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## INTRODUCTION

The year 1997 marks the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith from 1921 to 1957. The occasion provides an opportunity for The Baha 'i World to take up the theme of community, since it was through the

leadership of Shoghi Effendi that the Baha'i Faith grew to embrace the wide cross-section of humanity that it counts among its members today. This volume thus includes a retrospective essay, "Shoghi Effendi: Guide for a New Millennium," by Gifford E. Mitchell. It reviews Shoghi Effendi's inspired work as the builder of a unified global community, as interpreter and translator of Baha'i sacred scriptures, as aesthete, and as a thinker who combined a broad, incisive grasp of history with a keen vision of the future.

The selection of excerpts from the Baha'i sacred writings also focuses on the theme of community, and "World Watch" takes a critical look at some contemporary challenges facing community and the response to them found in the Baha'i Faith. An account of Amatu'l-Baha Ruliyih Khanum's visit to Brazil to mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Faith there, a report on a

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social and economic development project in Zambia, and an article profiling five moral development activities around the world all provide further glimpses into the life and concerns of the Baha'i community. Matthew Weinberg's essay on the contemporary human rights discourse presents the Baha'i perspective on a related topic of central concern. A report on the Baha'i presence at Habitat II provides a window on the Baha'i commitment to creating sustainable communities. Finally, a short article on the Baha'i International Community's launch of its official site on the World Wide Web tells how the Faith is using the new information technologies to acquaint the peoples of the world with its message, in a medium where the truth of Baha'u'llah's statement "the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens" is abundantly clear.

The Baha'i World 1996-97 is the fifth in the new annual series of volumes that provides a public record of the Baha'i community's activities and achievements—a chronicle inaugurated in 1925 with the publication of the original Baha'i World series. Readers will find it a useful source of accurate information. In addition to featuring the theme of community, the current volume contains a number of regular elements: highlights from major messages written during the year by the Universal House of Justice; "the Year in Review"—a chronology of the activities of Baha'is around the world throughout the year; an update on the situation of Iran's persecuted Baha'i community; an account of the work of the Baha'i International Community and a selection of statements made by it in United Nations fora over the year; a report on progress made on the Mount Carmel Baha'i Projects at the world center of the Faith in Haifa, Israel; an introduction to the Baha'i Faith and its community; and the usual selection of resource materials: statistics, a directory of Baha'i agencies, an annotated list of selected new publications; a basic reading list, and a glossary of Baha'i terms.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE BAHAI COMMUNITY

A group of Greek and Turkish Cypriots gather joyously together for a Holy Day feast, their obvious delight in each other's company contrasting with the ethnic tensions on that divided island. Young people in Angola, unable to attend school because of the war, participate in a workshop that gives them a vision of the important role they have to play in society. A princess from Western Samoa travels to Fiji in order to offer tribal chiefs and elders a document outlining a process of development that respects the dignity of all peoples. Women and men gather in Garoua Boulai, a rural region of eastern Cameroon, to discuss how they can work together to alleviate some of the burdens placed on the women with regard to child care. A young Mongolian woman who has never before left her province walks 70 kilometers in the snow, then travels by truck, and finally catches a plane to Ulaan Baatar, where she participates in the election of her religion's national administrative body. A youth group performs a dance about the terrible consequences of racism to a rapt audience of children in a school auditorium on Vancouver Island, Canada. In Colombia, South America, a conga musical group imbues its traditional Latin rhythms with a spiritual message about the unity of humankind, to the delight of listeners in open-air venues. After two weeks of training in basic health care, a woman in Zambia returns to her village and shares what she has learned with her neighbors. These people, though they have in all probability never met one another, share a united view of the world and its future, as well as their own role in shaping that future. They are members of the Baha'i international community.

The Baha'i international community, comprising members of the Baha'i Faith from all over the globe, now numbers some five million souls. They represent 2,112 ethnic and tribal groups and live in over 121,000 localities in 190 independent countries and 45 dependent territories or overseas departments. What was once regarded by some as an obscure, tiny sect is now reported by the Encyclopedia Britannica to be the second-most widely spread independent religion in the world, after Christianity. Its membership cuts across all boundaries of class and race, governing itself through the establishment of local and national elected bodies known as Spiritual Assemblies. Its international center and the seat of its worldgoverning council, known as the Universal House of Justice, are located in the Holy Land, in Haifa, Israel.

From what source do the members of the Baha'i Faith draw their spiritual strength and their organizational structure? What are the tenets of faith that can so attract and unify such a diverse

group of people? How do they see the future? This brief introduction to the Baha'i community, its history, its spiritual teachings, its aims, and its objectives, provides information in response to these questions.

### Origins

In 1844 in Persia, a young siyyid (descendant of the Prophet Mul).ammad) named Mirza 'Ali-Mul).ammad declared Himself to be the Promised Qa'im awaited by Shi'ih Muslims. He adopted the title "the Bab," which means "the Gate," and His teachings quickly attracted a large following. Alarmed by the growing numbers of "Babis," as His followers were known, the Muslim clergy allied themselves with ministers of the Shah in an effort to destroy the infant Faith. Several thousand Babis were persecuted, tortured, and killed over the next number of years,

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but the growth of this new religion continued, even after the Bab Himself was imprisoned and subsequently publicly executed by a firing squad in July 1850. The horrific treatment of the Babis at the hands of the secular and religious authorities was recorded by a number of Western diplomats, scholars, and travelers, who expressed their admiration for the character and fortitude of the victims of the persecution.

The Babi Faith sprang from Islam in the same manner that Christianity sprang from Judaism or Buddhism from Hinduism. It was apparent from early in the Bab's ministry that the religion established by Him represented not merely a sect or a movement within Islam but possessed the character of an independent Faith. Furthermore, one of the main tenets of Babi belief was the Bab's statement that He had been sent by God to prepare the way for One greater than Himself, who would inaugurate an era of peace and righteousness throughout the world, representing the culmination of all the religious dispensations of the past.

Mirza I:Iusayn-' Ali, known to history as Baha'u'llah, was one of the leading adherents of the Babi Faith who was arrested and imprisoned during the tumultuous years of the Bab's brief ministry. He was spared from execution but was banished from Persia to Baghdad, thence to Constantinople, Adrianople, and finally to the penal colony of Acre in Palestine. Thus, the Persian government, which had secured the support of the rulers of the rival

Ottoman empire in suppressing the new movement, expected that His sphere of influence would be severely limited. During His imprisonment Mirza I:Iusayn- 'Ali had received the first divine intimations that He was the Promised One of whom the Bab had spoken. He adopted the title Baha'u'llah, which means "the Glory of God," and publicly declared His mission on the eve of His exile from Baghdad, in April 1863 .

Baha' u ' llah was still nominally a prisoner when He passed away some forty years later in Acre, in November 1892, although the authorities had gradually loosened their restrictions as they became acquainted with Him and the nature of His teachings. During the long years of His exile and imprisonment, Baha'u'llah revealed the equivalent of over 100 volumes of writings, consisting of the laws and ordinances of His dispensation, letters to

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the kings and rulers of the East and the West, mystical teachings, and other divinely inspired writings.

In His Will and Testament, Baha'u'llah appointed His eldest son, 'Abbas Effendi, who adopted the title 'Abdu'l-Baha (the Servant of Baha), as His successor and sole authoritative interpreter of His teachings. ' Abdu' l-Baha had shared the long years of exile and imprisonment of His Father, being freed only after a new regime was installed by the "Young Turk" movement in 1908. Shortly thereafter, at an advanced age, He embarked on an arduous journey to Europe and America where, from 1911 to 1913, He proclaimed Baha'u'llah's message of universal brotherhood and peace to large audiences, consolidated fledgling Baha'i communities, and warned of the potential catastrophe looming on Europe ' s darkening horizon. By the time World War I erupted in 1914, 'Abdu'l-Baha had returned to His home in Haifa, just across the bay from Acre in Palestine, and devoted Himself to caring for the people of that city, fending off famine by feeding them from stores of grain He had safeguarded for just such an eventuality. ' Abdu ' l-Baha's humanitarian services and promotion of intercultural harmony were recognized by the British government, which, at the end of the war, conferred upon Him a knighthood, a title He acknowledged, although He declined to use it. He passed away in 1921 and is buried on Mount Carmel in a vault near where the remains of the Bab were interred by Him some years before.

Among the significant legacies bequeathed to history by 'Abdu'l-Baha was a series of letters, called the Tablets of the Divine Plan, addressed to the Baha'is of North America during the years of World War I. These fourteen letters directed the recipients to scatter to countries on all continents and share with their populations the teachings of Baha'u'llah- a mandate that led to the global expansion of the Baha'i community.

Another legacy of 'Abdu'l-Baha was His Will and Testament, which Baha' is regard as the charter of the administrative order conceived by Baha'u'llah. In this document, 'Abdu'l-Baha appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, to succeed Him after His passing as Guardian of the Baha' i Faith and authorized interpreter of its teachings.

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During the period of his Guardianship, from 1921 to 1957, Shoghi Effendi concentrated his attention on four main areas: the development of the Baha'i World Centre in the environs of Haifa, Israel; the translation and interpretation of the Baha'i sacred writings; the rise and consolidation of the institutions of the administrative order of the Baha' i Faith; and the implementation of 'Abdu'l-Baha's plan for the propagation of the Baha'i Faith around the world.

At the Baha'i World Centre, Shoghi Effendi effected the construction of a superstructure for the mausoleum containing the remains of the Bab, which had been brought secretly from Persia and interred by 'Abdu ' l-Baha in a tomb on Mount Carmel in a spot designated by Baha'u'llah. Shoghi Effendi beautified and expanded the simple native stone structure, which is today a site of pilgrimage for Baha'is from all over the world. He enhanced the Baha'i properties, particularly the site of Baha'u'llah's grave at Bahji, with gardens of striking beauty, and he initiated the construction of the International Baha'i Archives building to house and preserve artifacts from the early days of the Baha'i Faith. The International Archives building was the first structure built on the arc-shaped path on the site designated as the world administrative center of the Baha'i community. It was completed in 1957.

In concert with the actions he took to develop the Baha'i World Centre and lay the foundations, literally and figuratively, for the further course of that development, Shoghi Effendi was also instrumental in interpreting the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu 'l-Baha and translating them from the original Persian and Arabic into English. The Guardian had served as secretary for a number of years to ' Abdu'l-Baha and at the time of the latter' s passing was a student at Oxford University. His mastery of Persian, Arabic, and English, coupled with the authority conferred upon him by 'Abdu' l-Baha as the appointed interpreter of those writings, made him uniquely qualified to undertake their translation. He also translated a history of the Babi Faith, authored a history of the first century of the Baha'i Faith, called *God Passes By* , and wrote thousands of letters to communities and individuals around the world, elucidating passages from the writings, and thus giving direction and impetus to Baha'i activities.

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### Development of the Administrative Order

Shoghi Effendi's work in developing the Baha'i 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 Baha'i communities in places where local and

national Baha'i councils, known as Spiritual Assemblies, would eventually be established. The Guardian effected this global expansion of Baha'i communities through a series of international plans that ran for varying numbers of years and during which twelve National Spiritual Assemblies were founded. At the time of Shoghi Effendi's sudden passing in 1957, the Baha'i 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 Baha' u'llah's declaration of His mission in the Garden of Ri<;ivan in Baghdad the goal was to open 132 new countries and major territories to the Faith and expand existing communities in 120 countries and territories previously opened to the Faith. These ambitious targets were actually exceeded by the end of the plan, in spite of the difficulties posed by the Guardian's death.

'Abdu'l-Baha, 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 Baha' u' llah. Such a designation was dependent upon the decision of Shoghi Effendi whether an individual could be named who met the demanding spiritual qualifications specified by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. Shoghi Effendi had no children and died without designating such a Guardian to follow him. He had, however, taken steps toward the election of the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Baha'i Faith which was to function , with him, as one of the two authorized successors provided for in the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu ' l-Baha. He had also appointed a number of individual Baha'is to an auxiliary institution of the Guardianship called "Hands of the Cause of God." These individuals had been charged with the duty of protecting the unity of the faith and collaborating with the National Spiritual Assemblies around the world to ensure that

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the goals of the Ten Year Crusade were won. Upon the passing of Shoghi Effendi, these persons gathered together to guide the Baha'i community to the completion of the plan initiated by the Guardian and towards the first election of the Universal House of Justice, which took place in April 1963 .

Conceived by Baha'u'llah Himself, the institution of the Universal House of Justice is established on principles laid down in the Baha'i sacred writings. Its election, by the members of the 56 National Spiritual Assemblies that existed in April 1963, clearly demonstrated the principle of unity so central to the Baha'i Faith, with the nine elected members coming from four continents and representing a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Basing itself on the authority conferred on it by the Founder of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice has stood as the acknowledged central authority in the worldwide Baha'i community since 1963. During the last 32 years, the Universal House of Justice has launched six global plans for the advancement of the Faith. From a worldwide population of 408,000 in 1963, the Baha'i community has grown to approximately five million members; the number of National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies has grown from 56 to 174; and the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies has increased from 3,555 to some 16,000. Baha'is live in some 235 countries and territories around the planet.

#### Spiritual and Moral Teachings and Baha'i Community Life

The force that unites this widely diverse body of people is a unity of vision gained from belief in Baha'u'llah as a Manifestation of God, in the social and administrative structures He established, and in the spiritual and moral teachings He propagated. Central to these spiritual teachings is the concept that there is only one God and that the major religions of the world have been established by Messengers or Manifestations of this one Divine Reality: Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muhammad, who have been sent by the Creator progressively throughout history to deliver a divine message commensurate with humanity's stage of development. The spiritual essence of all the major religions, in the Baha'i view, is the same: that humanity has been created to know and to worship God. Only the religions' social teachings change through this process of progressive revelation. The Baha'i

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perspective is optimistic, seeing the cumulative benefits of progressively revealed religions as fundamental to an "ever-advancing civilization." What divides various religious communities, Baha'is believe, comes not from God but from humanity and its accretions to the essential religious teachings brought by each divine Messenger.

In this new stage of humanity's development, the time has come for the recognition of the unity of the human race, for the establishment of the equality of women and men, for the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, and for the realization of the age-old promise of universal peace. Lkening the development of the human race to that of a child, the Baha'i writings say that we have passed through the stages analogous to infancy and childhood and are now enduring a tumultuous adolescence, on the threshold of maturity. Baha'u'llah 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 Baha'i ideals can be fully realized, Baha'u'llah established laws and

moral teachings that Baha'is are called upon to follow. Central to these is daily obligatory prayer. Study and meditation upon the Baha'i sacred writings is also enjoined upon believers each morning and evening. Baha'is between the ages of 15 and 70, with the exception of women who are pregnant or menstruating, as well as nursing mothers and the sick, observe a nineteen-day, dawn-to-dusk fast each year. Baha'u'llah 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 Baha'u'llah's laws is a volume entitled the Kitab-i-Aqdas, or the Most Holy Book.

There are no dietary restrictions in the Baha'i 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. Baha'u'llah counseled Baha'is to be honest and trustworthy, to render service to humanity with an abundance of deeds rather than mere words, to be chaste in their relationships with others, and to avoid gossip and backbiting. He forbade

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lying, stealing, adultery, sodomy, and promiscuity. The importance of the family is central to Baha'i community life, as is the moral and spiritual education of children.

Baha'is often gather together in their communities to study the sacred writings of their faith and to pray, but a central feature in Baha'i community life is a meeting called "the Nineteen Day Feast," at which all members join in worship, consult about community affairs, and socialize. For the time being, pending the further development of Baha'i communities, these meetings often occur in rented facilities, people's homes, or, in some locations, in the local Baha'i center. The Baha'i writings call for the erection in each community of a beautifully designed House of Worship, set in exquisite gardens and functioning as a spiritual center of activity. A variety of social and humanitarian institutions are also to be established around it. A Baha'i House of Worship presently exists on each continent, and sites have been purchased around the world for construction of many more in the future. They 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 Baha'i writings and scriptures of other world faiths and music by an a capella choir. This preserves for worshippers the sacredness of the experience of hearing and meditating upon the Holy Word without the interference of man-made concepts.

Aims, Objectives, and Activities

As the Universal House of Justice stated in a message addressed to

the peoples of the world, written in October 1985 on the eve of the United Nations International Year of Peace, "Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind." The ultimate aim of the Baha'i Faith is the establishment of unity among all the peoples of the world, and it is because of its orientation towards unity on an international scale that the Baha'i community has been active at the United Nations since that organization's inception. Today the Baha'i International Community, an extremely active non-governmental organization (NGO) which represents the collective voice of the national Baha'i communities around the world, enjoys consultative

status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is particularly involved in addressing human rights issues, the needs of women and children, and environmental concerns, as well as pursuing sound sustainable development policies. To coordinate its international efforts in these areas, the Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office and Office of Public Information, as well as Offices of the Environment and for the Advancement of Women, collaborate with National Spiritual Assemblies around the world in various projects and representations at international gatherings.

The activities of the Baha'i International Community at the United Nations have earned it a reputation as one of the most effective religious NGOs in the UN system. Its national and international representatives have taken active roles in major international events such as the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995.

Beyond the scope of the United Nations, Baha'is 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 Baha'u'llah, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, . . . enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an

international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system.

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

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

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

The Baha'i community has also taken a proactive approach in promulgating its views. The statement on peace issued by the

1. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 203-04.

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Universal House of Justice in 1985, entitled *The Promise of World Peace*, sparked a worldwide campaign of presentations and public education projects that lasted throughout the International Year of Peace and beyond and encompassed government figures and leaders of thought, as well as the general population. To mark the centenary of Baha'u'llah's passing in 1992, the Baha'i International Community's Office of Public Information published *Bahri 'u 'llah*, a statement about the Faith's Founder, detailing His life, His teachings, and His mission. Events of the year itself, notably the commemoration in the Holy Land in May 1992 of the centenary of the passing of Baha'u'llah, involving some 3,000 participants from all over the world, and the Baha'i World Congress held in New York City in November 1992, which attracted some 27,000 Baha'is from around the globe, brought much publicity to the Faith. In January 1995, the Office of Public Information released another major statement on social development, *The Prosperity of Humankind*. Widely disseminated at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995, the statement promises to lead to further engagement of the Baha'i community with leaders of thought in this field. In October 1995, a statement entitled *Turning Point for All Nations* was released to contribute to the discussions on the future of the United Nations that marked the organization's fiftieth anniversary. Aside from large-scale public relations activities and the publication of statements on different themes, the Baha'i community has been continually engaged in a series of international teaching plans, and it has seen rapid expansion in different parts of the world, most notably in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where national Baha'i communities have been established in recent years following the collapse of long-standing political barriers. Baha'i communities governed by National Spiritual Assemblies now exist in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Baltic States, Belarus, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Romania, Russia, the Ukraine, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The Czech and Slovak Republics, and Slovenia and Croatia have Regional Spiritual Assemblies. Elsewhere in the world, National Spiritual Assemblies have recently come into existence in Cambodia, Eritrea, Mongolia, and Sicily. In April

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1996, two more National Spiritual Assemblies were established, in Moldova and in Sao Tome and Principe.

The existence and growth of the Baha'i community offers irrefutable evidence that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work together in harmony. While Baha'is are not

unaware of the turmoil in the world surrounding them, their view is succinctly depicted in the following words, taken from The Prosperity of Humankind:

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

2. See The Baha'i World 1994- 95, pp. 273- 96, for the complete text of this statement.

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## SACRED WRITINGS

### Writings of Baha'u'llah

The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth. The one true God, He Who knoweth all things, Himself testifieth to the truth of these words. Exert yourselves that ye may attain this transcendent and most sublime station, the station that can ensure the protection and security of all mankind. This goal excelleth every other goal, and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations.

The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance. Were mankind to be adorned with this raiment, they would behold the day-star of utterance, ' On that day God will satisfy everyone out of His abundance,' shining resplendent above the horizon of the world. Appreciate ye the value of this utterance; it is a noble fruit that the Tree of the Pen of Glory hath yielded. Happy is the man that giveth ear unto it and observeth its precepts. Verily I say,

whatever is sent down from the heaven of the Will of God is the means for the establishment of order in the world and the instrument for promoting unity and fellowship among its peoples. Thus hath the Tongue of this Wronged One spoken from His Most Great Prison.

In one of the Tablets these words have been revealed: O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behavior. Valiant acts will ensure the triumph of this Cause, and a saintly character will reinforce its power. Cleave unto righteousness, O people of Baha! This, verily, is the commandment which this Wronged One hath given unto you, and the first choice of His unrestrained Will for every one of you . ...

It is incumbent upon every man, in this Day, to hold fast unto whatsoever will promote the interests, and exalt the station of all nations and just governments. Through each and every one of the verses which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed, the doors of love and unity have been unlocked and flung open to the face of men. We have erewhile declared- and Our Word is the truth- : "Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. " Whatsoever hath led the children of men to shun one another, and hath caused dissensions and divisions amongst them, hath, through the revelation of these words, been nullified and abolished. From the heaven of God's Will, and for the purpose of ennobling the world of being and of elevating the minds and souls of men, hath been sent down that which is the most effective instrument for the education of the whole human race. The

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highest essence and most perfect expression of whatsoever the peoples of old have either said or written hath, through this most potent Revelation, been sent down from the heaven of the Will of the All-Possessing, the Ever-Abiding God. Of old it hath been revealed: "Love of one's country is an element of the Faith of God." The Tongue of Grandeur hath, however, in the day of His manifestation proclaimed: "It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the world." Through the power released by these exalted words He hath lent a fresh impulse and set a new direction to the birds of men' s hearts, and hath obliterated every trace of restriction and limitation from God's holy Book. ...

In formulating the principles and laws a part hath been devoted to penalties which form an effective instrument for the security and protection of men. However, dread of the penalties maketh people desist only outwardly from committing vile and contemptible deeds, while

that which guardeth and restraineth man both outwardly and inwardly hath been and still is the fear of God. It is man's true protector and his spiritual guardian. It behoveth him to cleave tenaciously unto that which will lead to the appearance of this supreme bounty. Well is it with him who giveth ear unto whatsoever My Pen of Glory hath proclaimed and observeth that whereunto he is bidden by the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days ... .  
O ye that dwell on earth! The distinguishing feature that marketh the pre-eminent character of this Supreme Revelation consisteth in that We have, on the one hand, blotted out from the pages of God's holy Book whatsoever hath been the cause of strife, of malice and mischief amongst the children of men, and have, on the other, laid down the essential prerequisites of concord, of understanding, of complete and enduring unity. Well is it with them that keep My statutes.

Were men to gaze with the eye of the heart, they would know for a surety that whatsoever hath descended from the Source of Command containeth naught but pure benefit for all the peoples of the world. All must become as wings to bear one another onward. Man's true honor lieth in wisdom, understanding and an upright character, not in amassing earthly ornaments, in vainglory and conceit. All

were created out of dust, and unto dust shall they return. O people of Baha! Man's true adornment consisteth not in the trappings of this world, but rather in recognition of the one true God-magnified be His might!-and in sciences, crafts and upright conduct.

Ye are the pearls of the Sea of Oneness! Consider ye the pearl: its purity and fineness are qualities inherent in itself. Were one to wrap it in the finest silks, they would but hide from view its delicacy and lustre. Its beauty is within itself. Strive, then, to acquire this beauty, and grieve not at lacking this world's material benefits.  
O ye trees of the celestial paradise! Deprive not yourselves of the vernal breezes of God's loving-kindness, nor withhold from yourselves the sweet savors of His holy words of wisdom. Such is the measure of His gracious providence that, notwithstanding the heedlessness of all and this most great affliction in the Prison of 'Akka, He hath yet caused to flow from the Pen of the All-Glorious that which profiteth His creatures. He, verily, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth with joy and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in tum are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations. Blessed are such as hold fast to the cord of kindness and tender mercy and are free from animosity and hatred.

This Wronged One exhorteth the peoples of the world to observe tolerance and righteousness, which are two lights amidst the darkness of the world and two educators for the edification of mankind. Happy are they who have attained thereto and woe betide the heedless.

Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha

In every dispensation, there hath been the commandment of fellowship and love, but it was a commandment limited to the community of those in mutual agreement, not to the dissident foe. In this wondrous age, however, praised be God, the commandments of God are not delimited, not restricted to any one group of people,

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rather have all the friends been commanded to show forth fellowship and love, consideration and generosity and loving-kindness to every community on earth. Now must the lovers of God arise to carry out these instructions of His: let them be kindly fathers to the children of the human race, and compassionate brothers to the youth, and self-denying offspring to those bent with years. The meaning of this is that ye must show forth tenderness and love to every human being, even to your enemies, and welcome them all with unalloyed friendship, good cheer, and loving-kindness. When ye meet with cruelty and persecution at another's hands, keep faith with him; when malevolence is directed your way, respond with a friendly heart. To the spears and arrows rained upon you, expose your breasts for a target mirror-bright; and in return for curses, taunts and wounding words, show forth abounding love. Thus will all peoples witness the power of the Most Great Name, and every nation acknowledge the might of the Ancient Beauty, and see how He hath toppled down the walls of discord, and how surely He hath guided all the peoples of the earth to oneness; how He hath lit man's world, and made this earth of dust to send forth streams of light.

Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquility, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honor, as day succeedeth day. And if we widen out the sphere of unity a little to include the inhabitants of a village who seek to be loving and united, who associate with and are kind to one another, what great advances they will be seen to make, how secure and protected they will be. Then let us widen out the sphere a little more, let us take the inhabitants of a city, all of them together: if they establish the strongest bonds of unity among themselves, how far they will progress, even in a brief period and what power

they will exert. And if the sphere of unity be still further widened out, that is, if the inhabitants of a whole country develop

peaceable hearts, and if with all their hearts and souls they yearn to cooperate with one another and to live in unity, and if they become kind and loving to one another, that country will achieve undying joy and lasting glory. Peace will it have, and plenty, and vast wealth.

Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind. It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization.

