetermeer, and the De Poort Bahá'í Conference Center in Groesbeek. He also made important contributions to the development of foundations, trusts, and institutes in the Bahá'í community of the Netherlands, including the Tahiri Institute. He married Giény Smits in 1949; she predeceased him in 2001. The couple had two children. After his passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "His many services to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in both the administrative and teaching fields, including membership on two nascent National Spiritual Assemblies, those of the Benelux Countries and the Netherlands, and his dedicated services as an Auxiliary Board member, are lovingly remembered."

ELIZABETH LUNT TOOMES

On 21 August 2004, in Colombia.

Daughter of distinguished early American Bahá'í Alfred E. Lunt, Elizabeth (Betty) Lunt arose to pioneer with her husband Lew Toomes during the Ten Year Crusade. Leaving their comfortable home in Philadelphia, the couple settled in Barranquilla, Colombia, and remained in that country for the rest of their lives—in Mrs. Toomes' case, for more than 50 years. There, using the education she had received at Tufts College in the US, Mrs. Toomes established a bilingual primary school, the Boston School of English. Later, she founded a second school on the island of San Andres. A member for many years of the National Spiritual Assembly of Colombia, Mrs. Toomes had a deep love for teaching the Bahá'í Faith, and in her last years, she devoted her energies to the Wayuu people in the Guajira region of the country. After her passing, the Universal House of Justice wrote, "Her devoted and steadfast pioneering efforts in Colombia since the time of the opening of the Ten Year Crusade, her many years of distinguished service on its National Spiritual Assembly, and her notable accomplishments among the Wayuu people together constitute an enduring contribution to the Cause of God and will no doubt long be remembered."

KOSS MALLA YAM-BEL-YAM

On 9 October 2004, in Bongor, Chad.

Koss Malla Yam-Bel-Yam was born on 1 January 1957 in Moussohongo (Sarh), Chad. He embraced the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in 1977, after which he engaged in extensive teaching travels in the southern region of Chad until his untimely death in an automobile accident. He helped to establish hundreds of local communities in Chad and was instrumental in initiating the institute process in the country. He served as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Sarh, as the chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly, and was a member of the Auxiliary Board at the time of his passing. Koss Malla was well known as the founder of one of the most successful local nongovernmental organizations working in social and economic development in Chad. APRODEPIT helped rural communities improve their standard of living through fish farming, environmental preservation, and children's education.¹ His first wife predeceased him. He leaves behind his second wife, Remadji, whom he married in August 2004, and two children.

NOTES

- ¹ For a profile of APRODEPIT, see *The Bahá'í World 2002–2003* (Haifa: World Centre Publications, 2004), pp. 219–225.

Statistics

General Statistics

More than 5.5 million people are members of the Bahá'í Faith. As of Ridván 2004, the Bahá'í community has 183 National Spiritual Assemblies and thousands of Local Spiritual Assemblies around the world. The Bahá'í Faith is established in 191 independent countries and 45 dependent territories or overseas departments. There are 2,112 indigenous tribes, races, and ethnic groups represented within the worldwide Bahá'í community.

Social and Economic Development

Bahá'í development activities are initiated either by individuals or groups of believers or by Bahá'í administrative institutions. Together, these activities contribute to a global process of learning about a Bahá'í approach to social and economic development. They presently fall into three general categories.

ACTIVITIES OF FIXED DURATION

Most Bahá'í social and economic development efforts are fairly simple activities of fixed duration in which Bahá'ís around the world

address the problems and challenges faced by their localities through the application of spiritual principles. These activities either originate in the Bahá'í communities themselves or represent responses to invitations from other organizations. It is estimated that in 2004–2005 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 activities consists of approximately 600 ongoing projects. The vast majority are academic and tutorial schools, while others focus on areas such as literacy, basic health care, moral education, child care, agriculture, the environment, and microenterprise. Some of these projects are administered by nascent development organizations, which have the potential to grow in complexity and in their range of influence.

ORGANIZATIONS WITH CAPACITY TO UNDERTAKE COMPLEX ACTION

Certain Bahá'í development efforts have evolved into development organizations with relatively complex programmatic structures and significant spheres of influence. They systematically train human resources and manage a number of lines of action to address problems of local communities and regions in a coordinated, interdisciplinary manner. Also included in this category are several institutions—especially large schools—which, although focusing only on one field, have the potential to make a significant impact. In this category there are currently 45 such organizations.

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Bahá'í Business Forum of America

E-mail: info@bbfa.org
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Bahá'í Computer and**Communications Association**

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Selected New Publications in English

Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy

Christopher Buck. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005. 317 pp.

Alain Locke was one of the leading African-American intellectuals of his day. Best known as the father of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, he also pioneered calls for multicultural democracy. This book is a study of Locke's identity and commitment as a Bahá'í, and explores how the Bahá'í principles influenced Locke's thinking.

Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence

Michael Karlberg. Oxford: George Ronald, 2004. 288 pp.

In his analysis of contemporary society, Michael Karlberg puts forward the thesis that our present "culture of contest" is both socially unjust and ecologically unsustainable and that the surrounding "culture of protest" is an inadequate response to the social and ecological problems it generates. Rather, the development of non-adversarial structures and practices is imperative. Dr. Karlberg considers various historical and contemporary expressions of mutualism and presents a case study of the Bahá'í community and its experience as a working, non-adversarial model of social practice.

Close Connections: The Bridge Between Spiritual and Physical Reality

John S. Hatcher. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005. 314 pp.