If a man is not characterized by these excellent qualities, it is certain that he has never attained to so much as a drop out of the fathomless river of the waters of life that flows through the teachings of the Holy Books, nor caught the faintest breath of the fragrant breezes that blow from the gardens of God; for nothing on earth can be demonstrated by words alone, and every level of existence is known by its signs and symbols, and every degree in man's development has its identifying mark.

The purpose of these statements is to make it abundantly clear that the Divine religions, the holy precepts, the heavenly teachings, are the unassailable basis of human happiness, and that the peoples of the world can hope for no real relief or deliverance without this one great remedy. This panacea must, however, be administered by a wise and skilled physician, for in the hands of an incompetent all the cures that the Lord of men has ever created to heal men's ills could produce no health, and would on the contrary only destroy the helpless and burden the hearts of the already afflicted . . .

When, through the Divine bestowals, three things appear on earth, this world of dust will come alive, and stand forth wondrously adorned and full of grace. These are first, the fruitful winds of spring; second, the welling plenty of spring clouds; and

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third, the heat of the bright sun. When, out of the endless bounty of God, these three have been vouchsafed, then slowly, by His leave, dry trees and branches turn fresh and green again, and array themselves with many kinds of blossoms and fruits. It is the same when the pure intentions and the justice of the ruler, the wisdom and consummate skill and statecraft of the governing

authorities, and the determination and unstinted efforts of the people, are all combined; then day by day the effects of the advancement, of the far-reaching reforms, of the pride and prosperity of government and people alike, will become clearly manifest.

Today nothing but the power of the Word of God which encompasses the realities of things can bring the thoughts, the minds, the hearts and the spirits under the shade of one Tree. He is the Potent in all things, the Vivifier of souls, the Preserver and the Controller of the world of mankind. Praise be to God, in this day the light of the Word of God has shone forth upon all regions, and from all sects, communities, nations, tribes, peoples, religions and denominations, souls have gathered under the shadow of the Word of Oneness and have in the most intimate fellowship united and harmonized!

#### FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Baha'i world community, derives its authority directly from Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith—"the Revealer of God's Word in this Day," "the Source of Authority," and "the Inspirer and Founder of a world civilization," as the opening of the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice states. That same document continues on to outline clearly the devolution of authority from Baha'u'llah to the House of Justice:

To direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation He instituted His Covenant, whose power has preserved the integrity of His Faith, maintained its unity and stimulated its world-wide expansion throughout the successive ministries of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. It continues to fulfill its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice whose fundamental object, as one of the twin successors of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, is 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.

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Thus charged with responsibility, the Universal House of Justice seeks to educate, inform, direct, encourage, and inspire the global Baha'i community, a task it undertakes mainly through its voluminous correspondence with Baha'i institutions and individuals around the world.

Ri«;fvan Messages (153 B.E.)

The Baha'i Faith has systematically expanded and consolidated its ranks through the operation of successive plans of varying duration. This year saw the launching of a new Four Year Plan, and this subject formed the substance of the 1996 "Ri(,ivan message" of the Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is of the world, released each year between 21 April and 2 May, the period that marks Baha'u'llah's declaration of His mission in the Garden of Ric;lvan (Paradise) in Baghdad in 1863. This year, in addition to its general letter, the House of Justice addressed eight separate letters to the Baha'is in various regions of the globe, reflecting on the history of those communities, the current situations they face, and their prospects for the future.

The general letter to the Baha'is of the world begins by reviewing the global accomplishments of the Three Year Plan ( 1993-1996) just completed, with the House of Justice noting that the period resulted in a "more consolidated, more resilient, more mature, and more confident"-in short, "a qualitatively enriched"-community.

Among the accomplishments noted are the following:

- the progress made in the construction of the projects at the Baha'i World Centre on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel;
- an increase in social and economic development activities around the world;
- expansion of external affairs work;
- the formation of twelve new National Spiritual Assemblies;
- a surge of pioneering and travel-teaching;
- the implementation of systematic approaches to collective teaching activities;
- well-focused long-term teaching projects;
- numerous achievements of the institution of the International Teaching Centre, both in the evolution of its own functioning and in its attention to the educational needs of the community;
- the asswnption by indigenous believers around the world of more responsibility

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for teaching and consolidation work in their own communities;

- the continued functioning of Baha ' i communities in such troubled countries

as Angola, Cambodia, Liberia, and Sie1Ta Leone ;

- the rapid maturation of Baha'i institutions in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc in Europe;
- island Baha'i communities ' inclusion of diverse populations in their membership;
- the enthusiastic service of youth, including their pursuit of music and the arts

(particularly dance and drama workshops), their participation in external affairs activities, their commitment to a year of service, and their

achievements of academic, professional, and vocational excellence;

- the Baha' i community 's greater involvement in social and economic development, particularly in the field of education, including the community 's

adoption of the management of seven public schools in one country; the development of farming, leading communities towards self-sufficiency, particularly in Africa; efforts to advance the status of women, including the establishment of the Baha' i International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women; and involvement in health and literacy projects in various countries;

- effects of expansion in external affairs work, in both small and large communities, as evidenced by increasing numbers of invitations to Baha' i communities from high public officials, by the community 's efforts to influence government action, by the establishment of Baha' i academic programs in colleges and universities, and the development of curricular materials for public schools;

- the Baha' i International Community 's participation in the World Summit for

Social Development, held in Copenhagen in March 1995 , with the concurrent release of the statement Th e Prosperity of Humankind by the Baha' i International Community 's Office of Public Information; participation in September 1995 in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing; contributions to the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, and the release of the statement Turning Point for All Nations ; the attendance of Hand of the Cause of God Amatu ' l-Baha Rul).iyyih Khanum at both the Summit on the Alliance between Religions and Conservation and the Fourth International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society;

- the publication of the Persian edition of Baha ' u ' llah ' s Most Holy Book,

the Kitab-i-Aqdas ;

- the increasing rootedness of the law of fuququ ' llah in the Baha' i community.

The House of Justice moves on from this review to an analysis of current events, looking at the integrating and disruptive processes at work during this turbulent period "of accelerating transition."

The disruptive forces are evident in the disarray of human affairs presented through news media, while the integrating forces can be seen, for example, in the efforts by world leaders to take collective action on various issues , to attend global meetings, to engage in collective efforts to respond to crises, and in the calls for global governance proliferating throughout the world.

In this context, the House of Justice states, the Baha'is' efforts to build their unique system will invoke a spiritual atmosphere and lead to a quickening of the processes towards world peace.

Baha'i communities around the world are thus called upon to focus on one major aim during the coming four years : movement

towards ensuring sustained large-scale growth of their numbers and an accelerated program of consolidation, referred to as "a significant advance in the process of entry by troops," a process that involves individuals, institutions, and local communities. Standing "at the very crux of any progress to be made" in this process, the individual has the responsibility to teach the Faith to others, to exercise his or her capacities, to study and allow the transformative forces of that act to exert their influence, and to draw on his or her love for Baha'u'llah, the power of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, and prayer.

In turn, heightened functioning of the institutions in the Baha'i community enhances individuals' capacity to serve and fosters unified action. Such an evolution requires a new state of mind on the part of the members of those institutions and on the part of those they serve. The means through which Spiritual Assemblies can rise to this new level of functioning include improving the use of consultation among the members themselves and with community members; fostering a spirit of service in the community; collaborating with the Continental Boards of Counsellors and their Auxiliary Board members; and cultivating external relations. At the level of the community, which is defined as comprising individuals, families, and institutions that are the originators of systems- in short, a "comprehensive unit of civilization"-the Universal House of Justice stresses the need for a "significant enhancement in patterns of behavior," achieved through the integration of adults, youth, and children in the community's spiritual, social, educational, and administrative activities, as well as in

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teaching and development activities, and through the practice of the collective worship of God.

To develop human resources within the community, systematic attention must be given to educating large numbers of Baha'is in the fundamental verities of the Faith and to training them, an effort that requires collaboration between the Continental Boards of Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies to establish organized, formal, regular programs of training, particularly institutes, that will evolve as centers of learning.

Extending the network of national governing councils around the world, two new National Spiritual Assemblies, of Moldova and of Sao Tome and Principe, are to form at Rio de Janeiro in 1996. Unfortunately, the National Assemblies of Burundi and Rwanda are not able to re-form owing to political turmoil in those countries, leaving the total number of National Spiritual Assemblies at 174.

Efforts already in progress should not lose momentum during the coming four years: for example, work in the field of social and economic development will continue; so, too, will external affairs

activities focusing on the defense of the Baha'i community in Iran, and on the themes of global prosperity, the advancement of women, moral development, and human rights; encouragement is given to further use of the arts in the proclamation, expansion, and consolidation work of the Faith.

As Baha'i communities around the world strive to accomplish the aims detailed above, so the Baha'i World Centre will pursue a number of specific goals. The most important of these is the completion of the current projects on Mount Carmel, following which, at Ric;lván 2000, a major event will be held. Other goals include provision of further directives to the Baha'i world regarding the application of additional laws of the Kitab-i-Aqdas; the translation and release of another volume of the writings of Baha'u'llah; the further development of the institution of the International Teaching Centre; and allowance for an increase in the number of pilgrims and visitors to the World Centre.

Accomplishing the two main challenges that lie before the Baha'i community at this juncture in history- namely, teaching the Faith and completing the projects undertaken on Mount Carmel- will, in the words of the Universal House of Justice, "foster

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conditions towards the release of pent-up forces that will forge a change in the direction of human affairs throughout the planet." This Plan, set "at one of the most critical times in the life of the planet," will prepare the Baha'i community to cope with accelerating changes in the world, enable it to withstand accompanying tests and challenges, and make visible its distinctive pattern of functioning. Assigning this Plan "a special place in the scheme of Baha'i and world history," occurring as it does during "a time so charged with potentialities and hope for all humanity," the House of Justice closes this weighty message with the expressed hope that the worldwide Baha'i community will "arise to seize the tasks of this crucial moment."

In addition to this general letter to the Baha'is of the world, separate letters address the opportunities and challenges facing countries in eight different regions, namely, Africa, Australasia, Europe, the countries and islands in the region of the Indian subcontinent, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Southeast Asia, and Western and Central Asia.

Many of these letters stress common themes also found in the general letter, in addition to dealing with the particularities of each region. All, for example, mention the importance of advancing the process of entry by troops; all encourage teaching so as to increase the numbers of Baha'is from all walks of life and from "every stratum of society," with the goal of building "a vibrant model of unity in diversity"; and all encourage individual believers

to take initiative.

Social and economic development is highlighted in different ways throughout the eight letters. Particular stress is laid upon the encouragement of the advancement of women-with men's active support, as the letter to Africa states. Literacy and the development of moral education programs also receive mention in a number of the letters, and where social and economic development activities are already flourishing, communities are urged to sustain and expand them as feasible.

Again, the development of human resources within the Baha'i community is stressed, through the repeated mention of the importance of the development of "systematic," "consistent," and "widespread" training institutes and institute programs. Indeed,

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the word "systematic" occurs many times throughout the letters, reflecting the importance the House of Justice places on the wellplanned expansion and consolidation of the Baha'i community, accomplished through individual teaching as well as organized teaching campaigns promoted by the institutions of the Faith and with the community's full participation.

As in the general letter, the consolidation of the Baha'i community is emphasized. Several of the letters specifically mention the enhancement of the trust and confidence, or "organic unity," between the individuals and the institutions, stressing that improving the functioning of Local Spiritual Assemblies and developing "a distinctive community life" go together. Included in the latter aspect are, for example, specific mention of the improvement in the Nineteen Day Feast, support of the Baha'i Funds, and communities' assumption of the full responsibility for the election of their own Local Spiritual Assemblies. Planning is another aspect of this evolution of functioning. With the commencement of the Six Year Plan ( 1986-1992), Baha'i communities around the world began to develop their own plans for the expansion and consolidation of their communities; as this plan begins, they are urged to continue and improve upon that process.

And again, as in the general letter, stress is placed upon the idea that combined efforts in systematic expansion and consolidation will firmly establish "the patterns of Baha'i community life." The Baha'i education of children, the teaching and spiritual enrichment of entire families , and the collective practice of the worship of God as other aspects of this development are also emphasized. Encouragement of the use of the arts, particularly music and drama, in the proclamation, expansion, and consolidation work is a recurring theme in several of the letters, adding emphasis to similar points made in the general letter. Emphasis on external affairs work is also reinforced; where it has already been undertaken, it is

praised, and its inauguration is urged in places where it has, as yet, been untried.

Pioneering and travel-teaching form yet another common thread running through the regional letters. Particular appeals to indigenous believers, those of African descent, Iranian Baha'is, French Canadians, believers from Hispanic backgrounds, and those from

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Arctic and sub-Arctic regions to travel and teach others from their own language or ethnic backgrounds are made in the letter to North America. Indigenous believers in Australasia are urged to study, to teach locally, and to participate internationally in the Ocean of Light programs throughout the Pacific region. Baha'is in Papua New Guinea and in the Indian subcontinent region are also asked to assist the development of Baha'i communities in other countries. Noting that the Latin American and Caribbean Baha'i communities are comprised of "a harmonious blend of groups from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds," the House of Justice urges mobilization of people from these populations not only in their local communities but elsewhere as pioneers and traveling teachers.

Specific direction regarding future administrative developments can be found in two letters. The House of Justice writes to

the Australasian region that it must take steps to establish a strong Baha'i community in French Polynesia, in preparation for the election of a National Spiritual Assembly there; likewise, Europe is advised to raise up National Spiritual Assemblies "in certain of those independent countries and major islands, such as the Farnes, which have not yet attained them."

In addition to the many overlapping themes and the particular directions given to different communities, the letters contain specific references to the spiritual heritage of the various regions of the world. Western and Central Asia, for example, are extolled as "the home of the oldest and most venerable Baha'i communities." It is recalled that India was mentioned in the first of the

Bab's writings and that Baha'u'llah Himself "selected and dispatched emissaries to propagate His Faith in India." In the letter

to North America, mention of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, a series of letters by 'Abdu'l-Baha written in the early years of the twentieth century, urging Baha'is in North America to arise, teach the Faith, and settle in farflung locations, is made: "In the eight decades since you received this mandate, your prodigious exertions have carried the message of Baha'u'llah to all parts of your continent, and throughout the length and breadth of the planet. You have played a critical role in the establishment of the framework of the Administrative Order and in the sustained

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proclamation of the Faith." To the Baha'is of Australasia, the House of Justice recalls a promise of Baha'u'llah connecting their efforts to the persecuted Baha'i community in Iran, in which He wrote, "Should they attempt to conceal His light on the continent, He will assuredly rear His head in the midmost part of the ocean and, raising His voice proclaim: 'I am the life giver of the world.'" Africa's "extraordinary history of achievement" is mentioned in the letter addressed to the Baha'is of that continent, with particular note of the beginnings of the African Baha'i community in Egypt during the time of Baha'u'llah, the remarkable opening of sixteen territories in the two-year period of 1951-53, and then the opening of a further 33 territories between 1953 and 1963. "During the course of these rapid developments," the House of Justice observes, "the African believers themselves, through sacrificial effort as teachers and pioneers, arose to champion the Cause of God, manifesting the profundity of their response to the Message of the New Day."

The letters also note the particular characteristics of the regions ; for example, to the Baha'is in Southeast Asia, the House of Justice remarks, "Among your peoples, the majority of whom have been influenced by noble and high-minded teachings of Buddhism, are many who possess a profound sense of spirituality, which is reflected in the practices of their daily lives and in the quality of their relationships with one another, with nature, and with their social institutions. They have a keen understanding of the need for coherence between the material and the spiritual." Likewise, the receptivity of the peoples in the region of the Indian subcontinent to the message of Baha'u'llah is noted.

Achievements of Baha'i communities in the various regions are also noted and praised. The Latin American and Caribbean Baha'i communities' activities in wider society, their work in social and economic development (particularly in education), their "discourse on issues such as the preservation of the environment and the organization of social action," and their interactions with leaders of thought all prompt the House of Justice to remark on their "keen understanding of the needs and aspirations" of the peoples of that region, which has enabled the Baha'is "to present the Faith to a wide range of interests." The contributions of the Baha'i communities in

Europe are noted, including the pioneers they have sent out to serve in Africa, the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Greenland; contributions made by its institutions to the external affairs work; the outstanding scholars, musicians, artists, scientists, and those "concerned with the application of Baha'i Teachings to economics and business" the continent has produced; the efforts made in the advancement of women and the strengthening of family life; and

the work of the European Baha'i Youth Council. Given all these accomplishments, the House of Justice urges them, "Now is the time to build on these achievements, clearly focusing all efforts on the central purpose of taking the Message of Baha'u'llah to a spiritually famished population."

Offering a balance of historical perspective, current analysis, and future vision, as well as both encouragement and direction, these weighty and detailed letters clearly set the course for the Baha'i community's progress over the next four crucial years.

#### Amatu'l-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum's Trip to Brazil

A letter from the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated 22 August 1996, reported an historic event in Brazil, during which Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum was the honored guest at a special session of the Brazilian Federal Chamber of Deputies, held to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the introduction of the Baha'i Faith to that country. Attended by ninety Federal Deputies, of whom fourteen spoke in recognition of the principles of the Faith "and the benefits that their application has already brought to many localities," the session was reported in the press and broadcast media. 1

In closing, the House of Justice commented, "This momentous acknowledgment of the transforming power of the Faith, so generously expressed by the governing institutions of one of the world's major nations, demonstrates both the calibre of the Brazilian believers and the growing receptivity of the world to the Message of the Cause."

1. See pp. 49- 51 for a full report of this event.

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##### Pioneering

On 15 September, 1996, the Universal House of Justice reported to the Baha'is of the world that during the Three Year Plan, completed at Rio de Janeiro in 1996, some 10,600 Baha'is, including a substantial number of youth, had arisen to serve the Faith as pioneers outside their own home countries. With the launch of the Four Year Plan, also at Rio de Janeiro in 1996, the House of Justice called upon the Baha'i community once again to respond enthusiastically and win the goals set by National Spiritual Assemblies around the world. In conclusion, the House of Justice noted:

The prospect before us as the Plan unfolds is one to thrill every Baha'i heart: the need of our fellow human beings for the Message of Baha'u'llah becomes more urgent day by day; ardent, willing and capable servants of the Cause are required in many lands and for many functions. That His eager followers in every

community will arise with devotion, audacity and determination to advance His Cause in the longing of our hearts and the object of our fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold.

Acquisition of 4, Avenue de Camoens

The National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies in Europe were notified in a letter dated 28 October 1996 of the acquisition of the apartment at 4, Avenue de Camoens in Paris, in which 'Abdu'l-Baha stayed during His visit to the city. The House of Justice noted:

This marks the first step in the acquisition of sites sanctified by the residence of the Master in the cities of Europe during the three visits He made to that continent, between 1911 and 1913, for the purpose of spreading the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, sites which are second only in holiness to those places in Istanbul and Edirne where the Manifestation of God Himself blessed the soil of the European continent.

## EVENTS

1996-97

This article describes the formation in April 1996 of two new National Spiritual Assemblies.

## TWO NEW

## NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES

The Baha'i communities of Sao Tome and Principe and of Moldova had more than the usual reason to be joyous at the 1996 Rizvan festival. In addition to commemorating the 133rd anniversary of the Declaration by Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, of His prophetic mission, delegates throughout both countries gathered together at inaugural conventions to elect their first National Spiritual Assemblies.

The purpose of the 174 National Assemblies currently in existence around the world is to stimulate, unify, and coordinate by frequent personal consultations the activities of the Baha'is and the local administrative units under their jurisdiction, initiating measures and directing in general the affairs of the Faith in their respective territories. They also maintain regular contact with the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel. The manifold functions of a National Assembly

1. Two previously existing National Spiritual Assemblies, of Rwanda and Burundi, were unable to reform at Rizvan 1996 owing to political and social turmoil in those countries.

include the publication of Baha'i literature, formulation of national teaching plans, and representation of the Baha'is in relation to the civil

authorities. The members of all National Assemblies constitute the electorate in the election, every five years, of the supreme administrative body of the Baha'i Faith, the Universal House of Justice.

National Assemblies are themselves elected according to the principle of proportional representation, whereby adult members in hamlets, villages, towns, and cities gather in unit conventions to elect their delegates to National Conventions, at which the delegates elect the nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly.

This was the procedure followed for the birth of the Baha'i world community's two newest national institutions.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Moldova 2  
About 100 Baha'is from Moldova, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United States gathered together in Chisinau from 27 to 28 April 1996 to witness the election of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Moldova. Representing the Universal House of Justice was Dr. Ilhan Sezgin, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Europe, who read the statement of the House of Justice addressed to those attending the country's inaugural convention. The message declared, "Only through the healing Message of Baha'u'llah can the age-long rivalries and prejudices between races and peoples be overcome. It is your duty and high privilege to work towards the fulfillment of such a noble goal by spreading the life-giving Teachings to your fellow countrymen, by demonstrating through your own personal lives the transforming power of the Faith and by creating, in cities, towns and villages of your country, a network of sound and harmonious Baha'i communities which can radiate the light of unity to all regions." Among those present at this gathering was Annemarie Kriiger, Knight of Baha'u'llah for Moldova, who has witnessed the development of the Baha'i community in that country from its inception to the election of its first National Assembly.

2. With the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Moldova, the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Ukraine and Moldova became the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the Ukraine.

## NEW NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES

The  
first  
National  
Spiritual  
Assembly of  
the Baha'is of  
Moldova.

It was Shoghi Effendi who initially called for the introduction of the Baha'i Faith into the territory of Moldova at the launching of the Ten Year Plan<sup>3</sup> in 1953. The first Baha'i who visited Moldova

with this goal in mind was Mrs. Kruger in 1974. As a result of her repeated trips and constant correspondence, the first Moldovan embraced the Baha'i Faith in Chisinau in 1984. Later, with the easing of restrictions and changed political conditions, Baha'is from different parts of the world were able to settle as pioneers or visit Moldova as traveling teachers. In 1991, the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Moldova was formed and placed under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of what was then the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The following year, there were 26 Baha'is and the administrative duties of this infant community were placed under the Regional Assembly of the Baha'is of the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. It was not, however, until the Three Year Plan (1993-1996) that the numbers of Baha'is expanded rapidly—from 66 in June 1994 to 173 a year and a half later—allowing for the formation of the country's own National Assembly.

3. In 1953 the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, launched a ten-year teaching plan, among the goals of which were to bring the Baha'i Faith to the main unopened territories of the world and to consolidate communities in territories where there were already Baha'is. During this period the number of National Spiritual Assemblies increased from 12 to 47. Those who arose at that time or later to open territories named as goals of the Ten Year Plan were named Knights of Baha'u'llah.

## THE BAHAI WORLD

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Sao Tome and Principe

At the time of the launching of the Ten Year Plan in 1953 Shoghi Effendi also called for the Faith to be taken to the islands of Sao Tome and Principe, off the coast of West Africa. In response to his appeal, Elise Schreiber arrived in 1954 as a pioneer from the United States, thereby becoming a Knight of Baha'u'llah for those islands. A small number of people was attracted to the Faith, despite severe trials and hardships, and a Local Spiritual Assembly was formed. For many years, because of local circumstances, there were no Baha'i visitors from outside the island. Then in 1984, under the sponsorship of the National Spiritual Assembly of Nigeria, efforts were intensified to reestablish the community, supported by collaboration with the Baha'is of Brazil, Cape Verde, Gabon, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Portugal, and the United States. Traveling teachers from Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Portugal, and the United States came to assist in teaching and consolidation. By 1988 a Local Assembly was established in the capital city of Sao Tome and three groups were formed in other cities. Kobina Fynn, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Baha'i Faith in Africa, traveled frequently to the islands, encouraging and training the Baha'is; during a three-week visit in 1994 eighty persons

accepted the Faith of Baha'u'llah. By that time there were twelve Local Spiritual Assemblies, with at least one in each of the seven

The first  
National  
Spiritual  
Assembly of  
the Bahci 'is  
ofSifo Tome  
and Principe.

#### NEW NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES

administrative districts. In July 1994 the National Teaching and Administrative Committee of Sao Tome and Principe was appointed to spearhead the community's efforts to achieve that country's Three Year Plan goals. The community was further strengthened the following year through the efforts of traveling teachers from Angola and Brazil.

Whereas the first Baha'is on those islands had experienced intimidation and even imprisonment, on 7 October 1995 the Sao Tome and Principe National Radio broadcast a detailed introduction to the Faith including mention of its status as an independent religion. By November of that year there were 17 Local Spiritual Assemblies in the islands, with two in Principe.

The first National Spiritual Assembly was established at Ric)van 1996 with Fred Schechter, Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre, representing the Universal House of Justice. The preparations, both material and spiritual, for the birth of this new institution were made by its mother Assembly, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Nigeria.

This article reports on the activities held to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the founding of the Bahil 'i community of Brazil, and, in particular, the visit ofHand of the Cause of God Amatu 'l-Baha Ru~iyyih Khanum to that country.

Amatu'l-Baha Ru41yyih Khanum in Brazil:

#### CELEBRATING 75 Y EARS of COMMUNITY GROWTH

T he first Baha'i pioneer to settle permanently in Brazil, and indeed in all of Latin America, arrived in Rio de Janeiro at dawn on 1 February 1921. Leonora Stirling Holsapple (later Armstrong) was a single woman of 26; in her purse was barely enough money to support her for two weeks; she had no job and

spoke no Portuguese. She knew no one in the city. Yet the arrival of this lone woman signaled the establishment of the Brazilian Baha'i community. And the results of her tireless efforts are clear today: by 1996 the stature of the Baha'i Faith had grown in Brazil to such an extent that whereas Leonora Holsapple Armstrong had arrived alone and friendless, a visit paid by Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Baha Ruq.iiyyih Khanum in August, to participate in the celebrations of the Brazilian Baha'i community's 75th anniversary, garnered a reception in the highest offices of the land.

The history of the Baha'i Faith in Brazil had begun two years before Mrs. Armstrong's arrival with the visit in 1919 of Martha Root, the most outstanding Baha'i teacher to arise in America,

who was identified as a Hand of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi upon her passing in 1939. Miss Root had determined to visit every country in the world to spread the Baha'i message and went to Brazil as part of her trip to the major cities of South America. Though she spoke no Portuguese and had no literature in that language, she succeeded in attracting the attention of a group of Brazilians who undertook to translate a Baha'i booklet into Portuguese. These same people assisted Mrs. Armstrong when she took up residence in Bahia.

I Amatu 'l-Baha  
Ruhiiyyih Khanum  
and International  
Counsellor  
~"-.-"-....., Shapoor Monadjem in the Brazilian  
Chamber of  
Deputies during  
the Solemn Session  
held in honor of the  
Baha'i Faith on  
16 August 1996.

Despite the patient and courageous work of Mrs. Armstrong and others, progress was slow in the beginning; there were only three Local Spiritual Assemblies in Brazil by 1947, when special efforts were undertaken to assist the Latin American Baha'is to assume responsibility for the functioning of their communities. But from that time, the Brazilian community's growth gathered momentum. In 1951 the National Spiritual Assembly of South America was elected, followed in 1957 by the election of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, and in 1961 by the first election of the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil. During the Ten Year Plan (1953-1963) a total of 13 new Local Spiritual Assemblies were

established in Brazil (twice the goal of six called for in the Plan), including in 1962 the first all-Indian Local Assembly in the Kiriri Indian community of Lagoa Grande, Bahia. 1

1. As of Ric;lván 1996, 198 Local Spiritual Assemblies had been established in Brazil.

## BRAZIL'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY

The years from 1968 to 1977 saw the Brazilian community moving from strength to strength, assisted and inspired by many visits from various Hands of the Cause, including Amatu'l-Baha Ru}iyyih Khanum. By 1977 the features of today's vigorous Brazilian Baha'i community life had emerged: involvement in public efforts to promote the status of women; the broadcasting of radio programs; participation in book fairs; the use of the arts; and a colorful community life punctuated by conferences, summer and winter schools, and continuing efforts to share the Baha'i Faith with the Brazilian people of all social conditions and ethnic backgrounds.

It is in the context of such a vibrant community life that the 75th anniversary activities were carried out. The most significant of these was the special Solemn Session held on 14 August 1996 by the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, which Ru}iyyih Khanum attended as a representative of the Baha'i World Centre.

"This special session," remarked Deputy Wilson Campos (PSDB, Pernambuco), who was presiding, "... is intended not only to serve as a moment of reflection on the teachings of the Baha'i Faith and to receive one of its most notable leaders, but primarily to provide an occasion for the Brazilian people, who we represent, to manifest their gratitude for the magnificent work begun among us 75 years ago by Leonora Armstrong."

More than 90 representatives of the Chamber of Deputies-Brazil's main legislative body-were present for the two-hour session. Representing the full range of that country's political parties, 14 deputies spoke, honoring Amatu'l-Baha as a defender of the environment, a promoter of world peace and unity, and a protector of the rights of indigenous peoples. Some 70 deputies, from all of the different parties and regions of Brazil, had signed the declaration calling for the session.

Among her other accomplishments, Ru}iyyih Khanum was honored for her six-month "Green Light Expedition" through the Amazon basin to survey the impact of development on the environment and on indigenous cultures. Motivated by her deep concern for the environment and indigenous peoples, the expedition was a ground-breaking effort to highlight the importance of indigenous cultures and the need to preserve them.

## THE BAHAI' WORLD

Tribute was also paid during the session to Mrs. Armstrong, who labored valiantly for almost 60 years to foster the growth and development of the Brazilian community; for the last seven years of her life she also served as a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in the Americas. Deputy Alzira Ewerton (PPB Block, Amazon) commented, "In 1921, the young Leonora Armstrong, sent to Brazil to spread the teachings of Baha'u'llah, made a long journey through the North and Northeast of Brazil, and went to Manaus, before settling in Bahia. One can only imagine what this must have meant, taking into consideration not only the isolation of the Amazon, but also the fact that it was a woman who made this trip, which must certainly have been surprising at a time when women simply did not do things of this nature." The speeches by the deputies covered a wide range of other topics related to the presence and activities of the Baha'i Faith in Brazil, from its involvement in social and economic development projects to the efforts of the Brazilian Baha'i community to promote unity and tolerance.

"In many cities," remarked Deputy Flavio Ams (Brazilian Social Democratic Party, Parana), "in addition to the spiritual and moral development work, Baha'is also carry out projects in the economic and educational fields, such as the School of the Nations in Brasilia; the Monte Carmelo Association in Sao Paulo; the Educational Center of Salvaterra, in Salvaterra, Para; and the rural Polytechnical Institute in Iranduba, Amazonas."

Both Alzira Ewerton (PPB Block, Amazon) and Maria Yadao (Liberal Front Party, Goias), praised the Baha'i Faith for its promotion of the principle of the equality of women and men. "The Faith of Baha'u'llah did not merely foresee equality in theory but, above all, presented a concrete model of how equality should become real in society," said Ms. Valadao.

"I believe that only the bringing together of the spiritual forces of all origins-and this is where I see that the Baha'i Faith is a very strong example of tolerance for other beliefs-will make us move forward," said Deputy Tilden Santiago (Labor Party, Minas Gerais). "Certainly, it is a very strong spiritual force that is needed to face the world of conflict and contradiction in which we live."

## BRAZIL'S 75 TH ANNIVERSARY

At the close of the session there was a call for a Baha'i prayer, and as one of Baha'u'llah's prayers for unity was recited the entire company stood in reverent silence.

That evening, Ruyiyih Khanum was the honored guest at a dinner party attended by authorities and prominent people in the capital, including the Minister of State for Administration and Senators, Federal Deputies, Ambassadors, and members of some

international organizations.

Ru}liyyih Khanum's itinerary included visits with a number of other dignitaries. The day following the Solemn Session, she met with President Fernando Henrique Cardoso at the presidential palace.

Amatu 'l-Baha  
Ru~iyyih Khanum  
at the First Latin  
American  
Conference on  
World  
Citizenship,  
in Bahia,  
August 1996.

They spoke together about the environment, global governance, and the development of the Baha'i Faith in Brazil. In addition, she was received on 8 August by the Acting Governor of Bahia, Dr. Otto R. Mendorn;a de Alencar, at which time she granted an interview to the press. That evening, a reception offered in her honor brought together city council members, artists, intellectuals, and other figures in Bahian society. On 15 August she received, in Brasilia, Yaacov Keinan, the Israeli Ambassador to Brazil, who paid a formal visit. For a total of one month, Amatu'l-Baha traveled throughout Brazil, inspiring Baha'i communities, meeting dignitaries, and participating in conferences. She also granted a number of interviews with newspaper and television reporters.

#### THE B AHA.'f W ORLD

Among her other activities, Amatu'l-Baha attended, along with some 250 participants from 13 countries, "The First Latin American Conference on World Citizenship-Practicing Unity in Diversity," held on 22 and 23 August at the Permanent Seat of the Latin American Parliament in Sao Paulo. The conference, the first of its kind in the region, brought together a wide range of elected officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social activists. It resulted in a 10-point declaration on world citizenship, for presentation to heads of state at the Sustainable Development Summit for the Americas, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia.

The statement declared that "the establishment and promotion of world citizenship" is "the greatest means for achieving peace, security and prosperity" in the world. It also called for all states to join into "some sort of world federation," saying it was "the best form of sociopolitical organization for the present-day world."

The conference was organized by Instituto Para a Cidadania Mundial (Institute for World Citizenship), an NGO whose founders include the Local Spiritual Assembly of Sao Paulo, and it

featured speeches by a wide range of regional and international figures. Among them were Amatu 'l-Baha, Professor Ervin Laszlo of the Club of Budapest; the Brazilian Minister of Culture, Francisco Weffort; the Brazilian Minister of Administration, Luis Carlos Bresser Pereira; Brazilian Federal Deputy Luiz Gushiken; Maria Terezinha Godinho , Sao Paulo State Secretary for Childhood, Family, and Social Well-Being; and Pierre Weil, President of the City of Peace Foundation.

During the event, tribute was paid to Amatu'l-Baha as a living example of a world citizen. A video about her life was shown and transmitted via satellite to a large audience and she offered a brief speech after the tribute.

A world citizenship award ceremony was also held during the conference by the National Assembly of Brazil. Sixteen women of prominence, representing different races and social classes, all of whom are actively involved in the betterment of society, were honored.

A highlight of Rul}iyyih Khanum's visit to Brazil was her return to the Amazon to commemorate the 20th anniversary of

#### BRAZIL'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY

Children gathered  
at Manaus  
International  
Airport to receive  
Amatu 'l-Baha,  
August 1996.

the Green Light Expedition. On 17 August, Rul).iyyih Khanum traveled to Iranduba, making part of the journey on a boat placed at her disposal by the Amazonas State authorities in recognition of her expedition 20 years before. In Iranduba, she visited the Djalal Eghrari Rural Institute of the Amazon, where a Baha'i conference was held at which she spoke on the destiny of the indigenous peoples and the power they have to influence the evolution of humanity.

On 18 August, the Mayor of Manaus offered the use of his boat to RuQ.iyyih Khanum for a one-day trip in the Amazon, also in honor of the 20th anniversary of her expedition. Amatu'l-Baha was accompanied by state and municipal officials concerned with the environment and five of the expedition's original seven members.

The Manaus Municipal Theater saw another event to commemorate her trip on the evening of 19 August. Amatu'l-Baha spoke before a crowd of over 400 people, including governmental authorities and other leaders of thought, about the elimination of prejudice, the equality of all humanity, and the important international role of the Amazon and its people. The program also

included folk dances, music, a showing of the video on the life of Rul).iyyih Khanum, and a film on the Green Light Expedition. Concurrent with these activities, on 16 August, the Legislative Assembly of the State of the Amazon passed a law recognizing Naw-Ruz as a Baha'i Holy Day.

Brazilian Baha'i communities were delighted by the chance to have Rul)\_iyyih Khanum amongst them in their gatherings. From

## THE BAHAI'f WORLD

9 to 11 August she attended the Second National Integration Conference in Bahia. Distinguished by the participation of many indigenous Baha'is from the area and by the use of the arts in its program, the conference gathered some 400 people from nine countries, five indigenous nations, 19 states, and 42 communities. Amatu'l-Baha spoke at the opening and at the closing of the conference and participated in a special youth meeting during the event. A discussion was held on the evening of 9 August with a panel of two city council members, a former university president, and the founder of a non-governmental project for the defence of children and youth. All the speakers addressed the theme "Baha'u'llah and the New World Order." The next day a devotional meeting was held in memory of Leonora Armstrong. From 28 August to 1 September, Amatu'l-Baha was in Foz do Igua9u, where, upon her arrival, she was greeted at the airport by the mayor's brass band and was warmly welcomed by his special deputy. While in the area, she visited Itaipu Binacional, the largest hydroelectric dam in the world, and was received with the highest respect and dignity by the dam's personnel. Invited to plant a tree in a grove planted by visiting heads of state, she carried out the task with characteristic joy and expertise, dispensing with any assistance and commenting on the great number of trees she has planted over the years.

The culmination of her trip to Brazil was a two-day conference organized by the National Spiritual Assemblies of Brazil and Paraguay, attended by some 650 people from nine countries, with many Indian tribes represented. During her remarks, Rul).iyyih Khanum pointed out the importance of the education of children in the formation of their character and emphasized the special destiny of indigenous peoples described in the Baha'i writings.

This event represented a suitable end to a memorable journey, rich in opportunities for reflection on past achievements and new resolutions for future progress.

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REVIEW

T he advent of Ri<;lvan 1997 brought to a close an eventful

year for Baha'i communities around the world. At Rio de Janeiro, 1996 Baha'is everywhere embarked on a Four Year Plan, constituting the latest in a series of plans initiated by the Baha'i World Centre and designed to systematize and stimulate the growth and development of the worldwide Baha'i community. 1 The inception of the Four Year Plan was distinguished by a vigorous and rapid planning process, engaging the attention of the community at all levels, beginning with joint consultations of the Continental Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies and extending to Auxiliary Board members and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Numerous Baha'i communities focused more intently than ever before on establishing training institutes. In many parts of the world, Baha'i involvement in the life of society took the form of special efforts to address the need for race unity. The year was also notable for the number of individual Baha'is who arose to promote the

1. See also pp. 27-37 .

teachings of their Faith through travel to distant regions and countries. This article seeks to highlight some of the specific events associated with these and other developments in the Baha'i community this year.

Certain events of particular note will not be covered in this summary but are chronicled in more detail in separate articles: The election of two new National Spiritual Assemblies; the solemn session of the Federal Chamber of Deputies in Brazil held to mark the 75th anniversary of the introduction of the Baha'i Faith into that country, at which Amatu'l-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum was the honored guest; and an update on the progress of the construction projects on Mount Carmel.

The material in this survey is organized under the following categories: community building; landmark occasions; youth; women; race unity; peace; interfaith activities; social and economic development; involvement in the life of society; moral education; contact with prominent people; recognition; sharing the message of Baha'u'llah; institutes and other training activities; scholarship; and the arts.

#### Community Building

A major task occupying Baha'i individuals and institutions is that of building the community itself. The vision of what Baha'i communities are to be has been articulated by the Universal House of Justice as "a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress." Within this context, a wide array of activities and endeavors can be described as "community building."

The influx of  
Cameroonian students

into the Baha'i  
community of Mogilov,  
Belarus, made possible  
the formation  
of the community's  
Local Spiritual  
Assembly in  
April 1996.

The observance of Baha'i Holy Days is one of the first matters to occupy the attention of new Baha'i communities, and these events are the source of spiritual refreshment and inspiration. The efforts of the following two communities merit particular mention, due to the social upheaval afflicting their countries. The Freetown, Sierra Leone, Baha'i community celebrated the Birthday of Baha'u'llah at the National Baha'i Center on 12 November 1996. Forty-five people attended the event. On 20 October 1996, Baha'is in Rwanda gathered in the National Baha'i Center to observe the Birthday of the Bab, which was announced on the Rwandan radio station. About 50 Baha'is attended the event, at which the children recited poems and Baha'i writings from memory, to the delight of the attendees. Then on 27 October, Rwandan Baha'is visited the land reserved for the construction of a House of Worship in that country, once again listening to the children read prayers and poems and sharing a meal together. In the Central African Republic, during the disturbances that took place there in May 1996, the Baha'is organized themselves in such a way as to protect each other and to guard Baha'i property. The Baha'i principle of unity in diversity was expressed by various communities in significant ways. From 21 to 23 February 1997, a Baha'i Native Council was held in Panama, during which representatives from a number of communities gathered together. Some 800 people participated each day, representing six countries, three indigenous groups within Panama, and thirty local communities. The final evening drew a crowd of about 2,000. Over the three days three doctors, one nurse, two assistants and a dietician from San Felix hospital offered urgent and simple assistance, including medications;

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on the last day all the children were vaccinated and some adults given tetanus shots. In Belarus, an influx of Cameroonian students into the Baha'i community made possible the formation of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Mogilov at Rivn 1996 and the establishment of a diverse community. In July 1996, the Tenth Annual Black Men's Gathering was held in Hemingway, South Carolina, at the Louis Gregory Institute. Attended by over 100 Black Baha'i men from the United States, the Caribbean, Canada, and Africa, the event aimed at deepening the participants' understanding of the history and

role of the peoples of African descent. As a result of the gathering, more than 45 attendees pledged to visit Africa over the following three years to share Baha'u'llah's message with the people there. The gathering was highly praised by the Universal House of Justice for simultaneously meeting the particular needs of a certain population while maintaining a universal spirit. Conferences are regularly held in Baha'i communities in order to allow people to gather from far-flung areas to create bonds and consult. The Baha'is of Freeport in the Bahamas held a conference

A group of musicians performed at the National Pacific Island Conference in South Auckland, New Zealand.

on Baha'i life from 27 to 29 September 1996. The Baha'is of Costa Rica held two simultaneous conferences in the autumn of 1996 to launch the Four Year Plan-one in San Jose and one in the indigenous area of Talamanca. In Equatorial Guinea a conference was held in the village of Ntobo this year, attended by over 50 Baha'is from various communities in the region.

A regional congress was held in the amphitheater of the Local Baha'i Center in Mo'issala, Chad, from 25 to 28 November 1996, attended by about 380 people. The purpose of the gathering was to assess the community's strengths and weaknesses and consult on the possibilities for the future. News of the conference was reported in the national press of N'Djamena and on Sarh Radio.

Members of many of the Baha'i communities in the Mediterranean region gathered near Palermo, Sicily, in September 1996 for a friendship meeting which was also attended by the Hand of the Cause 'Ali-Mulhammad Varqa. About 200 people participated. A regional conference was held on 22 and 23 February 1997 in Ngardmau, Palau, Western Caroline Islands. The attendees consulted on the role of Baha'is in society, what Baha'i culture is, and how a Baha'i can be distinguished from other individuals.

Over 220 Baha'is from all parts of Zimbabwe gathered in Harare in September 1996 for a National Baha'i Congress. The event began with a women's conference, which was attended by 35 women and featured a music and drama competition.

A key element of Baha'i community life is the seasonal school,

during which Baha'is from widely scattered areas can gather, study the Faith together, enjoy fellowship, and immerse themselves in an Baha 'is in Cochabamba, Bolivia, gathered in September 1996/or a course on the Local Spiritual Assembly.

environment in which Baha'i principles are being scrupulously followed. Such events forge bonds of unity and love among people who would otherwise rarely, if ever, meet. These schools are held in every part of the globe; the following are a representative sampling of summer, winter, and spring schools held this year.

The first joint Baha'i summer school for the communities of Japan and Korea was held in Kyongju, South Korea, from 16 to 18 August 1996. There were 61 participants from Japan, 120 from

Korea, and 10 from other countries. After the summer school, two teams made up of Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese participants arose to convey to others the message of Baha'u'llah through the use of the arts.

The fifth Bulgarian Baha'i summer school, held near the city of Stara Zagora from 29 August to 1 September 1996, was attended by 41 participants, including eight members of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Baha'is attended from Bulgaria, Germany, India, the Netherlands, Nigeria and the United Kingdom. In July 1996, a summer school was held in Equatorial Guinea, attended by 150 people, both Baha'is and others. A Baha'i summer school held in Marianao, Cuba, in August 1996 covered a variety of topics, including consultation, sharing the message of Baha'u 'llah with others, and Baha'i administration.

In Greece, the weekend of 31 May to 3 June 1996 saw a spring school for Baha'i children, dedicated to the discovery of a true Baha'i identity through the sharing of experiences, the offering of service, and the release of creativity and love. The school program interwove service activities with creative exercises.

The winter school held in Minsk, Belarus, in February 1997 was attended by some 90 people representing the countries of Belarus, Cameroon, Moldova, the Ukraine, and the United States. It included workshops on Baha'i marriage and family life, teaching moral values to children, and the effects of alcohol on the family. A winter school was held in the Khartoum, Sudan, Baha'i Center from 24 to 26 January 1997 and attended by Baha'is from various parts

of the country. Baha'i Spring Schools were also held in the Virgin Islands and in Wales.

The effort to build communities includes special attention to the needs of families and to the effectiveness of group endeavors. In Dioral, Senegal, the Baha'is have acquired a community field in which they work together, with the proceeds from the harvest going to their local fund, as well as other development projects. On 13 July 1996, Baha'is in the Mariana Islands and their families gathered at Tagachang Beach in Yona for an island-wide family camp, which included an observance of the Nineteen Day Feast, in addition to socializing and relaxation. From 22 to 26 August, "Camp Badi' 2" was held in Mayaro, by the Baha'is of Trinidad

and Tobago. The camp was an opportunity for families to gather for consultation, study, games, and relaxation in order to enhance unity of thought in the community.

The Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel, plays a vital role in Baha'i community life by providing both a spiritual and an administrative center for Baha'is all over the world. Guidance and inspiration flow out from the World Centre through the correspondence of the Universal House of Justice, while pilgrims and visitors flock to Haifa, bringing their news and enthusiasm. While in Haifa, pilgrims form bonds with other visitors from far-flung areas, further knitting together the hearts of the members of all humanity. Hand of the Cause of God 'Ali-Akbar Furlitan plays a special role in this process of building an international community. Both through his correspondence and through his daily meetings with pilgrims and visitors, during which he shares his wisdom and experiences, he provides others with a clearer picture of the society Baha'is are bringing into being.

#### Landmark Occasions

Two of this year's landmark occasions have to do with making the Baha'i writings more widely available to people the world over: the first French edition of the Kitab-i-Aqdas- the Most Holy Book of the Baha'i Faith- was published in Belgium in November 1996; and a booklet of Baha'i prayers in the ChiKalanga language was published in Botswana. It is the first Baha'i booklet to be printed in this language, which is dominant in the northeast of the country.

More than 2,500 Baha'is from 48 countries and 26 states in India thronged the Baha'i House of Worship in New Delhi on 23 December 1996 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of its dedication. A special prayer service began the celebration, during which Baha'i prayers and other writings were recited in Hindi, Urdu, and English and a 95-voice a cape/la choir sang. After the prayer service, attendees visited the Indian National Baha'i Archives, which contain some sacred relics related to the Central Figures of the Faith- the Bab, Baha' u 'llah, and 'Abdu'l-Baha- and to its early history. The government television network aired a 30-minute program on the

House of Worship, "The Jewel in the Lotus," during prime time on the same day. The next two days of the celebration were held in the Sirifort Auditorium in South Delhi and included

## THE BAHAI WORLD

This year marked the 10th anniversary of the dedication of the Bahri 'i House of Worship in New Delhi, India . More than 2,500 Bahri 'is from around the world attended the celebration.

A special cultural program, including dance and song presentations, was held to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Indian House of Worship.

a special cultural program of singing and dancing, which was attended by various dignitaries, as well as a wide variety of talks and other presentations. The Temple attracted over 28 million visitors during the ten years from its dedication to the celebration; as many as 150,000 people a day have passed through its portals, making it one of the most visited edifices in the world, and it has been mentioned or featured in numerous architectural and engineering journals for its innovative design and exquisite beauty. It was dedicated in December 1986 to "the Unity of God, the Unity of His Prophets, and the Unity of Mankind."

A new Baha'i center was opened in Imafin, in the middle bush area of Tanna Island in Vanuatu, at the end of November 1996. About 500 Baha'is attended the ceremony, which included a feast with singing and dancing and whose highlight was the placing of a copy of the Kitab-i-Aqdas in the new center. The volume, which had been laid on a bed of flowers and taken to the top of a mountain "to be closer to God," was carried down by four local

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chiefs. Customary gifts were exchanged, and the Aqdas was set in its place of honor.

On 11 November 1996 the Baha'i center in Inari, Finland, was inaugurated with a program which included the participation of two members of the Sarni Parliament and a member of the Inari municipality. The speakers emphasized the significance of the center as a promoter of fellowship, peace, harmony, and unity within the area. The Inari Local Spiritual Assembly, which operates in the heart of Lapland, makes the facility available as a regional center for the Sarni people. Additionally, a Regional Baha'i Council has been established for the whole Sarni area, which includes parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.

Didibuna is a tiny village inside an abandoned rubber plantation, one hundred kilometers west of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. On 31 November 1996, 372 people gathered there for the opening of the community's new Baha'i center. Some Baha'is traveled hundreds of kilometers to attend the event, while others from nearby coastal villages brought contributions of food. Youth song and dance groups came, and their string bands played through the night until dawn.

The Baha'is of Caacupe, Paraguay, placed the cornerstone of their future Baha'i center in October 1996. The community's financial resources are so limited that the Ministry of Health has no facilities to use for its vaccination campaigns. The Baha'is wish to offer their center for this and other community needs.

Members of the Baha'i community of Cyprus rejoiced this year that for the first time they were able to celebrate Naw-Ruz together as a united community of Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Nearly 60 Baha'is from all parts of Cyprus gathered in the Ledra Palace for a program of readings, socializing, music, and refreshments in an atmosphere of love and unity.

On 7 September 1996, Amatu'l-Baha Ru}liyyih Khanum, accompanied by Violette Na. !shjavani, participated in a conference in

Lisbon, Portugal, held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Baha'i Faith in that country. Some 300 people gathered, including Baha'is from Spain, Ireland, the United States, France, and Bulgaria. During her visit, Ru}liyyih Khanum was interviewed by a daily newspaper, which published

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an article on the event the following Sunday, and by a television crew, whose station aired a 30-minute program about the history of the Baha'i Faith in Portugal on national television on 10 November.

On 29 and 30 June 1996 four National Spiritual Assemblies in the Americas--Brazil, French Guiana, Guyana, and Surinam met together for the first time, in Paramaribo, Suriname, to discuss cooperative efforts and other subjects of mutual concern.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the Philippines, together with the country's Islamic Directorate, was presented

with the Gawad Ugnay Award during the Eighth National Trisectoral Congress of the National Social Action Council (NASAC) on 26 July 1996. NASAC is composed of members from the government, religious, and business sectors of society, and the conference's theme was "Regeneration of Values: the Role of Family for the Twenty-First Century." In further recognition of the Baha'i community's involvement with the activities of the council, the Baha'i Faith is now represented on its Executive Board.

Australian Baha'i Cathy Freeman took the silver medal at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta in the 400-meter track and field final; in so doing she became the first Australian Aborigine to win an Olympic medal. Her time was 48.63 seconds.

#### Youth

Baha'is participated in the first National Youth Congress of El Salvador, held in San Salvador on 17 September 1996. Focused on finding solutions for problems facing Salvadoran youth, the conference was attended by representatives of governmental and private agencies in addition to more than 1,400 young people. Three of the 15 Baha'is present were selected by their peers to be members of the National Commission of Salvadoran Youth, which was sworn in by Salvadoran President Armando Calderon Sol at the end of the Congress. A Baha'i was also selected to be one of ten alternate members for the Commission. The event was covered by news media. A conference on "Youth and Global Governance" was held at the Landegg Academy in Wienacht, Switzerland, from 11 to 15 September 1996. About 107 individuals from 25 countries attended the event, including representatives of various youth

Youth from diverse backgrounds posed for a picture at the Baha'i House of Worship in Sydney, Australia.