An exploration of the relationship between the material and the metaphysical. Author and scholar John Hatcher employs axioms drawn from the Bahá'í Faith as tools for probing answers to questions about physical reality.

One Common Faith

Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2005. 64 pp.

A document produced by the Bahá'í World Centre for the study of Bahá'ís worldwide. *One Common Faith*, the Universal House of Justice explains, “reviews relevant passages from both the writing of Bahá'u'lláh and the scriptures of other faiths against the background of the contemporary crisis.”

A Radiant Gem: A Biography of Jináb-i-Fáḍil-i-Shirazi

Houri Falahi-Skuce. Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2004. 218 pp.

An account of the life of this erudite Islamic mystic who embraced the Bahá'í Faith, this book also includes many Tablets 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed in honor of Jináb-i-Fáḍil.

The Story of Bahá'u'lláh, Promised One of All Religions

Druzelle Cederquist. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005. 376 pp.

This book brings to life in rich detail the compelling story of the prophet and founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

A Study Guide to the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice

Guy Sinclair. Oxford: George Ronald, 2005. 288 pp.

Bahá'u'lláh established the Universal House of Justice in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the supreme administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith. Its Constitution was hailed by Shoghi Effendi as the “Most Great Law of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.” This guide provides insights into how this remarkable document was developed, annotations giving the source of each line of the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws, a short compilation on the station of the Universal House of Justice, and questions and exercises about the Constitution.

Ṭáhirih: A Portrait in Poetry

Edited and translated by Amin Banani with Jascha Kessler and Anthony A. Lee. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004. 151 pp.

Original text and translation of 23 poems by the renowned nineteenth-century Persian poetess and early follower of the Báb named Ṭáhirih, in the original language and translated into English. Ṭáhirih's work is deeply spiritual,

startling, mystical, and surprisingly modern. Dr. Banani provides a full introduction to her life and work and extensive notes for each poem. (Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions series, vol. 17)

**Ṭáhirih in History: Perspectives on Qurratu'l-'Ayn
from East and West**

Edited by Sabir Afaqi. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004. 306 pp.

This book brings together, for the first time, the most serious research that has been done on Ṭáhirih's life. Included are the tributes written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, new essays on Ṭáhirih's literary impact, the work of Indian and Pakistani scholars, early essays by E.G. Browne and A.L.M. Nicolas, along with more recent studies by contemporary scholars. (Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions series, vol. 16)

**The Bahá'í Faith and the World's Religions:
Papers presented at Irfan Colloquia**

Edited by Moojan Momen. Oxford: George Ronald, 2005. 288 pp.

Papers comparing the Bahá'í Faith with other religions. Includes essays by Moojan Momen, Todd Lawson, Julio Savi, Robert Stockman, O. Osei, Enoch Tanyi, Margaret and Crispin Pemberton-Pigott, Albert K. Cheung, and Zaid Lundberg.

The Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

Baharieh Ma'ani and Sovaida Ewing. Oxford: George Ronald, 2004. 352 pp.

The authors trace the evolution of the major laws found in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas through the Old and New Testaments, the Qur'án and the writings of the Báb. Their straightforward account places the laws of Bahá'u'lláh in their historical context and provides fresh insights into their significance for building a new world order.

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. 300–302 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 was known as Rúhíyyih Khánum Rabbání. (‘Amatu’l-Bahá is a title meaning “Handmaiden of Bahá’u’lláh.”) She served as the Guardian’s secretary during his lifetime and was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God in 1952. After Shoghi Effendi’s passing in 1957, she traveled extensively to teach the Bahá’í Faith, consolidate

Bahá'í communities, and serve as a representative of the Universal House of Justice at major events.

Arc, the: An arc cut into Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, along which the international administrative buildings of the Bahá'í Faith have been built.

Auxiliary Boards: An institution created by Shoghi Effendi in 1954 to assist the Hands of the Cause of God. When the institution of the Continental Boards of Counsellors was established in 1968 by the Universal House of Justice, the Auxiliary Boards were placed under its direction.

Báb, the: The title, meaning “Gate,” assumed by Siyyid ‘Alí-Muḥammad, Who was the Prophet-Founder of the Bábí Faith and the Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh. Born on 20 October 1819, the Báb proclaimed Himself to be the Promised One of Islam and announced that His mission was to alert the people to the imminent advent of “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” namely, Bahá'u'lláh. Because of these claims, the Báb was executed by order of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh on 9 July 1850.

Bahá'í Era (BE): The period of the Bahá'í calendar beginning with the Declaration of the Báb on 23 May 1844 and expected to last until the next appearance of a Manifestation of God after the expiration of at least 1,000 years. See also *Calendar, Bahá'í*.

Bahá'í International Community: A name used generally in reference to the worldwide Bahá'í community and officially in that community's external relations. In the latter context, the Bahá'í International Community is an association of the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world and functions as an international nongovernmental organization. Its offices include its Secretariat at the Bahá'í World Centre, a United Nations Office in New York with a branch in Geneva, an Office of Public Information with a branch in Paris, and an Office for the Advancement of Women.

Bahá'í World Centre: The spiritual and administrative center of the Bahá'í Faith, comprising the holy places in the Haifa–Acre area and the Arc of administrative buildings on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel.

Bahá'u'lláh: The title, meaning “Glory of God,” assumed by Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Born on 12 November 1817, He declared His mission as the Promised One of All Ages in April 1863 and passed away in Acre, Palestine, on 29 May 1892 after 40 years of imprisonment, banishment, and house arrest. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are considered by Bahá'ís to be direct revelation from God.

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*, Wendi Momen, ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989).

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