In Western Samoa,  
adults, youth, and children  
sing at a Baha'i  
Nineteen Day Feast,  
held in November 1996.

In December 1996,  
' youth from Nagaland, India, attended  
a Baha'i conference  
in New Delhi, which  
was immediately  
followed by the tenth  
anniversary  
celebrations of the  
Baha'i House  
of Worship.

Baha'i youth

in Ireland  
discuss the  
relationship  
of man to  
God at a  
workshop  
held in  
August 1996.

organizations from diverse countries. Organized by the European Baha'i Youth Council, the proceedings benefited from the active contribution of two members of the Commission on Global Governance, Madame Anna Balletbo and Lord Frank Judd.

The European Baha'i Youth Council participated in the United Nations Youth Summit held in Vienna, Austria, from 25 to 30 November 1996. Over 350 non-governmental organizations were represented, and 12 working groups were designated to discuss issues such as drug abuse, employment, education, and tolerance. The European Baha'i Youth Council's representatives participated in two of the twelve working groups- "Youth Participation and Youth Rights" and "Youth and Human Settlements."

The first Baha'i youth conference of Kyrgyzstan, held from 26 to 28 July in Bishke), was attended by some 400 Baha'is from 19 countries. Conference topics included the responsibility of youth and the role of Baha'i women at this time in history.

Malawi's annual Baha'i youth conference was held at the Amaika Baha'i Institute from 30 November to 1 December 1996. Participants came from Amalika, Nkaombe, Kankhomba, Chimeta, Nankwakwala, Blantyre, and Chiradzulo.

The third Southeast Asian Baha'i Youth Conference was held in Nongkhai, Thailand, from 6 to 9 December 1996 and was attended by over 250 youth of various ethnicities from 15 countries. The conference focused on the arts.

A Baha'i youth conference in Lima, Peru, held from 9 to 12 January 1997, was characterized by the use of the arts in encouraging and stimulating youth. The event was regarded by many as

Some of the  
235 participants  
of a training  
institute in  
Cote d'Ivoire.

a step forward in the consolidation of the Latin American Baha'i youth movement that has started to emerge over the past couple of years.

The Manzini Regional Baha'i Center in Swaziland was the scene of a Baha'i youth conference from 3 to 12 May 1996. The

first four days focused on how to tell others about Baha'u'llah's message; the next six days were spent actually teaching those in rural areas about the Baha'i Faith and its principles. About 25 Baha'i youth attended another conference held from 1 to 3 November 1996 at the same center.

From 24 to 28 December 1996, a youth conference was held at the National Baha'i Center in Kampala, Uganda. The 78 participants came from Alaska, Burundi, Canada, Chad, Kenya, New Zealand, Spain, Tanzania, Uganda, the United States, and Zambia.

A national youth conference was held in Ebo Iowa, Cameroon, from 11 to 14 July 1996. The theme of the Conference was "Transformation," and all of the topics were presented by youth. During the conference, two adults and two youth were interviewed for a radio program which was broadcast later. On 17 and 18 August 1996, 65 Baha'i youth gathered for a youth conference in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, which was fully organized by the Baha'i youth of that city. Both of the main speakers were Khmer youth, and about 20 percent of the participants were young women.

The second Baha'i National Youth Conference in Hungary was held in Bekescsaba on 23 November 1996, featuring the first performance of the Hungarian Dance Workshop, various talks,

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and workshops on the role of youth today and in the future. From 5 to 8 April 1997, the National Youth and Pre-Youth Conference was held in Oulu, Finland, giving impetus to the enhancement of local youth group activities.

With their youth unable to attend school and left idle because of the war in that country, Baha'is in Angola offered a workshop from 1 to 5 May 1996 to help the young people understand Baha'u'llah's vision of the world and the important role they can play in society. A camp was held at the Baha'i institute in Mahalapye, Botswana, for the youth who were on holiday. It provided opportunities for fellowship, as well as classes on the Baha'i Faith, music, and drama. A youth camp was also held in Belize in July 1996.

From 29 April to 2 May 1996, a spring school for Baha'i youth and junior youth took place on the island of Crete in Greece with approximately 20 participants. The young people studied the Baha'i writings and discussed topics such as the power of divine assistance, consultation, and offering a period of service to the community. On 14 and 15 December, the Baha'i community of Argentina held a celebration to mark the culmination of its "Future Society" course, which has for five years been providing youth with an opportunity to deeply study the Baha'i Faith. Salonika, Greece, saw a four-day seminar this year in which

themes such as transformation, the love of Baha'u 'llah, and the Four Year Plan were discussed. Other opportunities for youth to study the Baha'i writings were offered by the Baha'i communities of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, and Coverden, Guyana.

Ocean Waves  
Dance Workshop  
of South Korea  
performs for a  
senior citizen group  
in Kyoung Ju City  
in August 1996.

Baha'i youth in Tenerife, Canary Islands, engaged in a variety of activities to serve the community for nineteen days beginning 27 August 1996. They visited a center for people with mental disabilities and a hospital, they offered a talk and discussion on drug dependency, and visited a home for the aged in Puerto de la Cruz, helping the elderly people during their meal time and taking them to visit a zoological amusement park.

On 25 August 1996 the third "Full Color Festival" was held in Emmen, the Netherlands, to let people from different cultures in the region get to know each other better. Baha'i participation included a stand of literature and three dynamic performances of the Baha'i youth workshop "Awake."

Baha'i youth in Singapore participated in three major activities in June 1996: a 24-hour prayer vigil held on 15 June; a musical introductory meeting on 22 June; and a youth carnival on 29 and 30 June. At the 22 June meeting, the Singapore Baha'i Youth Workshop gave its first public performance at the Hilton Hotel. Baha'i youth year of service volunteers at the Native American Baha'i Institute in Houck, Arizona, in the United States, took

part in a monthly youth development program that aims to raise their awareness of their own special talents and their confidence to play a part in the development of their own communities, and to develop in them the skills necessary for offering the Baha'i message to others.

A special project in Belgium, carried out in August 1996, succeeded in attracting positive attention to the Baha'i Faith on the part of people of various backgrounds in Brussels. Sixty youth from 18 countries participated, including Panacea, a workshop composed of youth serving at the Baha'i World Centre, which contributed to the success of the project.

On 25 July 1996, Sparks of Peace, composed of some 20 youth from eleven countries in the Caribbean, premiered their program of drama, dance, music, and puppetry at Mapps College, St. Philip, Barbados. In preparation for their dispersal in teams throughout the Caribbean, they produced a cassette of stories, designed and printed a teaching pamphlet. recorded a cassette of original songs,

and wrote scripts to teach the principles of the Baha'i Faith through dramatic performances. Five went to Statia, in the West

Leeward Islands, from 27 July to 11 August, performing skits about the equality of men and women, conducting children's classes, and sharing the Baha'i message with others.

On 12 and 13 October, an Ecuadoran radio station sponsored an art contest among schools in the city of Bahia de Caraquez. The organizers invited a Baha'i Youth Workshop to open and close the program with performances of music and dance. About 1,200 people attended the event, which was held in a coliseum. The Youth Workshop performed seven artistic pieces conveying the message of the need for unity. The following day the youth also performed in the central park.

On 22 May 1996, the Maui Baha'i Youth Workshop in Hawaii performed at the Maui Memorial Stadium to all of the fifth grade classes in the county. The performance, which was sponsored by the Maui County Police Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE) program, centered on the destructive and damaging effects of drug addiction. The DARE program officers had called the Baha'i Youth Workshop "the most important tool" at their disposal "in reaching the youth of Maui County with this important message."

The Maui Baha'i Youth Workshop completed a seven-week tour of the islands in the Central Pacific on 26 July 1996. In Kiribati, over 6,000 people attended their shows, including the President, Vice-President, Cabinet members and high-ranking government officials. The Kiribati Youth Song and Drama Team, which was performing throughout the islands, joined the Hawaiian youth. In Tuvalu, about 2,000 people, representing almost a quarter of the country's population, attended the performances. In the Marshall Islands, the youth offered four performances and carried out community service, including painting several schools.

Sixteen youth who formed a song and dance workshop called Ocean Waves visited eight cities in South Korea in two weeks during the summer. The group was made up of one youth each from Germany and Guam, five from Japan, four from South Korea, and five from Taiwan.

In June 1996, a three-week project was arranged in Poland in conjunction with the visit of a Baha'i youth theater and dance group from Canada during which Baha'i classes were conducted in

many communities of the country. The Canadian youth group was on a "World Citizenship Tour/Service Project." The effort was covered in the newspaper and on the radio.

Baha'i youth in St. Martin, West Leeward Islands, formed a youth dance group this year, offering their first public performance of a dance on unity on 17 October 1996 at the Grand Case Community Center as part of the Baha'i contribution to an ecumenical

service.

Members of Europe's Diversity Dance Workshop-youth of diverse cultural backgrounds from about seven countries in at least four continents-took a year from their studies to tour Europe, with a goal of using dance to promote the principles and teachings of the Baha'i Faith. The group's itinerary included Germany, France, Macedonia, Albania, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Spain, Belgium, and Denmark.

Other Baha'i youth workshops were active this year in Alaska, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Mariana Islands, the Netherlands, Russia, and Singapore. Additionally, groups traveled in West Africa and East Africa, and dozens of workshops were busy all across the United States.

#### Women

The urgent need to raise the status and improve the living conditions of women the world over occupied the attention of the Baha'i community once again this year. The Baha'is' endeavors took the form of both awareness-raising activities and special projects.

A representative of the Baha'i Agency for Social and Economic Development (BASED) of Cameroon took part in the seventh International Forum of the Association for Women in Development, held in Washington D.C., in the United States, in September 1996. The BASED representative offered a presentation on the role of males in achieving gender equity in the family, based on the experience of the "Traditional Media as Change Agent" project.

An event to celebrate International Women's Day was held on 8 March 1997 by the National Women's Development Center, an organization of the Kiribati government. Baha'i women provided,

at the request of the organizers, devotions in Kiribati and English at the beginning of the event. Attendees included the Honorable Teburoro Tito, the President of Kiribati, and his wife, Nei Keina Tito, as well as several ministers and senior government officials, Bishop Paul Mea and other religious leaders, the Australian High Commissioner and other diplomatic representatives, and representatives of several non-governmental organizations.

A seminar in honor of International Women's Day was held at India's National Institution of Women on the topic of "Towards a Violence-Free Family."

Diane Starcher was invited as a representative of the European Baha'i Business Forum to give a presentation on "Women Entrepreneurs: Catalysts for Transformation" at the Seventh Annual Trade Fair for Women Entrepreneurs held in Madrid, Spain, from 7 to 10 November 1996. The fair aimed at giving women entrepreneurs the opportunity to rent stands to make themselves and their products or services known.

The third Women's Seminar, organized by the Baha'i Association of Women in the Canary Islands, took place from 31 May to 2 June 1996. The event was held in Grand Canary and was attended by 39 people. On 20 February 1997, a public program entitled "Empowering Women" was held in Gaborone, Botswana. Additionally, a conference on women's and children's education was held at the Baha'i Center in Gaborone on 23 March.

The tenth annual National Women's Conference in Kenya, with a theme of "Women, The First Educators of Mankind," was held at the Nakuru Baha'i Center from 14 to 18 August 1996. The conference included workshops where participants could learn how to make various handicrafts. Attendees from the central and western parts of the country offered traditional dances and songs, and an evening of entertainment was presented by the Baha' i youth, who sang, danced, and performed plays. On 2 June 1996, the

Delta State chapter of Nigeria's Baha'i Office for the Advancement of Women held a conference for women. Men who had helped set up were observers at the event, during which talks were delivered on various topics relating to women.

The Malaysian Baha'i community engaged this year in an array of activities to address the need to raise the status of women. Baha'is in Tampak helped organize a public forum, held on 28 September 1996, for sharing experiences of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing; a family workshop focusing on women's and men's differing needs was held in August 1996; and Baha'i women took part in State Women's Day on 28 September 1996.

A three-day course on empowering women was held in July 1996 by Baha' is in Cape Town, South Africa. Attended by older women who had habitually served behind the scenes of various activities without putting themselves forward, the event was seen by many as a profound and moving experience that offered them a precious opportunity to express themselves freely without feeling ashamed for not being well educated.

Two events in Australia this year highlighted the role of women as peacemakers: more than 100 people participated in a one-day conference held in Fremantle, Western Australia, entitled "Achieving Peace: A Dream of the Past and a Reality of Today"; and over 250 people attended the Clara and Hyde Dunn Memorial Dinner and Lecture in Melbourne, held this year on 16 November 1996,

which featured Wilma Ellis, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in the Americas, speaking on the theme "Women: Peacemakers, Reformers, Leaders." Also in Australia, a visit by Patricia Locke, a Lakota Sioux from South Dakota who serves on the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly, to an indigenous women's meeting in Mt. Morgan created new bonds and moved many of those present. Mrs. Locke, who is the executor of an international institute dealing with Native American language issues, was the first Native American woman to win a MacArthur Fellowship. 2

The Baha'i community of India kept up a steady stream of events designed to address issues of concern to women and raise

2. See The Baha'f World 1995- 96, p. 86.

their status in that country. A seminar hosted by the Indian Baha'i Office for the Advancement of Women this year focused on the empowerment of women as a key to the alleviation of poverty. That office, in collaboration with other organizations, also hosted a seminar on 25 April 1996 on "Creating Violence-Free Families." The chief guest was Padma Seth, a member of the National Commission for Women. The states of Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Manipur also saw special gatherings for women organized by the Baha'i community, in conjunction with literacy classes and discussions on the role of women in development. Vocational training for women was offered by Baha'is in Bihar and West Bengal.

In August 1996, phase II of the "Traditional Media as Change Agent" project was presented in five villages of the Kadei Division of Cameroon. Sponsored by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and by the Baha'i International Community, the project uses dramatic sketches, songs, dances, and stories to identify problems in the communities such as lack of education, inequality between men and women, and attachment to obsolete customs. At the end of the presentations, men and women from the villages were selected to discuss the implications of the problems and to make recommendations about how they could be solved. As a result of these consultations, four of the communities created farming cooperatives, two purchased com mills to lessen the strain of the women's work, and one dug a well for drinking water with the assistance of an American Peace Corps volunteer. Literacy and health classes for women were offered in various communities in the Gambia. One community included a lesson in sesame brittle production, to assist the women in generating income. In Sweden, a Baha'i woman has begun holding regular meetings for young girls aimed at strengthening their identities and opening up a dialogue with them on the deep questions of life. The Baha'i Frauen Forum (Baha'i Women's Forum) was established in Germany in June 1996 with a meeting at the Baha'i

National Center. To demonstrate the Baha'i community's commitment to the principle of the equality of men and women, the forum welcomes the membership of men as well as women and it elected one of the male participants as a member of its board of directors.

### Race Unity

Representatives of the Welsh Baha'i community attended a reception held by the Commission for Racial Equality in St. David's Hall, Cardiff, this year. The reception launched the "Roots of the Future" project, a large exhibition that features photographs and images showing that ethnic diversity is nothing new in Britain.

The first Annual General Meeting of the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Equality took place in Belfast on 11 May 1996. Nooshin Proudman, a Baha'i from Derry who had chaired the body during its first year of existence, was reappointed as its chairman. The council has responsibility for fostering good race relations in Northern Ireland.

On 12 June 1996, the Baha'is of East London, South Africa, invited the public to join them in celebrating Race Unity Day. About 400 people gathered to mark the occasion, including the mayor, who was the keynote speaker. The Italian Consul in East London also spoke at the event. A number of choirs and dancers performed, including an Afrikaans primary school choir, an Indian

dance group, African choir and dance groups, and Philippine dancers.

Baha'is all over Australia vigorously tackled issues of racial unity and Aboriginal reconciliation this year, mounting a number of short- and long-term initiatives. The National Spiritual Assembly of Australia published a statement on racism and offered a submission to the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Children. In addition, a special service was held at the Australian House of Worship on 8 December 1996 in honor of Human Rights Day, and at the reception held at the National Center beforehand Chris Sidoti, the Australian Human Rights Commissioner, spoke about the continuing problem of racism. The Baha'i Committee for the Advancement of Women

hosted a meeting on 10 December 1996 at which Annette Peardon, the State Secretary of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Center, spoke of her experience of being taken from her family at the age of seven under government separation policies and being placed in a girls' home. On the local level, Baha'is organized or participated in celebrations of cultural diversity in Sydney, Warringah, and Wollongong. The Baha'i community of Rockdale organized a "Week

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of Prayer for Aboriginal Reconciliation" which was attended by Robert McClelland, the Federal Member of Parliament for Barton and George Thompson, the State Member of Parliament for

Rockdale. Mr. Thompson's report on the event was published in the Hansard Proof for 11 June 1996.

The Canadian Baha'i community's National Race Unity Award was presented this year on 22 March 1997 to Vision TV at a ceremony in Toronto. Accepting the award were Vision TV's President, Fil Fraser, and Rita Deverell, Vice President of Production and Presentation. Members of Parliament Jean Augustine and Gurbax Malhi attended the event along with other dignitaries and representatives of many faith groups and organizations. Vision TV, known as Canada's Faith Network, was selected for the award in recognition of its unique national role in promoting racial unity. Many of its programs uncompromisingly examine and celebrate race, religion, and culture and clarify misconceptions in an effort to eliminate stereotypical attitudes and racial bigotry.

Also in Canada, over 30 local Baha'i communities participated in Unity in Diversity week, an initiative of the National Spiritual Assembly, often observed in collaboration with likeminded organizations and featuring proclamations by mayors and city councils, festivals, conferences, and public service projects. The intent of Unity in Diversity week is to celebrate diversity as a source of strength and beauty in the community.

Rajen Prasad, New Zealand's Race Relations Conciliator, met with members of the Baha'i community on 24 June 1996, seeking to establish a working relationship in addressing questions of race relations. The Baha'is presented Dr. Prasad with a number of documents pertaining to the subject, including *The Prosperity of Humankind*, *The Promise of World Peace*, and several books written by Baha'is on race unity and cultural diversity.

Baha'i communities in the United States responded to a series of burnings of black and multiracial churches by taking part in inter-faith services and through a statement issued by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. The statement said, in part, ". . . these acts are directed at all humanity, for humanity is one."

"Racism: Just Undo It," a non-profit group which began as an effort of the Baha'is of New York City, recently took its third annual

Show of Solutions campaign into New York City schools, aiming to help children learn to problem-solve and contribute to the building of a world free from racial prejudice. Baha'is also sponsored or took part in a number of conferences dedicated to eradicating racial prejudice. Once again this year, Baha'i communities participated, and often took a leadership role, in local observances of Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January 1997 throughout the United States. In Wenatchee, Washington, the Baha'is initiated a multiethnic event called "Celebration of Unity," which was attended by over 200 people. Localities where Baha'is marched in King Day parades and hosted and attended services and commemorations of

the day included San Jose, and Los Angeles, California; Olean, New York; Colorado Springs, Denver, and East Boulder County, Colorado; Sun Prairie, Wisconsin; Sanford, Florida; Greenbelt, Maryland; Carrollton, Houston, and Plano, Texas; and Gallup, New Mexico.

Baha'i communities in the United States also drew attention to the evils of racial prejudice through organizing observances of Race Unity Day in June 1996. A commemoration sponsored by the Baha'i community of Marquette, Michigan, featured a tree planting near the grave of Native American Chief Kawbawgam. An interracial Baha'i couple involved with the event returned home from the celebration to find a Race Unity Day flier marked up with racial epithets, a swastika, and a Ku Klux Klan symbol. This garnered significant media attention to the efforts to promote racial unity. Many other Baha'i communities held celebrations of the day, including the Baha'is of the Central California coast; New York, New York; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Clarkdale, Arizona; Woodbridge, Virginia; Inverness, Florida; Lansing, Michigan; Lexington, Kentucky; Chicago, Illinois; Kansas City, Kansas; Aberdeen/Raymond, Washington; and Austin, Texas.

#### Peace

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Puerto de la Cruz on the island of Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, collaborated with the city government in organizing an observance of UN World Peace Day on 22 September 1996. The event featured a series of activities held from nine in the morning until midnight in the city's central square,

Plaza del Charco, including a children's art and handicraft contest, a "Peace Concert," and the presentation of a work of art to the mayor. Over 1,000 people attended the celebration, two regional newspapers published articles announcing it, and two television channels interviewed Baha'is.

During social upheavals in the Central African Republic in spring 1996, the Baha'is offered a prayer for peace on the radio and then subsequently organized a concert for peace, held on 25 July, which featured a musical group of youth known as "Les Jardiniers de Dieu." Nearly 1,000 people attended the concert and a crew from the national television station was present. The Baha'is also presented programs on Central African television dealing with "peace and development" and "peace and justice."

The third Baha'i Peace Relay was held in Japan on 6 August 1996, running under the slogan "Peace- Pass It On." Leaving Hiroshima, Japan, at 8:15 a.m. on 6 August 1996, and arriving in Nagasaki at 11 :02 a.m. on 9 August, the 30 runners in this year' s relay team represented eight different countries and a variety of ages. Nippon Hoso Kyokai (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) broadcast the last part of the Peace Run on Nagasaki TV news, and one of the NHK

reporters was inspired to join a team and run the last few meters. The Baha'is of Sri Lanka held an observance of United Nations World Peace Day at the National Center on 21 September 1996. About 60 people attended the event, for which the guest speaker was Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council. A reception was held on 26 April 1996 in Chisinau, Moldova, to mark the contribution of a sample of Moldovan soil to the Baha'i

The second International Native Council was held from 21 to 23 February 1997 at the Guaymi Cultural Center in Soloy, Panama.

community, to be added to the Peace Monument in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1997. The soil was taken from the foot of the oak tree under which King Stephen the Great was reputed to have enjoyed resting, in the forest near the Capriana Monastery. Various government departments, state agencies, and non-governmental organizations sent representatives to the ceremony.

In all the Peace Monument received soil from nine countries this year.<sup>3</sup>

Interfaith

Baha'u'llah exhorted His followers to "consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship."

Accordingly, Baha'is eagerly take up opportunities to work hand in hand with other religious groups and people of other faiths.

The Baha'i community of Tallinn, Estonia, held a panel discussion on 12 January 1997, on the occasion of World Religion

Day, with the attendance of the Director of Religious Affairs of the Estonian Government, Mr. Au, as the guest of honor. The crew of the national television station filmed the event and interviewed a member of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Baltic States. A report was broadcast the same evening during the prime time news and current events program.

Abdullah Tarmugi, Singapore's Minister for Community Development, offered the keynote address during the World Religion

Day commemoration held on 19 January 1997. This third annual observance of the Day was cosponsored by the Inter-Religious Organization of Singapore and the Baha'i community, and was attended by about 1,000 people. The event was covered by television, and reports were published in newspapers.

On 27 November 1996, two Baha'i representatives participated with the Hong Kong Network on Religion and Peace on a visit to the Kowloon Mosque. The visitors were given a tour and were

invited to observe an evening prayer session.

In Orissa, India, Baha'is assisted in the organization of the World Religion Day observance, whose theme this year was "Communal Harmony," a topic welcomed by both local government

3. See p. 129 of this volume for further details.

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officials and the general public. A Baha'i representative spoke at the event, which was attended by some 120 people of diverse backgrounds. The "Communal Harmony Run" held on 20 August 1996 in Orissa also featured the participation of a number of Baha'i youth.

The Ministry of Education of Botswana called for workshops in Kanye and Gaborone to discuss the expanded syllabus for religious education with the junior secondary schools. A representative of the Baha'i Faith responded by making a well-received presentation to forty teachers from private and government schools and providing source materials.

A member of the Baha'i community of Mauritius made a presentation on the human soul at a two-day conference on life after death, which was organized by a group that promotes unity among religions . The event took place on 6 and 7 February 1997 at the University of Mauritius and involved the collaboration of a number of other religious groups.

A Baha' i interfaith conference on "Women, Equality and Religion" was held at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, on 22 June 1996. It was organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Ibadan

Various religions were represented at the Singapore Saha 'i community's third observance of World Religion Day on 19 January 1997.

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Ibadan sponsored an interfaith conference on " Women, Equality, and Religion " on 22 June.

and featured representatives of the Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, and Islamic religions. After each presentation, the floor was opened for questions for one hour.

A Baha'i participated in a seminar on religious minorities held from 18 to 20 July 1996 in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and organized by the Christian Study Center. Thirty-five representatives of minority religions attended the event, at which the Baha'i participant spoke and distributed a paper on collaboration among religious minorities.

### Involvement in the Life of Society

More than ever before, Baha'i communities and individuals made strenuous efforts to contribute solutions to the problems vexing society, confronting such issues as the environment, health care, human rights, and the need for world government.

On 5 June 1996, the International Day of the Environment, the

Baha'i community of El Salvador sponsored a seminar entitled "Let Us Protect Our Planet," which included the participation of the president of the Legislative Assembly Commission for Protection of Environment and Public Health, a USAID official for Environment, and a representative of the Green Project. Baha'is distributed a

paper at the event on the subject of "The Spiritual Dimension of the Ecological Problems."

The Baha'i-sponsored Children's Environmental Art Exhibition took place in Hong Kong from 1 to 4 October 1996 at the Visual Arts Center in Hong Kong Park. May Ng of the Friends of the Earth officiated at the opening ceremony, and the exhibition was covered by one English and two Chinese newspapers.

In Trinidad and Tobago, an interfaith service, environmental walk and brunch took place simultaneously in Port of Spain, San Fernando, and Tobago, on 2 June 1996. During the interfaith service, which was held at the Wild Flower Park, Baha'i prayers and writings were read.

This year an Albanian association dedicated to assisting children with mental retardation held a seminar at the Baha'i Cultural Center in Tirana. A Baha'i psychologist, Farhad Sobhani, offered the presentation on the topic. In Bangladesh, the third Rural Health Workers Training Course was completed in spring of 1996. The two-month course sought to imbue participants with the spirit of service to humanity, and to impart knowledge that will enable them to contribute to the health of their communities.

The fourth European Baha'i Health Conference took place in Budapest, Hungary, from 18 to 20 October 1996. Organized by the Tahirih Institute of the Netherlands, in cooperation with a committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of Hungary, the gathering brought together 58 delegates from 16 countries. The main themes discussed were the health effects of family disruption; violence within the family; racism in the health-care profession, and discrimination in health provision; science and its effects at international, national, and local levels; and other topics related to health, in the light of the Baha'i teachings.

Baha'i communities around the world frequently held special observances for various United Nations Days and other related events. About 60 people gathered at the Baha'i Regional Center in Bamenda, Cameroon, to celebrate the UN International Day of the Family on 15 May 1996. Two speakers addressed the audience on the theme "The Family and the Fight against Poverty." On 27 August 1996, an official delegation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Luxembourg and other members of the Luxembourg

Baha'i community attended the World Congress of the World Federation of United Nations Associations held there. In Guyana, the Baha'is held observances of United Nations Charter Day, on

26 June 1996, and International Day of Peace, on 17 September. The Baha'is in the Philippines celebrated United Nations Day with a meeting held in Manila on 27 October 1996 on the theme of "World Citizenship, a Global Ethic for Sustainable Development." Among the speakers were the mayor of Makati City, who gave the welcoming remarks, and the United Nations representative. In the

The singing group  
"Nighingales "  
from north Malaita,  
Solomon Islands,  
walked for two days  
to get to Tiriuna to  
participate in the  
"Ocean of Light"  
Teaching project,  
held in November  
1996.

audience were ambassadors, representatives of the government, the business sector, and religious groups.

On 15 July 1996, Baha'is in Uruguay held an event to pay tribute to the United Nations in the Feast Room of the Uruguayan Parliament- the first time in the history of that body that a religious minority held an official act there. The advisor to the Uruguayan Vice-President attended the event, and messages were received from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the President of Uruguay, and various other governmental officials and members of Parliament.

On the 51 st anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, the Albanian Baha'i community, in collaboration with the Albanian Forum of Non-governmental Organizations, held a commemorative event at the Baha'i Cultural Center in Tirana which was attended by over fifty guests, most of them members of various Albanian NGOs. Baha'is in Albania also held round-table discussions at the Baha'i Cultural Center on the occasions of International Volunteers' Day for

Social and Economic Development, on 5 December 1996, and Human Rights Day, on 10 December. The Baha'is of Bangladesh observed UN Human Rights Day on 10 December 1996 by holding public events in Rajshahi, Khulna, Chittagong, and Dhaka. Concern for human rights sparked other Baha'i community efforts this year. The National Spiritual Assembly of Cyprus sponsored a gathering in Nicosia on 22 January 1997 whose featured address was "Global Human Rights: Vision and Reality." The talk was delivered by Ambassador Andreas Mavrommatis, a member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee at the Center for Human Rights in Geneva. He formerly served as Ambassador and

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Cyprus to the United Nations in New York.

At the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Baha'i representatives in New Zealand attended two fora on international human rights, in Wellington and in Auckland. Topics discussed included the Rights of the Child; the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; and the establishment of a network of national human rights institutions in the Asia-Pacific Region.

On 23 January 1997, the Romanian Institute for Human Rights held a reception in connection with the publication of Reference Points for a Human Rights Philosophy, by Irina Moroianu Zlatescu and Victor Dan Zlatescu, the last chapter of which is entirely devoted to the Baha'i Faith. At the reception the Baha'i delegation had the opportunity to meet a number of government officials.

A group of Baha'is attended the First National Conference of Human Rights at the Nereu Ramos auditorium of the Brazilian House of Representatives on 26 and 27 April 1996. Proposals for the National Plan for Human Rights were formulated at the event and submitted to President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Minister of Justice Nelson Jobim.

On 11 October 1996, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited all the human rights non-governmental organizations, including the Baha'i community, to a meeting in preparation for the 53rd Session of the Commission on Human Rights. The Ministry asked the non-governmental organizations for their input on what subjects should be raised at the Commission.

The questions of international cooperation and global governance also demanded the attention of Baha'i communities this year. Baha'is in the United Kingdom collaborated with the Commission on Global Governance and the United Nations Association in organizing a conference on "Governance in the Global Neighborhood."

The event took place on 2 November 1996 at the International Students' House in London and was attended by over 90 people from 10 countries.

The first National Conference on Global Governance in Costa Rica was held on 22 and 24 October 1996 in the Ex-President's Hall of the National Legislative Assembly. Initiated by the Baha'i community and cosponsored by the United Nations Development Program, the National Legislative Assembly, the Ministry for External Affairs, the Arias Foundation for Peace, the University for Peace, the University of Costa Rica, and the National University, the event focused on discussion of the report of the International Commission on Global Governance, Our Global Neighborhood. The Fifth International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society was held in Budapest, Hungary, from 25 to 27 October 1996,

on the theme "A Planetary Consciousness for an Ever-Advancing Civilization." It was organized by the Club of Budapest, Landegg Academy, and the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland. Messages were received from Amatu'l-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum and from the Vice-President of the United States, Al Gore. Sir Yehudi Menuhin, 1992 Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Gertrude Mongella from the United Nations Development Program, and Vigdis Finnbogadottir, former President of Iceland, gave keynote speeches. A concert was given on the second evening by the Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Ken-Ichiro Kobayashi, and the Club of Budapest "First Planetary Consciousness Prizes" were awarded to Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, and to a group of folk dancers and choreographers. Sir Yehudi Menuhin and Sir Peter Ustinov presided over the awards ceremony.

From 2 to 16 September 1996, four conferences were held in Mexico City by the Baha'is of Mexico, all of which had the theme "A New World Order." The second annual Baha'i Conference on

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"Law and International Order" was held at the De Poort Conference Centre in Groesbeek, the Netherlands, from 19 to 22 September 1996. The gathering featured Mohsen Enayat's Dr. Aziz Navidi Memorial Lecture on "The Evolution of the World Order" and focused on the statement Turning Point for All Nations and on the challenge of global governance.

The Baha'is of Altenkirchen, Germany, held the Fifth Festival for International Understanding on 2 June 1996 under the patronage of the Minister of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate, Walter Zuber. About 600 people attended the festival, which featured the participation of a number of district and city officials. The Baha'is also collaborated with the World Federalist Movement and Terra One World Network in the organization of a panel discussion on the topic of "Globalization-A Challenge to the Nations." This event was held at the University Club in Bonn on 9 December 1996.

A panel discussion on "The Role and Involvement of the Worldwide Community: A Turning Point for All Nations" was held at Sala dello Stenditoio of the Ministry for Cultural Endowments and Environment in Rome, Italy, on 6 December 1996. Organized by the Baha'i community in cooperation with Ecole Instrument de Paix (EIP), the event had the goal of opening a dialogue between the institutional and academic worlds and non-governmental organizations in the search for a common strategy to help solve worldwide problems.

Baha'i communities made other efforts to address a wide variety of social

issues. Drums of Light, a group composed of native Alaskan Baha'is, assisted in the planning and organization of Celebration '96 in Juneau, Alaska. The event took place from 6 to 8 June 1996 and brought over four thousand people together to celebrate their native heritage.

Baha'is in Florida, Uruguay, organized a meeting in November 1996 that focused on the role of women in the establishment of peace and included the participation of various professionals and people of capacity. A reporter from a local journal interviewed the Baha'is and the next day an article was published. A second event focused on "The Planet: Our Home" and featured an exhibition of local art. The next day an article was published in the newspaper

El Hera/do and an interview with the Baha'is was broadcast during a local television station's news bulletin.

In late November 1996, the Baha'is of Nepal organized a number of activities to promote education. A public talk by a Baha'i who is an educator was held in Kathmandu and attended by 70 people, including the former Nepalese Ambassador to the United Nations; a luncheon and forum was cosponsored by the Baha'i community and the United Nations Development Program Resident Representative; and a presentation was made to 15 leading educators and various other dignitaries on the topic of "Educational Reform and Development." News of the public talk in Kathmandu was published in the government's newspaper, and an interview with the speaker, Dwight Allen, was aired on Nepalese television. On 17 October 1996, a Baha'i joined representatives of several religions in a half-hour prayer and meditation session at the Trocadero esplanade in Paris, France. The prayer session formed part of the event organized by the French humanitarian association ATD Quart Monde to mark the "World Day of Refusal of Extreme Poverty" and opened with some comments by the Baha'i representative and with a reading of a passage from Baha'u'llah's writings that begins "Be generous in prosperity and thankful in adversity." From 6 to 13 July 1996 a series of public lectures and seminars was held during the Finnish Baha'i summer school in Rovaniemi. Based on the themes "The Necessity of a New View of Man," "Human Relations in a New Cultural Environment," "Turning Point For All Nations," and "The Future of Ethnic Cultures," the meetings featured the participation of experts in various fields and the chairman of the Sarni Parliament. In January 1997, the Baha'is of Chile received a formal invitation to offer their views to a session of the Senate Committee deliberating on the text of a legal framework ensuring religious freedom and equality before law in that country.

Twenty-five members of the Baha'i Esperanto League attended the 81 st International Esperanto Congress, held in Prague, Czech

Republic, from 20 to 27 July 1996. Associated events included a Baha'i presentation entitled "Carrying Forward an Ever-Advancing Civilization," which was attended by 80 participants, and a Baha'i public meeting held at the Congress Center and attended by about

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60 people. Throughout the Congress, the Baha'i Esperanto League members maintained a display and information booth.

The European Baha'i Business Forum (EBBF) held its fourth annual conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, from 18 to 20 October 1996. The theme of the event was "Moral and Ethical Principles in a Social Market Economy," and it was sponsored by the Bulgarian Association of the Club of Rome; the Institute for Sustainable Development; the Federation of Consumers; the College of Management, Trade and Marketing; the National Museum "Man and Earth"; the International Association of Architecture; and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Bulgaria. About 60 people attended the gathering. EBBF also sent a delegation to the World Food Summit's parallel NGO Forum from 11 to 17 November 1996 in Rome, Italy.

In Hong Kong, the Baha'is presented their third Baha'i Award for Service to Humanity at a luncheon on 12 November 1996—the Birthday of Baha'u'llah. The recipient of the award was Sansan Ching, a leading educationalist in Hong Kong who has served the community in this field for over 24 years. More than 160 people attended the luncheon.

On 10 August 1996, the Baha'is of Jamaica hosted a media conference at the Pegasus Hotel. Sponsored by the Baha' i International Community's Office of Public Information and WETV (the first global access television network), the purpose of the gathering was to explore how to use television effectively—giving expression to positive actions, strengthening cultural identity and diversity, and further enhancing social and economic development. About 35 of the country's key decision-makers and independent producers attended the conference, including the Managing Director of JBC-TV, the Director of CPTC, two representatives from the Prime Minister's office, and representatives from UNESCO, CARIMAC, and CVM-TV.

Three Baha' i communications professionals from Canada who participated in the conference held a three-day workshop on how to produce video programs, training local Baha'is in filming techniques and low cost production methods for various uses , including community development work.

Two Baha'is in the Cook Islands have been visiting the inmates at the prison in Arorangi each week to offer music, talks on spiritual

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matters, and fellowship. The aim of the visits is to give the

inmates an opportunity to rethink their attitude towards life and help them acquire a positive outlook. Baha'i youth from Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, and Switzerland participated in a social service project in Crete from 1 to 8 August 1996. Activities included cleaning Lindo beach, donating blood, visiting sick children at the hospital, visiting the residents of a home for the aged, and distributing leaflets on protecting the environment. In San Diego, California, in the United States, Baha'is are playing a large role in the running of the Hmong Homework Center for Children. This after-school service is held in a public library and offers assistance with homework and reading skills to Hmong children. Young Hmong and Vietnamese women and men from San Diego high schools, colleges, and universities offer their assistance whenever they can and stand as role models for the children. Of particular concern to Baha'is everywhere is the promotion of universal education, with an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the purpose of serving humanity. This focus on service and education is evoking a response from the wider society. This year the National University of Bangladesh established a College of Law named after Jabbar Eidelkhani, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Asia residing in Bangladesh, in recognition of his services as a promoter of education and knowledge throughout Asia, particularly in Bangladesh itself. Nikhilesh Dutta, the Deputy Attorney General of Bangladesh, attended the inaugural ceremony, as did members of the Supreme Court. On 8 June 1996, at the request of the teachers and students and with the approval of the authorities, a public primary school in Rende, Italy, was dedicated to Giuseppe Stancati, a 12-year-old Baha'i who had died a few years before. In a ceremony attended by civil, religious, and cultural authorities, the school was dedicated to the child in memory of the attitude he showed towards other people's difficulties in spite of his own serious cardiac illness. The boy ultimately donated his eyes to two people in need, so that they would be able to see "the beautiful things of the world." The emphasis in Baha'i communities on social and economic development derives from a fundamental belief in the need for "a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements

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of life on earth": spiritual attainment cannot occur in isolation from the promotion of justice and the advancement of civilization. The efforts of Baha'is in the field of development and human prosperity reflect this link between the spiritual and the material. The following are a few examples of the ways Baha'i individuals and communities are putting spiritual principles to work for the betterment of humanity. "On the Wings of Words," the Baha'i project to promote literacy among 10 to 16 year olds of Guyana, was publicly launched on 27

May 1996 at the National Cultural Center. In the first months of the project's operation, 250 people were trained as facilitators and classes for children were established in communities throughout Guyana.

The Baha'i community participated in a seminar organized in Dada, Burkina, by the Provincial Direction for Basic Education and Literacy, from 26 to 27 August 1996. Baha'i literacy efforts in Burkina were described at the event.

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Zomba in Malawi started literacy classes for some 18 students, while the Malaysian Baha'i community's task force for adult literacy held a series of teacher training courses to provide needed resources for running adult literacy classes. Literacy training was also carried out in Togo for 26 participants, with four rising up to be literacy trainers and the remaining 21 prepared to be literacy teachers.

Baha'is in the Netherlands helped organize a conference held by the National Commission on Sustainable Development (NCDO) on 13 December 1996 which was designed to reflect the role that organized religion and ideological movements could play in sustainable development. The gathering was attended by 1,200 participants, of whom more than 60 were Baha'is. A Baha'i sat on two interreligious panel discussions on sustainable development, and the Baha'i community of Rotterdam created a prayer room at the event which was open to the participants for silent meditation throughout the day.

On 24 July 1996 in Uganda, a delegation of two Baha'is met with Professor Buhatunde Thomas, the local representative of the United Nations Development Program. Mr. Thomas was presented with *Turning Point For All Nations, Call To The Nations, The Prosperity of Humankind* and *The Baha'is*. He was informed of ways the Baha'i community is involved in the promotion of the equality of men and women and in health and literacy programs.

The involvement of the Baha'i community of India in efforts to promote social and economic development took many forms this year. A number of medical camps made free medical care available to thousands of people in Jammu, Karnataka, and Bihar. Baha'is also participated in a conference on cancer prevention held on 22 September 1996 in Delhi. In Delhi, both the "Perfect Health Mela" in October 1996 and the "Social Development Fair" in April 1997 saw intense activity at the sites of the Baha'i stalls.

Under the sponsorship of the International Association of Baha'i Publishers, a Baha'i exhibit was mounted at the Sixth International Beijing Book Fair in China in November 1996. The collection of literature reflected the theme "Fostering the Prosperity of Humankind." News coverage of the fair by the national English-language television station CCTV (China Central Television) included an interview with one of the Baha'i exhibit staff.

The Townshend International Secondary School in Hluboka

nad Vltavou, in the Czech Republic, a Baha'i-inspired educational institution, held its first graduation ceremony on 29 June 1996. Graduating students received praise from the state official who had overseen their exit examinations; their oral performance, respect for the teachers, spirit, and high potential received particular comment. The Banani International Secondary School in Zambia, a school for girls established in 1993 by the Baha'i community of Zambia in memory of Hand of the Cause of God M'lisa Banani, was officially inaugurated on 18 May 1996 by the Minister of Education in conjunction with the Baha'i community. The inaugural speeches were interspersed with presentations by the school's choir, drama group, and dance workshop. The inauguration was broadcast on national radio and television and was covered in the newspapers.

#### Moral Education

Baha'i communities are increasingly turning their attention to the need for moral education in society at large, and now more than ever before Baha'i initiatives in this field are gaining the attention of leaders of society who are searching for new ways to address a general decline in morality.

The School of the Nations in Macau, which is owned and directed by a foundation whose purpose is to provide education inspired

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by Baha'i principles and concepts, won first prize for innovative secondary curriculum in a contest organized by the Macau education department.

The prize-winning curriculum has as an integral feature a character development program that strives to strengthen the spirit of service in the students.

The National Spiritual Assembly of Thailand, in collaboration with Assumption University, the National Research Council of Thailand, and the National Institute of Development Administration of Thailand, held an Asian Baha'i Moral Education Seminar at Assumption University in Bangkok on 21 and 22 June 1996. Speakers included the Vice-President of the university, Brother Banta Saenghiran, and the Director of the National Institute for Development Administration of Thailand, Dr. Duangduen Bhanthumnavin.

On 2 August 1996, seventy-one individuals gathered for a lecture on "Values and Social Development" held in Baguio City, the Philippines, under the auspices of the local Baha'i community. Fifty-three of the participants were teachers of values education from Baguio City National High School and Pines City National High School. A series of Baha'i moral education classes began on 19 January 1997 in Hong Kong. The classes aim to teach the concepts of virtues, such as trustworthiness, courtesy, and cleanliness, through talks, storytelling, discussions, and games.

On 16 March 1997, a meeting was held to introduce to a group in Kiribati the material of the Virtues Project, a program initiated

by three Baha'is and aiming to help families and individuals to live by their deepest values. Subsequently, a group of Baha'is in Bikenibeu met weekly to study the material.

Representatives of the Baha'i community of St. Vincent and the Grenadines met with the Minister of Education, John Hom, to discuss issues concerning the improvement of education in St. Vincent. He subsequently arranged for a Baha'i delegation to speak on moral education to some 300 students and 20 staff members of Union Island High School. The Baha'is also conducted two classes on moral education, presented books on education to a number of primary schools and to the National Library, and held several public meetings on the topic.

The Baha' i community of India' s Office for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with UNICEF, on 27 November 1996

In th e Philippines,  
a group of  
children  
participate  
in the closing  
ceremonies of a  
Bahri 'i tutorial  
school.

Teachers  
at the Tender  
Kiddies Foundation  
School in Nigeria  
discuss raising  
children as  
peacemakers.

held a seminar in New Delhi entitled "A New Framework for Values Education." Participants, representing various non-governmental organizations, engaged in discussion of matters relating to moral education, listened to talks by eminent educators, and attended workshops. On 10 and 11 February 1997, a workshop on moral education was held by the Association for Baha'i Studies, India, in collaboration with the Chair for Baha'i Studies, Indore. The workshop was held for primary school teachers.

William S. Hatcher, a professor living in Russia who is a Baha'i, was invited to deliver a short course on ethics based on the Baha'i-inspired Moral Education Project materials at St. Petersburg State University. The course was very well received. Dr. Hatcher also delivered the material as a regular course at the St. Petersburg Electrotechnical University in the fall of 1996 and was subsequently able to present a paper on that topic at an international conference on pedagogical issues in university education.

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left: Children participating in the first Romanian Bahai social and economic development project in Bucharest, which hopes to turn an abandoned lot into a children's playground.

Right:  
Mothers bringing their children to the Bahai Tutorial School in Kungu, Uganda.

left: In Western Samoa, children participate in a Montessori school program sponsored by Bahais.

### Contact with Prominent People

The Bahai World Centre continues to draw visits from a succession of dignitaries and people of prominence from all over the world. Sultan Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya, the Sultan from Fomban, West Cameroon, came in November 1996, along with a retinue including Madame Bardica Rosette Mbombo Njoya, his wife; El Hadj Amadou Pokasa Nsangou, Imam and Chairman of the World Islamic Council of the Organization of Mosques in the Noun area; Reverend Abraham Ngoumoun, head of the Evangelist Church of Cameroon and Chairman of the Religious Commission of the Noun area; and two representatives of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ambassadors to Israel from the following countries were also received at the World Centre: Australia, Belgium, Ethiopia, Greece, Hungary, India, Rwanda, Slovakia, and South Africa. U Kyaw Zeya, Charged' Affaires of the Embassy of the Union of Myanmar, paid a call, along with two other diplomats from the embassy. In addition, visits were received from officials from the embassies in Israel of China, Hungary, Ireland, and Japan. A delegation of government officials from Guinea-Bissau, including the Minister of Rural Development and Agriculture, came, as did Christian Poncelet, member of the French Senate and President of its Finance Commission, along with officials of the Marseilles Municipality. Moshe Katsav, Minister of Tourism in Israel; Yossi Beilin of the Prime Minister's Office in Israel; and members of

the Knesset paid a visit to the World Centre. Annette Lantos, the wife of Congressman Tom Lantos of the United States, also visited.

Visiting academics and scholars included William E. Kirwan, President of the University of Maryland, U.S.A., along with other university administrators; Andre Chouraqui, former professor at the Sorbonne and the Academy of Moral and Political Science in Paris, France, and Vice-Mayor of Jerusalem; Fu Youde, Deputy Head of the Philosophy Department, and Director of the Institute of Jewish Culture at Shandong University, China.

Elsewhere in the world, two Baha'is from Britain attended Sweden's Royal 50th Birthday celebrations organized by the

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Wilma El /is, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, meets with United States President Bill Clinton at an Ecumenical Breakfast in the White House.

World Scout Foundation, held from 9 to 11 May 1996. On 10 May, they were granted a private audience with King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Sylvia in Drottningholm Palace. At the conclusion, the King and the Queen were each given four Baha'i books in Swedish, as well as a synopsis of the history of the Swedish Baha'i community. In Lesotho, His Majesty, King Letsie III and Queen Mamobato, the Queen Mother, attended a banquet hosted by Baha'is at the Lesotho Sun Hotel in honor of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Africa, which was holding a meeting in Maseru from 24 to 29 December 1996. The event was also attended by over 70 other dignitaries, including the High Commissioners of China and South Africa and senior officials of various government departments. Baha'is participated in an audience with President Ange Felix Patasse of the Central African Republic on 31 May 1996, during which he received the representatives of various religious groups, in the presence of other high-ranking officials, to explain the nature of the upheavals that country had recently experienced and to outline the proposal for the nomination of the future Prime Minister. The Baha'is read from the statement Turning Point for All Nations and, at Mr. Patasse's request, recited a prayer for peace at the end of the meeting. Over 250 people gathered at the National Baha'i Center in Port Vila, Vanuatu, on 17 October to celebrate "Bertha Dobbins

Day," marking the 43rd anniversary of the day in 1953 when Mrs. Dobbins, a Knight of Baha'u'llah, arrived in Port Vila and brought the Baha'i Faith to Vanuatu. Present at the occasion were the President Jean-Marie Leye Lenelgau; the Minister of

On 1 October 1996,  
Seema Nek Akhtar  
presented the --- .-...  
President of Pakistan,  
Faroq Ahmad Laghari,  
with Baha'i literature  
on behalf of the  
Baha'i community  
of Pakistan.

Justice, Culture and Religion, Hilda Lini; and the Chiefs of Erakor and Pango villages; as well as former students of Nur School, which Mrs. Dobbins established. The President, who had himself learned English from Mrs. Dobbins, urged everyone to reflect on the significance of her courageous life and sacrifices. Radio Vanuatu broadcast several news items and announcements about the day and aired a 10-minute interview with some of the Baha'is present. There was a report on the event in the newspaper Vanuatu Weekly. In Islamabad, Pakistan, a Baha'i delegation met with President Farooq Ahmad Laghari on 1 October, presenting him with a set of three statements: The Promise of World Peace, The Prosperity of Humankind, and Turning Point for All Nations. On 8 December 1996, three members of the Baha'i community of Bangladesh had an audience with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The Baha'is took the opportunity to present her with various materials on the Baha'i Faith and to explain the law-abiding, peace-loving attitude of Baha'is towards government and society. Firuz Kazemzadeh and Kit Cosby represented the United States Baha'i community at a White House commemoration of Human Rights Day on 10 December. Both were able to greet President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Ms. Cosby spoke with Mrs. Clinton about the effort to obtain U.S. ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Ms. Cosby, in her capacity as the deputy director of the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly's office of external affairs, was listed by Mrs. Clinton in a mailing to some 100 women on the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing as a

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resource and a point of contact for the effort to have the Convention ratified by the US.

Homa Mungapen, a Baha'i in Mauritius, has been nominated by the Mauritian President as a member of the President's Advisory

Council for a period of three years. The council is composed of nine members, four of whom are representatives of religious institutions. In November 1996, Wilma Ellis, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in the Americas, was appointed by United States Secretary of State Warren Christopher to a Special Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. She is one of 20 prominent religious leaders and scholars who will serve on the committee, whose purposes are to foster greater dialogue between religious communities and the United States government. Dr. Ellis also acted as the Baha'i representative who greeted the President and First Lady on behalf of the Baha'i community at the White House during this year's ecumenical breakfast on 6 January 1997. On 20 May 1996 a reception and buffet were held in London at the National Baha'i Centre of the United Kingdom in honor of Wally N'Dow, the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on

At a public audience in the Vatican, Feridun Mazlum, a Baha'i from Switzerland, presented Pope John Paul II with a copy of The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah.

#### YEAR IN REVIEW

His Majesty  
King Letsie III  
of Lesotho  
was greeted by  
Shanta Basin, a  
pioneer to the  
country, on  
27 December 1996.

Human Settlements (Habitat II). Also in attendance were Borg Olivier, the Director of the United Nations' United Kingdom Office; A. F. M. Yusuf, High Commissioner, Bangladesh; Gendengin Nyamdoo, the Ambassador of Mongolia; and other United Nations and embassy representatives in London. Dr. On 1 March 1997, Prime Minister Chaova/it Yong Chaikut N'Dow was presented with of Thailand received a copy of the Baha'i International Community statements Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World and Recommended Changes to the Draft Habitat Agenda, which were warmly received.

In Bermuda, a dinner party to celebrate Ayyam-i-Ha, held on 26 February 1997 by the Baha'i community in the parish of Hamilton, was attended by His Excellency Lord Waddington, the Governor. Baha'is in the Eastern Caroline Islands were received on separate occasions by the Governor of Pohnpei State, Del Pangelinan, and by the Australian Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia. Both officials were presented with Turning Point for All Nations. On 17 May 1996, a delegation of Baha'is in the Falkland Islands met with the Governor, Richard Ralph, to welcome him to the islands and present him with The Prosperity of Humankind. Zambia's Deputy Minister of the Desk of Religious Affairs visited the Baha'i National Center on 5 January 1997 and had a cordial meeting with the National Spiritual Assembly of Zambia.

## THE BAHAF WORLD

### Recognition

Ongoing efforts to achieve official recognition of Baha'i communities saw some progress this year in several countries. The State Legislative Chamber of Amazonas, Brazil, on 16 August 1996 passed a law which was subsequently approved by the Governor that recognizes 21 March as a Baha'i Holy Day- Naw-Ruz, the Baha'i New Year.

In Latvia, authorities have accepted the by-laws of the Baha'i community of Riga as in accordance with the new laws of that country, and a new registration certificate was issued to the Baha'i community. On 12 December 1996, the Armenian State Council on Religious Affairs officially registered the Baha'i community of Armenia. On 12 September 1996, the chief constable of the Faroe Islands made an announcement in the national press that the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tórshavn is now an incorporated body.

In response to a request by Baha'i youth in Belgium for permission to hold public dance performances in Ixelles, the police of that town sought information from the Brussels police department. The Brussels chief of police replied on 26 July 1996, asserting the validity of the Baha'i community as a religious association and citing information gathered from the United Nations, among other sources.

### The Head of State

of Bermuda,  
Lord Waddington,  
attended an Intercalary  
Day celebration  
hosted by the  
Hamilton Parish  
Baha'i community.

### Sharing the Message of Baha'u'llah

Heedful of exhortations in the Baha'i writings to scatter far and

wide to share Baha'u'llah's message with all of humanity, once again this year Baha'is the world over left the comforts of their homes behind and undertook long and at times arduous journeys to foreign lands and remote locales.

A group of youth from France, accompanied by a Ukrainian youth, visited Danane, Cote d'Ivoire, from 15 July to 30 August 1996 to participate in an intensive effort to inform the people of that area about the Baha'i teachings. Assistance was also given by Baha'is from Burkina-Faso, Mali and Guinea.

In late 1996, two Baha'is in Azerbaijan traveled from Baku to a small town called Guba where there were no Baha'is. There they visited two officials of the Department of Cultural Affairs and spoke with them about the Baha'i Faith for about half an hour. The Baha'is could only stay in Guba for one day, and then they returned to Baku. After their departure, one of the council members went to the local television station and spoke about the Faith for half an hour on an evening program, inviting all who were interested in learning more to come to a certain park the next day. Over 500 people came to the park, of whom 149 became Baha'is.

During the summer school held on the island of Saaremaa, in Estonia, Baha'is engaged in activities to teach the local population about Baha'u'llah, resulting in favorable coverage on the school in local newspapers and radio. About 70 local people

The Sultan  
of Cameroon  
visited the  
Baha'i Holy Places  
in Israel on  
6 November 1996.

attended evening sessions of the school and some 30 local youth attended a special introductory class arranged for them.

In the Gambia, monthly visits were carried out by teams of Baha'is to various local communities. Similarly, five Baha'is from Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands traveled to Little

Andaman in January 1997, offering courses on the Baha'i Faith and accompanying local Baha'is on courtesy calls on the community's chiefs and other dignitaries. Visits were made in the Telugu-, Bengali-, and Hindi-speaking areas.

The Sister to Sister project, involving the efforts of African-American Baha'i women to reach the people of Africa with the message of Baha'u'llah, continued this year, with a trip to Nairobi, Kenya in January 1997. The Baha'is were interviewed on a local television station's current affairs program, and an article about them was published in the Nation newspaper.

From 11 to 28 January 1997, nine African-American Baha'is

men- participants in the yearly Black Men's Gathering at the Louis Gregory Institute in South Carolina- traveled to Namibia to talk to the people about Baha'u'llah's message. Their itinerary consisted of audiences with government ministers, television and radio interviews, and travel to many regions of the country for the purpose of sharing the Baha'i Faith. An official audience with the speaker of Namibia's Legislative Assembly, Mose Tjitendero, was aired on the television news broadcast on 13 January. That meeting featured the presentation by a member of the Baha'i delegation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas- Baha'u 'llah's Book of Laws- to

Dr. Tjitendero, who gave him a copy of the Laws of Namibia, that country's constitution. One of the American Baha'is also presented a racial-healing seminar to the Windhoek community.

Five Baha'is from Ibadan, Nigeria, went to Osogbo to teach others about the Baha'i Faith on 30 June 1996. A local Baha'i artist arranged for drummers and dancers to perform, more than 200 people gathered, and over 60 children were taught songs and prayers. This year, several Baha'is visited Gomal Altaisk, Russia, for six weeks to inform people about the Baha'i Faith. The inhabitants are the traditional Altai people and Russians who are Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims, all living together in hannony. The visit resulted in a television interview and the airing of the Baha'i video "Temple on My Way" during prime time.

A group of Baha'i youth traveled to Embekelweni, Swaziland, for a week in September 1996 to hold introductory meetings, children's classes, and study classes. They also visited many homesteads to talk about the Baha'i Faith.

Baha'is in the Ukraine went to Lugansk City for six days in July to present the Baha'i message to others. There they visited the mayor's office, meeting about 16 key people, including members of the media, social workers, and the dean of the university. The dean asked the Baha'is to set up Baha'i courses as he believed they would be helpful to the students. In addition, they were asked to provide speakers on topics such as family life, consultation, conflict resolution, and violence.

Over the past few years, efforts have been made by Baha'is to promote a dialogue between indigenous peoples of North America and New Zealand. Groups of Maori Baha'is from New Zealand have visited native Canadian communities, making special connections and sharing Baha'u'llah's message with people everywhere they have gone. In May 1996, Canada reciprocated by sending a group of First Nation Baha'is to New Zealand, where they met with students in schools, attended traditional gatherings, held public meetings, and were interviewed by the media. Another group of Native Canadian Baha'is visited New Zealand in April 1997.

The Baha'i theater group "Lwniere de l'Unite" continued traveling and

performing in francophone Africa this year as part of its ongoing effort to spread the Baha'i teachings. The group visited Guinea, Senegal, and Mali in September, October, and November 1996. Their visit to Guinea coincided with the rainy season and as the roads were impassable, for the whole three weeks of their visit the group traveled almost exclusively on foot.

Special projects have been carried out in localities around the world to make the Baha'i principles known. The Baha'is of Angola initiated such a project in Sambizanga, Luanda, naming it "Project Paz" or "Peace." In the Bahamas, Baha'is are reaching out to the people of Little Abaco with Baha'u'llah's message. The Baha'i communities of Mogoditshane and Tlokweng, Botswana, mounted nine-day projects to share the message of Baha'u'llah with the people of their areas this year.

During the month of July, a project was undertaken in Moanda, Gabon, to tell the people of the area about the Baha'i Faith. The campaign consisted of the distribution of pamphlets, and the holding of exhibitions, film and slide presentations, and public talks.

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A special campaign in Georgia which ran from 1 November to 15 December 1996 resulted in the formation of 12 new Local Spiritual Assemblies in several areas of that republic, including Tschinvali in the autonomous region of South Ossetia; in an Azeri area of Georgia; and in a village inhabited by Russian expatriates. A project was held throughout Mongolia from 22 July to 15 August 1996 with the goal of informing people about the Baha' i Faith. It was preceded by a training course in Baganuur from 17 to 21 July. The 50 participants attended classes and then traveled to different areas of the country, visiting 10 provinces and 15 towns and holding children's classes. As a result of their efforts, 133 people became Baha'is and four Local Spiritual Assemblies were formed. A project to offer the Baha'i teachings to the people of Reunion took place from 19 to 25 August 1996, with the participation of Baha'is from Madagascar, Mauritius, and the Seychelles. Four public conferences were organized as part of the endeavor, and Baha' is reached out to people in seven communities.

Helen Reissenweber  
presented the book  
, she authored,  
Fire and Water,  
to the President of  
Vanuatu, Jean-Marie  
Leye Lenelgau,  
on 17 October 1996.

In June 1996, a course for the training of teachers of the Baha'i Faith was held in Sierra Leone, in Makeni and Magbenteh and their environs, as part of a large-scale effort to share the Baha'i teachings with the people of the area.

An "Ocean of Light" project was held in East Malaita, Solomon Islands, in the last weekend in November 1996. 4 A Baha' i group introduced 15 local chiefs in the bush communities of the region to

4. See also *The Saha'i Wo rld* 1994- 95 , p. 86.

In Andhra Pradesh, India, participants of a Bahri 'i cycle rally in August 1996 pose happily f or a photograph.

the Baha'i Faith, along with over 650 people who gathered in Tariuna, a Baha'i village, where they spent the next two days singing and dancing as the Baha'i Faith was presented. The chiefs expressed their joy at hearing about a belief that honored their customs and culture.

Projects to teach people about Baha'u'llah' s message were mounted in Kegalle and Matale, Sri Lanka, this year, and teams also visited various Baha'i communities to assist and encourage them to establish essential features of community life such as Nineteen Day Feasts, children' s classes, and training courses. Special projects to teach others about the Baha' i Faith were also undertaken throughout Lithuania, in Kaunas, Vilnius, Ukmerge, Plunge, and Jelgava.

A four-day Baha' i class for new Baha'is in Rajshahi, Bangladesh, changed its character when incessant rains prevented the attendance of all but three invitees. The three who came turned out to be members of a Hindu religious order from an area that is difficult to reach and that no Baha'is had previously visited; the invitations to the meeting were sent to them in error. The three men, with the encouragement of prominent members of their community, had come to the class to find out what the Baha'i Faith was and then report back to the others. After four days of thorough study of Baha'i teachings the men became Baha'is and eagerly set out for home to report on what they had learned.

The Baha' is of Zimbabwe had an exhibit at the International Book Fair held in the Harare Gardens from 29 July to 2 August 1996. The Baha' i stand was very popular, and during the event a television news piece was aired from the booth.

Efforts to tell others about the Baha' i teachings were reinforced by a host of "teaching conferences" the world over, held

for the purpose of consulting on the tasks associated with these

endeavors.

The Sixth Albanian National Teaching Conference took place in Tirana from 8 to 10 November 1996 and was attended by more than 60 people. An all-Ireland teaching conference was held in Derrygonnelly, Northern Ireland, on 22 and 23 February 1997. The gathering was the first of its kind since the establishment of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Republic of Ireland in 1972. More than 250 Baha'is from all parts of the island gathered for the meeting, whose theme was "Our Shared Spiritual Destiny." On 29 April 1996, a Baha'i conference was held at Nualei, Tonga, to deliberate on ways of sharing the Baha'i Faith with others. Another such conference, along with a training session, was held in Arusha, Tanzania, from 24 to 29 July 1996. Fifty people from Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and the United Kingdom attended the event, which was hosted by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Arusha. Similar teaching conferences were held in France, Malawi, and Uruguay.

#### Institutes and Other Training Activities

A systematic effort has been set in motion in Baha'i communities throughout the world to assist Baha'is to attain a more profound understanding of the principles of the Faith and to arise to carry out the myriad tasks and duties confronting their ever-expanding communities. This endeavor has taken the form of the creation of training institutes, nearly 200 of which were established in this year alone. Baha'i training institutes, rather than simply imparting information, aim to develop in the participants spiritual knowledge and to provide them with skills necessary for serving humanity. These agencies are being established in all parts of the world; the following are just a few examples of the efforts being made. Some other training activities are also mentioned.

From 30 September to 3 October 1996, the Ruhi Institute in Puerto Tejada, Colombia, saw the convening of the first continental meeting of consultants on the training institute process in Latin America. Participants with expertise in establishing and operating Baha'i training institutes gathered from nine countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, and the United States.

A number of communities have drawn upon the materials produced by the Ruhi Institute in the design of their curricula. Courses of the Ruhi Institute were offered in Anchorage and Juneau, Alaska, in January 1996, representing the beginning of that community's efforts to make the program available to Baha'is

throughout the country . The Baha'is of Belize have also begun offering courses of the Ruhi Institute, with several being held in May, October, and November 1996. Over 250 people gathered together for a Baha'i institute in Danane, Cote d'Ivoire. A nine-day training course was held in Kamina, Zaire, for participants to study the first book of the Ruhi Institute's materials. A two-hour summary of the activities of the Baha'is during the nine-day course and the conference for members of the public that followed was broadcast on television.

A training program employing the courses of the Ruhi Institute was launched in Asmara, Eritrea, this year. Baha'i communities in six towns and villages in Georgia sent individuals to undertake formal study of the Baha'i Faith at the Baha'i institute facility near Tbilisi from 28 January to 2 February 1997.

Twenty-five participants and four tutors were involved in a session on the Ruhi Institute materials held in the Solomon Islands from 2 to 30 December 1996. From this group, Baha'is were to be sent throughout the country to hold children's classes and to help others gain a deeper understanding of the Baha'i Faith.

In addition to the Ruhi Institute's materials, a wide variety of approaches and topics were included in the many institute courses offered this year. The Vivian Wesson Institute in Togo offered carefully developed programs of study in which the institute coordinator and teachers followed the courses up by visiting the Local Spiritual Assemblies which had sent participants. A Baha'i

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training course under the auspices of the Local Assembly of Puka-Puka, Chuquisaca, Bolivia, was held on 6 and 8 September 1996. The themes were the glorious destiny of the indigenous people of the Americas and the duties of the Local Spiritual Assembly. The Virgin Islands Baha' i community's Permanent Training Institute began functioning this year, offering systematic and ongoing courses in St. Croix, St. Thomas, and Tortola, while the Baha' i community of Greenland saw the appointment of a board of directors for its national training institute. The seventh course of the Fozdar Permanent Teaching Institute of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was held in January 1997 on Little Andaman. In Angola, the Baha' i community inaugurated its first institute in early 1997. Also this year, the first course of the newly formed Dr. Muhajir Institute of Bangladesh was attended by a group of assistants to Auxiliary Board members who gathered for a conference in Rajshahi. The Musa Banani Institute in Benin opened

its doors on 8 July 1996; on 18 August the first seven trainees left the institute, having completed its first course.

The training of teachers received particular attention from a number of communities this year. In Wels, Austria, the first teacher training course was held from 28 February to 2 March 1997, while the first Trans-Caucasian Teacher Training Institute ran from 7 to 28 August 1996 in Georgia. Twenty-six Baha'is from Azerbaijan, 19 from Armenia, and 40 from Georgia, as well as 22 children enrolled for the course, which included discussion of curricula for children's training and for moral class teachers.

A training activity was held this year in Mogoditshane, Botswana, aimed at adapting the Core Curriculum materials developed by the United States Baha'i community to improve the standard of Baha'i education in Botswana. It was followed by a weekend course to train teachers for Baha'i classes on 1 and 2 February 1997.

Two one-day teacher training courses were offered in Sa' ang village, Cambodia, in August and September 1996. Participants were trained how to conduct children's classes and how to use the materials that are available. A teacher-training activity was held in Bamako, Mali, in early 1997.

The first training session for children's class teachers in Chad took place from 7 to 21 January 1997 at the Samandari Institute.

Eleven people participated, including one woman. The Aziz Navidi Institute in the Congo opened this year by offering two sessions of a training course for children's class teachers, one from 4 to 16 June 1996 and another from 6 to 20 August. A children's class seminar was held at the Baha'i National Center in Spain on 7 and 8 November 1996. More than 50 teachers and other Baha'is from different areas of Spain and the Canary Islands attended the event. The program consisted mainly of workshops conducted by the National Education Committee.

#### Scholarship

A special issue of the monthly journal *Dialogue and Universalism*, entitled "The Baha'i Faith- Universalism in Praxis," was launched during a reception hosted by the Baha'i community in Warsaw, Poland, on 21 January

1997. The journal is produced by the International Society for Universalism based at the University of Warsaw. This special issue was a joint venture between the Universalists and the Association for Baha'i Studies, Ottawa,

Canada. A trainee at a teacher training institute, Associations for the held in Nepal, tells a Bahri 'i story study of the Baha'i Faith to a group of children.

were very active over the year, sponsoring conferences and seminars on an array of topics. A few of the larger events are outlined here.

The 20th Annual Conference of the Association for Baha'i Studies of North America was held on the theme "Anarchy into Order: Crafting Better Governance" in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, from 26 to 29 September 1996. Over 600 people participated, while some 130 children and youth attended a parallel conference on moral leadership. A special interest group on aboriginal spirituality included a visit to an addictions treatment facility to participate in a sweat lodge hosted by the Nechi Institute, during

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which discussions were held on prayer, the spiritual power of women, closeness to nature, and respect for elders and for oral tradition.

The prosperity of humankind was the topic of the annual conference of the Association for Baha'i Studies of German-Speaking Europe, which was held at Landegg Academy in Switzerland from 11 to 13 October 1996. The first annual meeting of the Association for Baha'i Studies of Venezuela was held on 20 and 21 July 1996. Over 145 people attended the annual conference of the Association for Baha'i Studies of English-Speaking Europe on 16 and 17 November 1996 in Oxford, England. The conference's theme was "Millennium and Apocalypse: The Baha'i Vision of the Future."

In January 1997, the Third Conference of the Association for Baha'i Studies of the Russian Federation took place. In Japan, the Fifth Annual Conference of the Association for Baha'i Studies for that country was held from 22 to 24 November 1996 in a hostel halfway up the central peaks of Kyushu's Aso volcanic caldera. The theme of the meeting was education, with moral education being the focus of three conference sessions. Fifty-five people from Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore attended the Third Annual Conference of the Association for Baha'i Studies of Malaysia, held in Jahore Bahru.

In Kenya, the Fourth Baha'i Studies Symposium was held on 9 and 10 November 1996 at the Baha'i Center in Nairobi. Its theme was "Human Relationships and the Unity of Mankind," which attracted papers from seven speakers, including two professors and a senior lecturer from area universities.

The Twelfth Irfan Colloquium was held from 6 to 8 December 1996 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, United Kingdom, sponsored by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund and the Religious Studies Seminar of the Association for Baha'i Studies of English-Speaking Europe. In the United States, the Wilmette Institute's first annual residential session of its Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program was held at National-Louis University in Wilmette, Illinois, from 7

July to 3 August 1996. The faculty came from North America, Europe, and the Middle East to deliver four weeks of classes and workshops and to conduct discussion groups.

## YEAR I N REVIEW

### The Arts

On 30 July 1996, over 500 people attended a concert in Paris by the "Voices of Baha" choir, which toured Europe during the summer, involving about 90 singers from 18 countries. On 1 August, the choir performed in a famous old cathedral, the Domkerk, in Utrecht, the Netherlands, before a capacity audience of 800, including senior officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mayors, members of the municipal council, dignitaries from several strata of society. The choir also performed in England, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, and Russia.

In the parish of St. John, Barbados, the Baha'i community hosted an evening of musical entertainment on 15 September 1996 to which the community was invited. A second concert, held on 28 November at the prestigious Frank Collymore Hall, was offered to the people of Barbados as a gift of love from the Baha'is on the occasion of Barbados's 30th anniversary of independence. This year at the Bergen Music Festival in Norway, which began on 22 May 1996, Lasse Thoresen, a Norwegian Baha'i, was the "Festival Composer"; the festival consisted of 130 concerts, 8 of which were the responsibility of Mr. Thoresen. At the opening ceremony, which took place before King Harald V and an audience of 1,500 people, the program included two prayers revealed by Baha'u'llah, set to music by Mr. Thoresen. The main concert of the festival was held on 25 May in the Hakonshallen in a 13th century monastery. All of the pieces were Baha'i prayers set to music by Mr. Thoresen, sung by a choir or performed by solo artists. About 500 people were present; before the concert, about 250 people attended a talk by Mr. Thoresen during which he presented the main content of the prayers and introduced the themes derived from the Baha'i Faith as inspiration for his music.

In cooperation with the Cultural Department of the Municipal Government, an exhibition of the paintings of the Baha'i Holy Places by Parvin Hattam was held in Skopje, Austria. The theme of the display, which opened on 1 September 1996 and lasted for ten days, was "Unity, Love, and Peace."

An exhibition of art by mentally handicapped children was

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held on 6 June 1996 by the Baha'i community of Klaipeda, Lithuania, in cooperation with the Cultural Department of the city.

The local television station broadcast a report about the exhibition during its news program.

George Fleming, a Baha'i artist, opened a three-month exhibition of his paintings on 6 February 1997 in Dundalk, Ireland. Entitled "All God's Children," the exhibition dealt with the seven major religions found in Northern Ireland.

On 15 January 1997, a Baha'i in The "Voices of Baha" choir Romania, Ardeshir V ahidi, opened performed on 1 August 1996 in a two-week exhibition of his art- Utrecht, the Netherlands. work in Targu Mure~ which was covered by local press and local and national television. Also this year, Otto Donald Rogers, a Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre and a renowned Canadian artist, visited Romania and was the featured guest at a gathering that included two representatives of the Ministry of Culture, several senators and deputies, art critics, and other art lovers. Mr. Rogers shared his conception of the connection between art and faith, with a special emphasis on the Baha'i Faith.

The Seven Candles of Peace, a Baha'i children's drama group

li'i'. -á

" á á ~ A Baha'i singing group performed at the Second Annual International Children 's Art Exhibition on the Environment and Animals. held on 1 August 1996 in Mexico City, Mexico.

#### Y EAR IN R EVIEW

in Singapore, was invited to perform the play "For the Love of Peace" at the Srilankaramaya Buddhist Temple on 9 April 1997 for their annual prize-giving day. This was the second public performance by the group.

A group of youth in the Chaco region of Argentina mounted a production of an adaptation of "The Drama of the Kingdom," a play whose outline was created by 'Abdu' l-Baha. The first performance in Chaco was given at a primary school in a Toba neighborhood. After attending and performing at the Habitat II conference in Turkey, Kevin Locke, a native American Baha'i who is an expert

hoop dancer, and his daughter Kimimila offered several performances for the public. A performance in Adana on 19 June 1996, which benefited a local retirement home, was attended by some 600 people, while another in Tarsus City on 20 June, held in the open air, was attended by more than 2,000.

One of the eight Ionic capitals for the portico of the Centre for the Study of the Texts being positioned, June 1996.

MOUNT

CARMEL

PROJECTS:

Progress 1996-97

The energies released in the Baha'i world through the completion of the Three Year Plan in April 1996 were also visible in the increased pace of work on the building projects on Mount Carmel between Ric;lvn 1996 and Ric;lvn 1997. Great progress was made in every aspect of work on the Arc and the terraces, with the goal of fulfilling the expectations of the Universal House of Justice that the projects will be finished at the end of the century.

With the completion of the structure of the Centre for the Study of the Texts, exterior finishing work began. Eight Ionic marble columnns, each weighing at least 15 tonnes and comprising six sections, were erected in a semicircle around the entrance portico. Lifted into place piece by piece with the help of a crane, they were pinned together by marble specialists from France. Next, sixteen windows on the semicircular wall on the two levels of the entrance portico were fitted with marble frames . Eighteen precast marble panels, each weighing seven tonnes, forming the soffit between the inner and outer entablatures, were also installed. It was not until December 1996, however, that the portico of the Centre for the Study of the

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Texts was shorn of all scaffolding and its classic beauty unveiled.

All that remained to be done was the marble work on the floor and radial stairs leading to the portico.

As the facade of the building neared completion, interior finishing work speeded up. Turkish masons commenced local stone work on different levels of the three patios that will provide natural light to several areas of the Centre for the Study of the Texts and the Archives extension. Installation of ceramic tile on the walls and floors, terrazzo tile in

Aerial view of the Centre for the Study service areas and along the Arc serof the Texts, March 1997. vice tunnel, and internal marble work and drywall partitions transformed the interior of the building. During the summer of 1996 work was completed on a network of drainage pipes to facilitate the irrigation of the planned roof garden on the Archives extension. Topsoil was added and temporary lawns developed to prevent runoff during the winter rains. By Ric;ivan 1997, marble work inside the Archives extension had progressed along the corridors and lobbies; most of the utility stairs had been covered by quarry tiles, and aluminum windows had been installed in the patios. The vault door for the strong room, which will preserve the sacred texts and relics, had also been installed.

The building that will house the International Teaching Centre is a large nine-story complex comprising the main Teaching Centre, the parking building, and the "common area," with a total floor space of approximately 19,000 square meters. As work commenced in all areas of the site, the full extent of the Teaching Centre became easily discernible. By March 1997 work had advanced to level six of the building, while major efforts were also going into the construction of levels four and five-the most complicated floors in terms of design and execution. Featuring a 400-seat auditorium and a large kitchen, the facilities there require many openings and changes in

#### MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS

One of the 7-tonne marble-clad, precast panels being maneuvered into position between two entablatures of the entrance portico of the Centre for the Study of the Texts.

Turkish masons install local stone on the external walls of the Centre for the Study of the Texts.

levels in the floor slabs and walls above. Intensive coordination among the various disciplines and careful monitoring during construction are thus imperative.

Part of the complexity of the Teaching Centre is the need to allow for its future connection to the International Baha'i Library when that building is constructed. The external walls along the east and

southeast perimeter will form the boundary between the two structures and must be built so that many large openings may be cut in the future. However, before the International Baha' i Library is constructed, these walls have to support large building loads, retain about ten to twenty meters of soil for the gardens, and resist lateral forces from backfill and earthquake loads. Meeting these requirements and achieving optimum flexibility entail special structural design incorporating a strong diagonal steel band rising from the foundations to the walls up to level five . With the completion of these special walls, work proceeded to level six of the Teaching Centre, the floor area of which covers nearly the full extent of the building. The main vehicular ramp leading from the street to level six of the building was completed and construction of the entrance plaza commenced.

While work continued on the structure of the Teaching Centre, several initiatives were taken for its interior finishing. Contracts for marble, wood millwork, metal doors, local stone, drywall partitions, and for the supply and installation of catwalks in the mechanical service areas and in the space above the stage in the auditorium were al so signed. By March 1997 several of the finishing items began to arrive on site. One delivery entailed the unloading of seven huge pieces of airconditioning equipment, the largest weighing 12.2 tonnes. A large 40-tonne crane lifted these units, manufactured in the United States, into the building through temporary four-meter by four-meter openings in the floor slab directly above the fan room. Three of the five elevator cabins that will serve the building arrived from Canada. Guide rails and hydraulic pistons were installed, along with one of the elevator cabins.

Soon after the contracts for the supply and installation of local stone for the building were signed, stone work began on three patios along the eastern external walls of the common area . Concreting progressed at the building's higher levels, while mechanical and electrical work was carried out at levels one to three.

'Abdu ' l-Baha is reported to have shared with pilgrims the following vision:

"The entire harbor from 'Akka to Haifa will be one

Intense activity  
on th e structure of the  
International  
Teaching  
Centre.

#### M O U T C ARMEL PROJECTS

path of illumination. Powerful searchlights will be placed on both sides of Mount Carmel to guide the steamers. Mount Carmel itself, from top to bottom, will be submerged in

a sea of light. ... " 1 On another occasion He prophesied: "The day will come when this mountain will be resplendent with ~ light- lights from top to bottom. "2 On the evening of 16 October 1996 Haifa residents were briefly dazzled by a display of lights on the terraces, from a test conducted by the Mount Carmel Projects' electrical team to determine the type and amount of lighting equip- Work progresses on the sixth level of the International Teaching Centre. ment necessary to illuminate the beautiful balustrades and stone work on the contour walls. The lighting of the terraces of the Shrine of the Bab forms a very significant component of the terraces' overall design, placing lights in strategic locations to highlight details on the terraces while keeping the exquisite structure of the Shrine of the Bab the focus of attention. Lights flanking the central stairway have been placed in a manner that strongly accentuate the "Kings' Pathway," while maintaining the primacy of the Shrine itself. The arcs of cypress trees in the outer areas on both sides of each terrace have between them bronze lanterns with hanging globes of light that highlight the geometric curves. Both sides of the main section of each terrace have ornate lampposts, and the fountain pools on each terrace have soft lights that turn the water into liquid gold. With the completion of the landscaping of the terraces below the Shrine of the Bab, and advancement of the construction of

1. ' Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in Star of the West, Volume XXIV , p. 302.
2. Ibid.

## THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD

the buildings of the Arc, the project manager's office began to put together maintenance teams for the gardens as well as for the mechanical, electrical, electronic, and irrigation work, with ongoing training of personnel so that experienced teams will already be in place when the projects are completed.

A glimpse of  
 'Abdu 'l-Baha 's  
 vision that the  
 day will come  
 when Mount Carmel will be  
 resplendent with  
 light- lights  
 from top to  
 bottom.

An exciting development for the terraces below the Shrine took

place on 7 March 1997: the last building obstructing the construction of the first two terraces was demolished, clearing the site "for the monumental entrance to the majestic path leading from the southern end of Ben Gurion Avenue up to the central edifice of the Shrine and beyond to the crest of God's Holy Mountain ." 3 This was accomplished as a result of over four years of delicate negotiations with the tenants of the building and the Haifa Municipality.

While these negotiations were under way, an application for the modification of the town planning scheme, to cancel that portion of Ben Gurion Avenue extending into the Baha'i property, was submitted to and approved by the local committee in Haifa and the District Committee of Galilee.

Intense activity, both structural and architectural, occurred on the terraces above the Shrine. The completion of the structure of terrace nineteen enabled stone work to commence; and by Rivian 1997 almost fifty percent had been completed. One of the major

3. Message from the Universal House of Justice, transmitted electronically to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated 4 April 1995.

#### MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS

Structural and architectural details of the terraces above ; ) 1

•  
the Shrine of the ... :  
Bab, presaging the ,  
extension of beauty to  
the crest of Mount  
Carmel.

architectural features of this terrace is seventeen arches of varying sizes and proportions. Installation of stone on four of them was finished and work began on the central and largest arch. The structure of the concrete pools on this terrace was completed, and work began to cover them with stone. At the end of the period under review terrace nineteen was ready to receive balustrades carved for it in Italy.

Hatzionut Avenue remained a critical area of work during the year. As one of the main thoroughfares connecting downtown Haifa with Central and Upper Carmel, this street sees continuous vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Work on such a busy street presents challenges as it interfaces with traffic and major municipal services such as sewage, water, electricity, telephone, and cable T.V. As work moved to the second and third phases of lowering the road, traffic and underground services had to be relocated to enable excavation to proceed. A 300-meter retaining wall was

## THE BAHAI WORLD

Members of the Universal House of Justice are seen visiting the terraces below the Shrine of the Bab soon after they were opened to Bahai visitors and pilgrims.

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-.....

built to strengthen the mountain face, and fifty-two anchors were installed behind the building housing the information center and security office, located on Hatzionut Avenue under terrace eleven. As this structure began to rise, contracts were signed for finishing work such as drywall partitions, tiling, and the installation of steel doors. By the end of March 1997, the configuration of Hatzionut Avenue had changed dramatically, with traffic moving at the new elevation on the south side and most of the municipal services connected to the new system. Work also commenced on the north side of the road, and a temporary pedestrian walkway was created within the Baha'i property.

During this period massive excavations were carried out at the site of terraces thirteen and fourteen above the Shrine of the Bab. A seven-meter-high rubble concrete wall on the east side of terrace thirteen was constructed, over which the curved stairs leading up to terrace fourteen will be built. Much of the excavated material was used as backfill behind the collar wall at the back of the Crusader Road tunnel to close the gap between the tunnel and the east side of terrace fifteen.

Behind all the progress visible on the Arc buildings and the terraces of the Shrine of the Bab has been much groundwork. Negotiations with agencies of the Government of Israel have been pursued throughout, covering applications for building permits, permits to import materials and equipment from around the world, modifications of town planning schemes in areas adjacent to the Projects, and permits to bring workers into Israel from Romania, Turkey, France, and Canada. Negotiations with and coordination of work between the large number of contractors employed in the

## MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS

projects are ongoing. The Mount Carmel Projects Office also undertook to procure materials directly from suppliers both within and outside Israel at considerable discounts, thereby saving millions of dollars.

As the Mount Carmel Baha'i Projects progressed rapidly, the restoration and development of the historic German Templar Colony by the government authorities in Haifa also picked up momentum.

This project is of great interest to the Baha'i World Centre as it conjoins the site of the entrance plaza of the terraces of the Shrine of the Bab. The colony of distinctive red-roofed houses was founded in 1868 by the members of the Templar Society from Wurttemberg in southern Germany whose founder, Christoph Hoffmann, was convinced that according to the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments, the return of Jesus Christ was imminent in the Holy Land. In his book *The Babi and Bahri 'i Religions, 1844-1944* Moojan Momen notes, "It is interesting that both the Templars [sic], who came to Palestine fired by the desire to witness the imminent return of Christ, and Baha'u'llah, Who claimed to be that return, arrived in the Haifa-'Akka area within a few months of each other . . . Believing the second coming of Christ to be so near, ... Hoffmann with his principal lieutenant Georg David Hardegg landed in Haifa on 30 October 1868. Hardegg remained in Haifa as the head of the colony ... [which] became the largest and most important of the Templar colonies in Palestine."

'Abdu'l-Baha had foreshadowed the conversion of the main avenue through Moshe Katsav, Israel's Minister of Tourism, this colony into "the High- was received at the World Centre on 15 way of the Kings and Rulers December 1996 by architect Fariborz

of the World ... starting

of the

of the

Sahba, left, and Albert Lili, right, Sec-

General Bahá'í

Secretary of the International

the sea and reaching up to the Community.

the Shrine of the Bab and beyond to the crest of Mount Carmel.

Now the task of restoring this area has been taken up by the Israeli authorities.

The year saw several dignitaries and official delegations from Israel and elsewhere visit the Projects. There were also a number of television crews and photographers from Hungary, Canada, Israel, Jordan, and Korea. The Mayor of Haifa visited several times, accompanying a Minister from the Prime Minister's Office, managers of municipalities in Israel, members of the Knesset Economic Affairs and Finance Committees, and the Minister of Tourism. Officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Israel escorted members of the Science and Technology Commission of China.

As it faces the many tasks that remain to be accomplished on

the Arc and terraces projects before the end of the century, the Mount Carmel Projects team gratefully acknowledges the prayers and encouragement of the Universal House of Justice and the worldwide Baha'i community. In tribute to the universal participation of Baha'is in this endeavor, the Universal House of Justice wrote in its Rivian Message of 153 BE: "The physical reality of the progress [of the Projects] thus far so marvelously realized is proof of an even more profound achievement, namely, the unity of purpose effected throughout our global community in the pursuit of this gigantic, collective enterprise. The intensity of the interest and support it has evoked has expressed itself in an unprecedented outpouring of contributions, reflecting a level of sacrifice that bespeaks the quality of faith and generosity of heart of Baha'u'llah's lovers throughout the planet. ... " 4

4. The Universal House of Justice, Rivian 153 B.E. ( 1996).

THE BAHAI'  
INTERNATIONAL  
COMMUNITY  
Activities 1996-97

For almost fifty years the Baha'i International Community has represented the worldwide membership of the Baha'i Faith at the United Nations (UN), supporting UN programs, sharing Baha'i perspectives on global issues at UN meetings and conferences, and working with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), primarily in New York and Geneva. National Baha'i communities, for their part, have supported the UN by observing special UN days, years and decades, and by cooperating in UN initiatives. An important trend during the last decade, however, has been the increasing involvement of national Baha'i communities in the work of the UN and with issues of global significance. The growing capacity and commitment of national Baha'i institutions to work with their governments and with other organizations for social progress became evident during preparations for the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio and has gathered strength, in part, through participation in the global conferences held throughout the decade.

The Baha'i International Community, which both encompasses and represents the worldwide membership of the Baha'i Faith, was granted consultative status as an international non-governmental organization with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1970, and with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1976. This status has allowed the community to offer Baha'i perspectives on the work of the UN and its agencies and to work with other NGOs in consultative status to support UN efforts to promote unity, peace, justice, and prosperity in the world. Over the years, the Baha'i International Community has established a

record of dependability and consistency in support of such critical issues as the advancement of women, human rights and responsibilities, universal education, and sustainable development.

The Community represents over 5 million people in at least 235 countries and dependent territories and has 174 national and regional affiliates around the world. It maintains United Nations offices in New York and Geneva, and representations to United Nations regional commissions in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, and Santiago, and to UN offices in Nairobi, Rome, and Vienna. In recent years an Office of the Environment and an Office for the Advancement of Women have been established as sections of its United Nations Office.

Apart from its United Nations activities, the Community is represented internationally by an Office of Public Information, based at the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel, and with a branch in Paris, which disseminates information about the Baha'i Faith around the world and oversees the production of an award-winning quarterly newsletter, *One Country*.

United Nations

Human Rights

The Baha'i commitment to human rights involves both protecting the right of Baha'is to practice their Faith and promoting respect for a broad range of human rights and responsibilities, which Baha'is see as a prerequisite for peace and order in the world. Safeguarding the religious freedom of Baha'is in various parts of the world has been a significant aspect of the work of the Baha'i International Community offices in both New York and Geneva for almost twenty years. The extraordinary responsiveness of the UN system to the plight of the Baha'is in Iran has been due, in large measure, to the coordinated efforts of national Baha'i communities around the world. National Spiritual Assemblies have appealed

BAHA'I INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

regularly and directly to their national governments to intercede on behalf of their Baha'i brothers and sisters in Iran.

In August 1996, the Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office held its first seminar for National Spiritual Assemblies on the diplomatic work related to the defense of the Baha'i community. Held at Landegg Academy, Switzerland, the event brought together 37 participants including representatives of 21 National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies, the Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office, the Office of Public Information in Haifa, and the Baha'i World Centre. The National Spiritual Assemblies invited were those whose governments have consistently cosponsored UN Resolutions condemning the violations of human rights in Iran. 1

Statements promoting human rights were presented this year at

both the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Support for the Decade for Human Rights Education was offered in a Baha'i International Community written statement to the Commission on Human Rights. 2 A joint written statement on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child authored by the Baha'i International Community was signed by 34 other NGOs. 3 Other joint statements signed by the Community addressed racism and racial discrimination, commented on the work of the Commission on Human Rights, and encouraged the drafting of a declaration on the right and responsibility of individuals and organizations to promote and protect human rights. At the Sub-Commission, the Baha'i International Community read a joint statement on human rights and youth on behalf of eight NGOs.

The Baha'i International Community was also an active participant in NGO activities aimed at educating people about human rights, encouraging respect for both rights and responsibilities, and helping to develop and apply human rights standards in the form of covenants and conventions.

1. Developments regarding the human rights situation of the Baha'is in Iran are treated at length in a separate article on pp. 147- 56 of this volume.
2. See pp. 283- 86 for the text of this statement.
3. See pp. 287- 91 for the text of this statement.

## THE BAHAI' WORLD

### Environment, Development, and Global Prosperity

One and a half years of preparatory activities by the Community's Office of the Environment culminated in June 1996 with the World Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul. 4 In December, in Geneva, the Community also took part in an International Conference on Globalization and Citizenship-the first in a series initiated by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) as a follow-up to the Social Summit. The conference was a colloquium consisting of a two-day closed meeting for interchange among some 25 political scientists, sociologists, and experts, followed by a one-day public meeting attended by the experts and some one hundred and twenty NGO and UN representatives. The Baha'i International Community was honored to be one of very few NGOs representing civil society invited to participate as an expert in all three days of the colloquium. The Rio+ 5 Forum, held 13-19 March 1997 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was one of a number of events marking the fifth anniversary of the Earth Summit, the first in the decade-long series of global conferences on critical issues facing the world community in the 1990s. Emerging from the Rio + 5 Forum, an international gathering of some 500 NGOs and UN leaders, was a draft Earth Charter,

whose preamble boldly asserts, "In the midst of our diversity, we are one humanity and one Earth community." Emphasizing human oneness, the Charter challenges the world to make a "fundamental change of course" toward sustainable development. Backers of the Charter, who believe it can provide a critically important moral guide for building a sustainable world civilization, plan to hold year-long, worldwide consultations on this draft. The goal is to produce an Earth Charter in late 1998 for submission to the UN General Assembly around the year 2000.

Organized and coordinated by the Earth Council, an international NGO based in Costa Rica, the Rio + 5 Forum was by invitation only. The Baha'i International Community representative assisted in the process of drafting the Earth Charter. Among the leading activists and specialists in environment and development

4. For a full report see pp. 137-46. The statement presented by the Baha'i International Community at Habitat II can be found on pp. 275-81.

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taking part in Rio + 5 were Maurice F. Strong, Secretary-General of the Earth Summit and President of the Earth Council; Juan Somavia, chairman of the World Summit for Social Development; Wally N'Dow, Secretary-General of the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II); Bella Abzug, President of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO); and former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, now President of Green Cross International.

Again this year, the Peace Monument in downtown Rio de Janeiro , a gift to the people of Brazil from the Baha'i International Community and the Brazilian Baha'i community on the occasion of the Earth Summit in 1992, moved closer to realizing the vision behind its creation. Five meters high and shaped like an hourglass, the Peace Monument was designed to be filled with 1 kilogram of soil from each nation on earth. At the Summit, soil from some 40 nations was deposited in the monument. Each year more soil, often from historically significant sites, is received, and added to the monument on World Environment Day. The nine nations that donated soil in 1996 were Cambodia, Ecuador, Jamaica, Lesotho, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nicaragua, Peru, Sierra Leone and Slovenia, bringing the total number of contributing countries and territories to 93.

The World Food Summit, sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations , was held in Rome in November, 1996. The Office of the Environment represented the Baha'i International Community at the Summit and at the parallel NGO Forum. For the Baha'i International Community, it was an opportunity to network with other NGOs and to support the work of

the Advocates for African Food Security: Lessening the Burden for Women. The Advocates, a coalition of NGOs, governmental and intergovernmental organizations, has been convened by the Baha'i International Community since the coalition's founding in 1988. The United Nations is encouraging youth to become involved in its activities, and Baha'i youth have responded, becoming involved both in Habitat II and in the biennial UN World Youth Forum. The Baha'i International Community participated in the Planning Committee for the Second Biennial World Youth Forum of the United Nations System, attending two of its meetings and the Forum itself

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Baha'i International  
Community  
representatives  
Giovanni Ballerio,  
Betty Mosley, and  
Beth Bowen at the  
United Nations  
World Food Summit  
and parallel NGO  
Forum in Rome,  
November 1996.

in Vienna in November 1996. More than 400 youth were present at the Forum, including seven Baha'i youth from five countries.

### Advancement of Women

The Baha'i International Community was pleased to be one of ten NGOs invited to present model development projects for consideration by participants in the Midterm Review of the United Nations New Agenda for Development in Africa in the 1990's (UN-NADAF).<sup>5</sup> The Baha'i projects presented represent two different strategies for improving the life of the community by raising the status of women. The Traditional Media as Change Agent Project in Cameroon, which was funded by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), focuses on changing women's status by changing the attitudes of men. The Banani International Secondary School for girls in Zambia focuses on educating rural girls, providing an internationally recognized certificate of graduation with an emphasis in science and agriculture. A report on the two Baha'i projects was published by the UN in a background document distributed to all governments and UN agencies participating in the mid-term review. Efforts by national Baha'i communities to involve men in implementing the principle of the equality of women and men are gaining international recognition. Tiati a Zock, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors of the Baha'i Faith in Africa and

director of the Traditional Media project in Cameroon since its

5. See pp. 293- 302 for the text of this statement.

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inception in 1991, was invited by UNICEF Cameroon to present the project at the annual Association for Women in Development (AWID) Conference in Washington, D.C. The seminar on "Gender Equity in the Family, the Role of the Male," in which Mr. a Zock participated, was the only workshop (of approximately 700) at the conference in which men took part. While in the U.S. Mr. a Zock also consulted with the UNICEF Task Force on Men in the Family and the president of the Confederation of YMCAs for Latin America and the Caribbean, who expressed interest in the project's potential for lowering the level of machismo in young males, a matter of great concern in Latin America. Attending the UN-NADAF midterm review in New York as the Baha'i International Community representative, Mr. aZock reported to an NGO panel on food security that, in some of the Baha'i communities participating in the Traditional Media Project, men broke with tradition and began helping their wives in the fields. As a result, food production increased markedly. Participants were astounded that a single behavioral change should have such a profound positive effect on domestic food production.

An encouraging development during 1996--97 has been the establishment of some 30 national offices and committees to promote the advancement of women. Along with the Community's Office for the Advancement of Women, they have been involved in the processes leading up to and following the Fourth World Conference on Women 6 which brought Baha'is the world over into relationship with other NGOs. For example, since Beijing the Australian Office for the Advancement of Women, founded in 1993, has worked closely with CAP OW, a coalition of national women's organizations, to support task forces on "Women and Peace" and "Women in Decision-Making," focusing on two of the twelve critical issues identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States is co-chair of an NGO working group composed of more than 100 organizations working to win US government ratification of the UN Convention on Women. The Assembly has appointed a National Committee for the Advancement of Women and recently issued

6. See article in *The Bahil 'i World* 1995- 96, pp. 145- 58.

#### THE BAHAF W ORLD

a statement on women, to stimulate discussion on equality issues. In Germany, the Baha'i Women's Forum, founded a year ago, now has some 130 members in ten regions of the country. In June,

the Forum held a major conference on the development of a "violence-free culture" in conjunction with its annual meeting. In France, the Association of Baha'i Women for Development, Peace and Unity, founded in 1989, now has eight regional branches. The Baha'i Community of Equatorial Guinea sponsored a functional literacy course for women in Malabo and Bata from November 1996 to April 1997. Working with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, the Community also used Baha'i Centers in those cities for courses in reproductive health, nutrition, and basic mathematics. In Ghana, the Baha'i National Women's Committee has focused on programs aimed at promoting healthy families and helping women to realize their full potential. Austria's national Task Force on Women has organized a nationwide series of seminars on the themes "Encouragement," "Change," and "Service." Singapore, where a Baha'i Women's Committee has been in existence since 1972, has seen a gradual transformation of attitudes of both women and men in the community itself, with more women now being elected to the administrative bodies of the Faith and men and women working side by side on committees and at Baha'i events and in other aspects of community life. In Denmark, the Danish Baha'i Association of Women, formed in January 1996, has organized a series of meetings in Copenhagen on such topics as "Women and AIDS," "Female Genital Mutilation," and "Families Who Have Been Subject to Torture." In the future, they hope to work with immigrant women. The Baha'i National Women's Committee in the United Kingdom, in addition to following issues from the Beijing conference, has worked with other religious groups to support the passage of legislation that would bring to justice UK citizens who have been involved in the exploitation of children overseas. The Committee gathered nearly 10,000 signatures from 159 cities and towns in support of the legislation, which was approved by Parliament on 21 March 1997.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children was also addressed by the Baha'i International Community this year. At the

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invitation of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and UNICEF, the Baha'i International Community participated in a multireligious consultation on this issue, whose goal was to prepare a statement for the World Conference against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996, and to ascertain how the various religious communities in the world view the problem. The Baha'i contribution to this consultation, entitled "Moral and Ethical Concerns of the Baha'i International Community in the Face of the Widespread Sexual Exploitation of Children," was published by WCRP for circulation at the Conference.

## Meetings

Meetings and UN sessions monitored by the Baha'i International Community during 1996- 97 , other than those already discussed, include the Commission on Sustainable Development, both the Intersessional meeting (February) and the Fifth session (April) in New York; the Commission for Social Development in New York; the Commission on the Status of Women in New York; the World Food Summit in Rome; the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna; the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, in San Jose, Costa Rica; the Commission on Human Settlements in Nairobi; the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Vienna; the Governing Council of the UN Environment Program (UNEP) in Nairobi; the Substantive Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council; the meeting of the UNICEF Executive Board in New York; and the Second Biennial Session of the Youth Forum of the United Nations System in Vienna. The Baha'i International Community also attended the 36th session of the South Pacific Commission held in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Much of the work of NGOs in consultative status with the UN is carried out through NGO committees and task forces that address specific issues. During this last year, the Baha'i International Community held the chairmanships of the New York NGO Committee on the Family, the New York NGO Committee on Human Rights, and the New York CONGO (Committee of NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC) NGO Task Force. As part of the ongoing discussion of UN reform, the CONGO NGO Task Force organized an all-day consultation on increasing access to the UN General Assembly, its main committees, and all areas of the work of the UN. The consultation, chaired by a Baha'i International Community representative, brought together representatives of governments, high-ranking UN officials, and leaders of over forty of the most active NGOs at the UN. The Baha'i International Community was also represented on the Planning Committee for the Second Biennial Session of the Youth Forum of the UN System.

## Public Information

The major initiative of the Office of Public Information during 1996--97 was the launch in July 1996 of its site on the World Wide Web, The Baha 'i World, which was further developed throughout the remainder of the year.

The Haifa office continued to host an increasing number of special visitors to the Baha'i World Centre. During 1996--97 some 3,473 dignitaries, media representatives, and other special visitors from 82 countries were received in 220 separate visits. Film crews came from Korea, Jordan, Dubai, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Israel, Spain, Hungary, and the United States.

Baha'i International Community representative Guilda Walker officially participated in the launch of "Forests for Life," the World Wildlife Fund's Global Forest Campaign, at a gathering held 26 February 1997 in London. The event, which took the form of a diplomatic dinner, brought together 46 ambassadors, high commissioners, charges d' affaires, and minister counsellors representing European, African, North American, Latin American, and Asian countries, as well as a number of high-ranking government officials. Speeches by Claude Martin, Director-General of WWF International and by H.R.H. Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, both paid tribute to the efforts of the Baha'i International Community for its strong support of the Forests for Life campaign. In his remarks, the Duke of Edinburgh recalled that the Baha'i International Community was the agency that had initiated the process of a forestry campaign at a 1994 gathering at St. James' Palace. At the 1997 event, a commemorative brochure carried a message from the Universal House of Justice, along with the text of the addresses given by the Duke of Edinburgh

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and Dr. Martin and statements from governments of countries that had committed to implement the forest protected areas target established by the World Wildlife Fund. The message from the House of Justice stated, in part:

It will be only through deliberate and considered action that forest ecosystems—the repositories of so much of the world's genetic heritage—can be safeguarded from further devastation. The protagonists in this enterprise must be both national governments and the peoples of the world, acting through the host of non-governmental organizations they have created. For its part, the Baha'i International Community will continue to do all in its power to safeguard the common interests of the human family.

Another project being undertaken through the Office of Public Information involves the Baha'i community's collaboration with WETV, a new global television network, with which the office held a number of conferences and training seminars in Kenya, India, Jamaica, and Brazil. The object of this initiative is to empower people from various parts of the world to acquire the means and skills to tell the world their own stories about their own communities. The Paris branch of the Office of Public Information was also involved in a variety of activities. A representative cosigned, with other major religions, an appeal by the international NGO ATD Quart Monde and participated in a ceremony to commemorate the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The office was also represented at the Fifth International Dialogue

on the Transition to a Global Society in Budapest in October 1996, and a conference on Global Governance in London the following month.

Other collaborative efforts included work with the international media and public information activities before and during Habitat II in June 1996, the coordination of a number of artistic presentations and projects throughout the year, and collaboration with the Continental Board of Counsellors of the Baha'i Faith in Europe and the European Baha'i Task Force for Women on issues related to women throughout that continent. The Office prepared materials in various languages, and organized public information training seminars in several European Baha'i communities.

## THE BAHAI WORLD

One Country, the Office of Public Information's newsletter, which has been published for eight years and now appears in six languages with a circulation of over 30,000 in some 170 countries, brought out four issues during 1996-97, again winning an award for the excellence of its design and content. Coverage this year included stories on Habitat II, the World Food Summit, the Microcredit Summit in Washington, D.C., and the recognition of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Baha'i Faith in Brazil. A hospital in Honduras that seeks to empower its rural clients, microcredit in Colombia, and the development of a stonebreaking machine in South Africa were among the development features. The Baha'i community of Russia was profiled, as were two individual Baha'is: Kevin Locke, a Native American hoop dancer who promotes the vision of world citizenship in his international travels, and Omid Djalili, an actor and stand-up comic from Iranian background whose mission is as much to educate and elevate as it is to entertain. Another report outlined the current situation and international concern raised over the death sentences passed on two Baha'is in Iran.

### Conclusion

Work at local, national, and international levels was carried out by the Baha'i International Community's various offices throughout the year, focusing mainly on the advancement of women, human rights, sustainable communities, and the environment. At all levels the community spoke with one voice, supported by its various publications, advocating the perspective enunciated by Baha'u'llah over a century ago and captured succinctly in His own exhortation, "Let your vision be world-embracing."

Some 150 Baha'is, including representatives of the Bahri 'i International Community, gathered in Istanbul, Turkey, to participate in activities associated with

Habitat II.

BAHA'fSAT

HABITAT II

The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements  
and NGO Forum

As a full moon rose over the Acik Hava Tiyatrosu open-air theater in Istanbul, Turkey, on 29 May 1996, a moving musical and dance production was presented to the diverse audience assembled for the opening ceremonies of Habitat II, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. It portrayed Turkey, and Istanbul in particular, as a place "striving for unity with the world, with the other, with God ... where opposites meet: the East and the West, the old and the new." "Do they meet to clash and destroy?" it asked, "Or do they clash to be reborn in harmony yet unseen?" The finale asserted, to the stirring melody of Beethoven's Ode to Joy, that "Uniting what custom divides, they make the city Love's home." Inspiring delegates with spirit and vision, the ceremonies set the tone for a conference aimed at further developing a conceptual and programmatic framework for peace, harmony, and justice in the world's myriad communities. Habitat II, which took place in Istanbul from 30 May to 14 June 1996, along with the parallel NGO Forum (for non-governmental organizations) from 3 June to 14 June, brought together thousands

of government representatives and members of civil society to discuss issues central to the well-being of the world community. Indeed, a banner displayed in the main conference building, which read, "Respecting Human Rights-Men and Women Working Together as Equal Partners-Becoming Citizens of the World," challenged delegates to consider the idea of "community" in a new light. The Baha'i International Community was represented at both Habitat II and the NGO Forum, having the largest delegation of any of the NGOs at the official conference and quite possibly the largest contingent of representatives of a non-governmental organization at the Forum. For Baha'is, the venue was particularly significant because Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, spent over five years in Turkey during His long exile at the hands of the Persian and Ottoman authorities. During those years, He wrote many Tablets-some addressed to the leaders of the world. He said that in this land He had "deposited beneath every tree and every stone a trust, which God," He promised, would "ere long bring forth through the power of Truth."

Baha'is, then, saw Habitat II as a fitting venue for the global community to gather to discuss ways in which humanity can build prosperous, just, and united communities. They also used the occasion to bring Baha'u'llah's message to the attention of

the peoples of Turkey and of the world, distributing over 50,000 copies of Baha'i statements and other materials in over a dozen languages both at the conference and the NGO Forum, including The Prosperity of Humankind; World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development; Turning Point for All Nations; and Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World, the statement written for the conference.

A campaign to promote the concept of world citizenship, sponsored by the Turkish Baha'i community, attracted much interest, and thousands of NGO representatives, UN and government officials, conference volunteers, and others-including the Secretary-General of Habitat II, Wally N'Dow, and the President of the Turkish Republic, Suleyman Demirel-sported world citizenship buttons distributed by the Baha'is, which read, "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens; I am a world citizen; Habitat II-Istanbul '96" and "One World, One Home; Habitat II, Istanbul '96; Baha'i."

## HABITAT II

As at previous United Nations conferences held this decade, the Baha'i International Community sponsored several cultural events during the evenings, which proved very popular.

### Habitat II

At least 15,000 people took part in Habitat II, including government officials, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, parliamentarians and local authorities, NGO representatives, members of the media, staff, and other participants. Some twenty heads of state or government, numerous deputy prime ministers and vicepresidents, and scores of ministers also attended. The very strong interconnection between Habitat II and the NGO and other Forums was evident in the number of NGO representatives who were involved in Habitat and in the large number of UN and government officials who took some part in or visited the NGO Forum.

The Baha'i International Community as a whole was represented at the conference, as were components of it, including the European Baha'i Youth Council; the National Spiritual Assemblies of Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States; the European Baha'i Business Forum; l' Association baha'ie de l' Architecture et de l'Urbanisme; and Health for Humanity. A business founded on Baha' i principles was also accredited, and Baha'is served as official representatives on two government delegations and for various organizations. In all, some 50 Baha'is were present during the conference.

Baha'i representatives distributed materials to most government delegations, gave press kits to journalists, and advocated text changes to draft documents so as to have Baha'i concepts included

in the final draft of the Habitat Agenda, the global action plan for human settlements that was negotiated by Habitat II. They also made contact with their national NGO and government representatives, met their national media, and discussed issues with many people. On several occasions, Wally N'Dow publicly acknowledged the contributions made by Baha'is to the Habitat process, especially the Baha'i position that spiritual principles and priorities must drive community development processes- a position that Dr. N'Dow himself advocated vigorously.

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In the formulation of the Habitat documents, text was offered by Baha'i representatives from the floor as part of the official intergovernmental negotiating process, and the Baha'i International Community was one of ten organizations to provide text revisions to the Habitat Agenda, resulting in a composite NGO document that was taken by the UN Secretariat and made into an official UN negotiating document-the first time in UN history that this has happened. Baha'i representatives also served as "floor managers" for NGOs wishing to comment on paragraphs of text as they were being negotiated by the governments. By the end of the conference, it was widely evident that the Baha'i efforts towards this unprecedented process had been constructive and unifying. On the fifth day of the conference, the Baha'i International Community was one of five NGOs to read a statement to the Plenary. A shortened adaptation of the statement Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World 1 was read by a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkey, after which over 300 copies were given directly by the UN Secretariat to government and UN officials and press.

A reception hosted by the Baha'i International Community and the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkey was held toward the end of the conference for UN and government officials, NGO and press representatives, and others.

### NGO Forum

The NGO Forum began four days before Habitat II and lasted sixteen days, attracting representatives from over 2,400 NGOs, thousands of government and UN officials, a large press contingent, and "day pass" visitors exceeding 22,000. Over 150 Baha'is from some thirty countries participated in many of the 2,500 workshops, meetings, symposia, and cultural events.

The official opening ceremonies commenced with a Baha'i singing a verse in English about the contribution of women to peace, which was then sung in turn in various languages by several women. At the end of those same ceremonies, a youth addressed the gathering on behalf of the Youth Caucus, reading a vision statement

1. For the full text of this statement, see pp. 275- 81 of this volume.

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Some of the  
Baha'is  
attending  
Habitat II at  
the Baha'i  
International  
Community's  
booth at the  
NGO Forum .

that two of the Baha'i youth present had helped to draft. The statement said, in part, that to build "our global home," we will need "values common to all humanity: truth, justice, equity, understanding and cooperation ... inclusion, unity, a sense of belonging and collective responsibility ... economic and social justice ... racial and gender equality ... world citizenship ... and a sense of belonging, of community and security." The speaker's words were met with a standing ovation.

Baha'i institutions and agencies, including the Baha'i International Community, the National Spiritual Assemblies of Turkey and the United States of America, the European Baha'i Family Task Force, the European Baha'i Business Forum, the European Baha'i Youth Council, Health for Humanity, and the Baha'i Institute for the Built Environment, held more than 35 workshops and symposia, with topics as varied as "Shelter: Individual Rights or Community Responsibility," "Service-Oriented Leadership," "Encouraging Entrepreneurship in Women," "Youth and Global Governance," "Tomorrow Belongs to the Children," and "Community Relations and Conflict Resolution."

Individual Baha'is held numerous workshops in their professional capacities, and others were invited as speakers, panelists, and presenters at several dozen workshops , symposia, and other events held by organizations including UNESCO, Peace Child International, and GROOTS. Baha'is also participated in a number of Issue Caucuses, often introducing Baha'i principles into their discussions and influencing the language of the Caucuses' final

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declarations and statements. Baha'i women were, as with almost all the other major UN conference processes of this decade, at the forefront of Baha'i activities. And as with previous conferences, the Baha'i participants became known for their ability to chair meetings in a manner that would foster a consultative, unifying spirit, resulting in greater cooperation and understanding.

Attractive exhibitions, sponsored by the Baha'i International Community, the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkey, the European Baha'i Youth Council, and the European Baha'i Business Forum, were visited by thousands. For those who wished to learn more about the Baha'i Faith itself, evening meetings were held throughout the course of Habitat.

#### The World Business Forum

The World Business Forum, which was part of the overall activities associated with Habitat II, brought together over 320 leaders of corporations, networks, and NGOs to discuss the responsibilities and contributions of the private sector to the goals of Habitat II. The European Baha'i Business Forum (EBBF) was a cosponsor and active participant in the World Business Forum, held from 29 May to 2 June in Istanbul. Fifteen members of the EBBF, which was recognized as one of the leading networks of progressive business leaders, attended, chairing or serving as panelists at a number of events.

The EBBF's intensive involvement in the Forum was a result of the organization's relationship with the World Business Forum's Chairman, Marcello Palazzi, who had met Baha'is at a number of previous conferences and was so impressed with the EBBF's aims that he became an honorary member. The Secretary-General of the EBBF participated in drafting the final document produced by the World Business Forum and was one of the six presenters of the conclusions of the Forum to the United Nations Habitat II Partnership Committee, composed of governmental delegates to the UN system; he also chaired the closing Plenary Session of the World Business Forum, on the theme "The Leaders' Panel-Governance, Leadership, and Participation."

#### Youth Activities

Youth for Habitat II, an informal coalition of youth and youth-serving organizations working at all levels on human settlement

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issues, served as the umbrella group for youth organizations and activities at the event; a Baha'i youth was one of the coalition's founders. Other Baha'i youth involvement, spearheaded by the youth of Turkey and supported by volunteers and the European Baha'i Youth Council, resulted in Baha'i youth acting as principal players in numerous activities, including workshops, consultations and the Youth Round table, the Youth Caucus, the Youth Cafe, and the drafting of the Youth Vision Statement, "Building Our Global Home."

The European Baha'i Youth Council was officially accredited to the conference, and, as an international NGO, it was able to send five representatives, although most of the Baha'i youth's efforts were focussed on the NGO Forum. The Council sponsored a wellattended workshop on "Youth and Global Citizenship" at the

Forum, addressing such issues as global consciousness and unity and diversity from a Baha'i perspective.

The Youth Caucus, which was considered by many to be the most active, energetic, and visible section of the NGO community participating in Habitat II, met daily and was open to all youth NGO representatives and individuals interested in youth issues.

The final text of the Youth Vision Statement, adopted by the entire Youth Caucus, incorporated many Baha'i ideals and concepts and was presented at the opening plenary of the NGO Forum, where, as previously mentioned, it received the only standing ovation of the session.

The European Baha'i Youth Council also played a leadership role in the International Youth Consultation on Habitat II, a smaller, On Youth Day, these youth- some of them Baha 'is- carried this banner to the pavilion where they presented the youth vision statement in dramatic form and then gave the document to Habitat II Secretary-General Wally N'Dow.

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more formal event initiated by the World Assembly of Youth, with which the Council had previously collaborated in organizing the International Youth Consultation on Social Development at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995. The event at Habitat II, held from 3 to 6 June, brought together some fifty representatives of international youth NGO's and national youth councils.

Throughout all of the youth activities at Habitat II, the Baha'i youth demonstrated their readiness to serve and facilitate for others, and to bring to the proceedings vision and a spirit of unity and cooperation.

### Other Activities

Wisdom Keepers II, which met from 5 to 7 June as an official concurrent event of Habitat II, brought together spiritual leaders, indigenous peoples, scientists, youth, and activists "with decades of experience in grassroots organizing based on mobilizing human spirit." Convened to consider "the moral, ethical, and spiritual aspects of Habitat," the gathering addressed themes complementary to those of the main conference. A Turkish member of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Europe represented

the Baha'i Faith at the sessions. Baha'is attended and contributed to other activities, including the Forum on Human Solidarity and the series of daylong "Dialogues," focusing on issues such as citizenship and democracy in the twenty-first century, communications and the media, health, finance, energy, transport, and employment.

Press coverage at both the NGO Forum and Habitat II was coordinated by Wally N'Dow, Secretary-General of the Baha'i International Community, left, with United Kingdom Community's Office of Public Information member Hugh Adamson at a reception. Prior to Habitat II, a dinner in London, 20 May 1996. The reception was organized in honor

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of the conference's Secretary-General, Wally N'Dow. Held at the National Baha'i Center in London, England, on 20 May, the event was attended by some thirty dignitaries. A press conference facilitated by the Baha'i community was held the following day.

### The Lead-up Process

The Baha'i International Community participated in the first Habitat conference, held in 1976 in Vancouver, Canada, at which a Baha'i statement, *Building a Unified Community*, was issued. While the first Habitat conference was mostly technical in its focus, Habitat II was more "people-centered," like the other major UN conferences held recently, and had as a central theme the promotion of equality between women and men in human settlements. It concentrated on social and economic issues.

The Baha'i community was involved at the local, national, and international levels in the lead-up process to Habitat II. Throughout the year prior to the conference, the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkey worked closely with the Baha'i International Community's United Nations and Public Information Offices with a shared vision and common goals. Several national Baha'i communities also participated in their national and local Habitat consultations, which involved government agencies, NGOs, and NGO networks and coalitions, and they worked at drafting national statements and reports.

The Baha'i International Community offices sent representatives to the three UN PrepCom sessions, the third of which was also attended by several National Spiritual Assemblies and Baha'i agencies. There, the Baha'i International Community offices presented to NGOs and governments a paper entitled *Recommended Changes to the Draft Habitat Agenda*. In several instances, text supplied by

the Baha'i International Community's offices was debated among NGOs and government representatives, and , in several places, Baha'i recommendations (phrases) were incorporated into the final Habitat Agenda through contributions made at this PrepCom and at the conference itself.

#### Important Themes

During the course of Habitat II, the NGO Forum, and related activities in Istanbul, several important themes and ideas arose:

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recognition that spiritual values must be at the heart of and must drive the community-building process; that prosperity for communities and nations will not come by withdrawing from the world community but by becoming actively engaged in it; that interdependence is a reality; and that the rights and responsibilities of citizenship must be extended to all of the earth's inhabitants.

Many calls were heard for conferences, gatherings, and other initiatives around the year 2000 to chart a new direction for humanity towards an age of peace, justice, and prosperity. There was much discussion about the nature of NGOs- who they represent, their accountability and transparency, and whether they are democratic. NGOs consulted about the next step in civil society's participation in the UN system, whether taken through a UN Assembly of civil society representatives or the establishment of something more far-reaching and more representative of the peoples of the world.

In all of these themes, ideas , and discussions, the Baha'is saw reflected Baha'u'llah's assertion that "consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in tum are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations" and 'Abdu'l-Baha's promise that "when the pure intentions and the justice of the ruler, the wisdom and consummate skill and statecraft of the governing authorities, and the determination and unstinted efforts of the people, are all combined; then day by day the effects of the advancement, of the far-reaching reforms, of the pride and prosperity of government and people alike, will become clearly manifest."

#### Update: The Situation of THEBAHA'fS IN IRAN

T he situation of the Baha'i community in Iran remained grave during 1996-97. Coping in a difficult and hostile environment since the installation of the Islamic Revolutionary Government in 1979, the Baha'is, whose approximately 300,000 members compose Iran's largest religious minority, still find themselves without any legal or civil recourse-regarded as

"unprotected infidels" under the country's Islamic constitution. Although the executions of Baha'is have ceased, harassment continues. Between 1993 and 1997, some 200 Baha'is were arrested and detained for periods ranging from 48 hours to 6 months. As of March 1997, fourteen Baha'is were still being held in Iranian prisons solely because of their religious beliefs. Four of these are under sentence of death.

Concern about these death sentences is very real. Since 1979 more than 200 Baha'is have been killed, while another 15 have disappeared and are presumed dead. A secret government document, written and approved by Iran's most senior clerical and civil authorities and adopted by Iran's Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council in

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1991, outlines specific guidelines aimed at suppressing the minority community in a fashion calculated to elicit minimal international attention.

The obstacles placed before the Iranian Baha'i community are numerous and serve to impede them in fundamental ways.

First, with regard to employment, Baha'is are prevented from entering a large number of professions. More than 10,000 government employees who were members of the Baha'i Faith were

dismissed from their positions in the early days of the Revolution and were, in some cases, forced to repay wages and pensions.

Many remain unemployed and receive no social benefits. Baha'i farmers are denied admission to farmers' cooperatives, which are often the only sources of credit, seeds, pesticide, and fertilizer.

The stores owned by Baha'is in one city have been closed for more than twelve years now, and there is no sign that they will be reopened, in spite of continual requests to the authorities.

Pharmacies owned by Baha'is in two other cities were closed down and sealed by the authorities, for no apparent reason. Other Baha'is have been bullied and intimidated into abandoning their professions. One medical doctor, for example, was arrested, beaten, slandered, and forced to cooperate with the Islamic security guards.

Baha'i youth have been denied access to higher education for some seventeen years now, and an entire generation is suffering from this deprivation. A recent change in the secondary educational structure of the country has created even further hardship

for the Baha'i community. Previously the public high school program was four years in length, but now the government has shortened it to three years, making the fourth a pre-university year, from which Baha'is are barred, thus closing access to postsecondary education. To counteract this repression on the part of

the government, the Baha'i community established, in 1987, its own higher education program, or open university, to offer a program to its youth. By 1996, several hundred students were

enrolled and eleven had graduated with the equivalent of a bachelor's degree. Recently, however, government officials raided the office where records of all the Baha'i students were kept. The information secured by the government through this action may well be used against the community.

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A third means of oppression with which the Iranian Baha'i community must deal is the deprivation of civil rights and liberties. Baha'i marriages and divorces are not recognized in Iran, nor is the right of Baha'is to inherit. Recently the Ministry of Justice, Tehran Civil Court, deprived a Baha'i woman of the right to inherit her rightful share following the death of her daughter, stating that the only heir of the deceased is her husband, a Muslim, "because the other inheritors are Baha'is." Since Baha'is are strictly prevented from seeking probate, according to a government ruling passed in 1996, they now have no recourse in the matter. The freedom of Baha'is to travel outside and inside Iran is often impeded or even denied. Baha'is seeking passports must complete application forms which require declaration of affiliation with a "recognized religion"; a declaration of faith by Baha'i applicants is used to pressure them to recant their belief. Another manner in which individual members of the Baha'i community are harassed is the practice, in a number of communities, of summoning Baha'is to the security offices, where they are insulted and belittled with the object of creating fear in their families and weakening their spirits. On a collective level, Baha'is have been denied the right, since 1983, to assemble and to maintain their democratically elected administrative institutions. Since the Baha'i Faith has no clergy, and these institutions direct many functions of Baha'i community life, their dissolution is a direct threat to the existence of this religious community. Another manner in which the community as a whole has been deeply affected is through the confiscation of Baha'i cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centers, and other assets shortly after the 1979 revolution. They have never been returned; many, in fact, have been destroyed. In 1993, approximately 15,000 graves were desecrated when bulldozers excavated a section of the Baha'i cemetery in Tehran to construct an Islamic cultural center. Throughout the country, seizure of Baha'i cemeteries has left Baha'is access only to areas of waste land designated by the government for their use, where they are not permitted to mark the graves of those they bury. Confiscation of property owned by individual Baha'is is also widespread. Private and business properties, homes, and farms, have all been arbitrarily seized, thus contributing further to the

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erosion of the community's economic base. A few examples will serve to illustrate the arbitrary nature of the actions taken by the government. In Kashan, a mosque was built on land confiscated from Baha'is, in spite of complaints made through official channels.

In Yazd, the majority of Baha'is are prohibited from conducting any business transactions, and over 150 cases related to the confiscation of belongings occurred in only one year, 1995. One of the Baha'is who was ejected from her home, over the protests of her neighbors, was a blind woman, whose belongings were also confiscated, along with those of some sixty other Baha'i families. In Kirman and Mashhad, government authorities "inspected" numerous Baha'i homes, confiscating belongings such as computers, a video recorder, a television, a piano, and other musical equipment. Baha'is were also arrested and detained for one month in Kirman.

The situation of those Baha'is currently imprisoned is of the utmost seriousness, particularly those languishing under sentence of death. Kayvan Khalajabadi and Bihnam Mithaqi were first imprisoned in 1989 solely on the basis of their faith. An original sentence of eight years' imprisonment was, through a process of appeals, first commuted to three years plus fifty lashes, and then overturned in favor of the death sentence, first passed in 1991.

The latest appeal resulted in the confirmation of the death sentence by the Supreme Court of Iran on 18 February 1996.

Musa Talibi was sentenced to death for apostasy on 18 August 1996, after being imprisoned in Isfahan since June 1994. While he was originally sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for sharing the tenets of his faith with others, an appeal reduced the sentence to eighteen months. A further appeal by the prosecutors resulted in imposition of the death sentence, which was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Iran in January 1997. News of this decision was conveyed orally to Mr. Talibi's relatives; no written verdict has been given. Recently Mr. Talibi was transferred from Isfahan to the notorious Evin Prison in Tehran.

Dhakil:m'llah MaJ:rjami, charged with apostasy, was sentenced to death in January 1996, and his properties and assets were all confiscated, since his heirs are all Baha'is. After a lengthy appeal process, confirmation of the death sentence was received from

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the Supreme Court of Iran in January 1997. Again, this news was conveyed orally to Mr. Mal\_irami's relatives, and he was moved from the prison of the Revolutionary Court in Yazd to that of the Security Information Department.

A fifth Baha'i, Ramic;lan-'Ali Dhulfaqan, although released from

prison in 1994, is still under sentence of death for apostasy. During 1996, other members of the Baha'i Faith were arrested on various pretexts. Two men in Mashhad, for example, were arrested in February while conducting a Baha'i children's class. Charges against them include being active in the Baha'i community, gathering for Baha'i meetings in a private house, and working against the country's security by organizing a children's art exhibit. Six Baha'is arrested for infringement of business law were given prison sentences of between six months and one year and were fined 500,000 tumans (equivalent to a year's rent for a two- or three-bedroom apartment in Tehran), although none of them had done anything illegal and they provided the court with evidence proving their innocence. Two were released in late 1996, but the other four were still imprisoned as of March 1997. And two other Baha'is, arrested with several Muslims early in 1996 on charges of misconduct, were sentenced to eight years' imprisonment after being told that they must recant their faith in order to be freed. They refused. All the Muslims arrested with them have been released.

#### Government Action

Around the world, governments again this year spoke up in defense of the Baha'is in Iran. Statements were made by government representatives in the European Parliament, which adopted a resolution on Iran mentioning the situation of the Baha'i community on 20 February 1997. Statements were also made in the German Bundestag and the French Parliament, and many other governments instructed their delegations to the United Nations to support actions taken on behalf of the Baha'is in that forum.

In the United States, Senators John Edward Porter and Tom Lantos wrote directly to the Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations expressing their concern about the persecution of religious minorities in Iran and specifically mentioned the death sentence passed against Mr. Talibi for apostasy, calling on the

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government to commute the sentence and to "permit the free exercise of religion for all its citizens and end the persecution of religious minorities." Again this year the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives unanimously approved a resolution-the seventh congressional appeal in support of the Iranian Baha'i community adopted since 1982- condemning Iran's continuing repressive actions against the community and urging the regime to grant religious rights to the Baha'is.

#### Media Coverage and Scholarly Articles

The year also saw significant media coverage of the plight of Iran's Baha'is. Following the confirmation of the death sentences on Mr. Talibi and Mr. Ma:irami at the end of January, both the

Reuters and the UPI news services reported on the statement by State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns which said, "The United States government strongly condemns this action and calls on the government of Iran to release these men. We urge the government of Iran to free all prisoners of conscience and to ensure freedom of religion."

Amnesty International, in its 30 January International Urgent Action Bulletin, also reported on the confirmation of the death sentences against Talibi and Malp-ami, stating that the organization "is extremely concerned" that the men "may be at risk of imminent execution." The bulletin provided details as to the cases of both men and stated, "Amnesty International believes both men are prisoners of conscience, currently held solely on account of their religious beliefs. It is calling for the death sentences against them to be lifted and for them to be released immediately and unconditionally."

The International Labor Organization noted in a June press release, following the 83rd International Labor Conference in Geneva, that there are "serious problems" in Iran "with respect to employment policy toward members of the Baha'i community and members of other religious communities." The ILO's Committee on the Application of Standards urged the Iranian government to adopt a non-discriminatory policy "particularly with regard to posts within the judiciary system, election to Islamic Labor Councils and access to university education."

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In Australia, in March 1997, the SBS, the second national broadcast network in the country and the one that addresses the needs of Australia's ethnic communities, aired an item on the case of Mr. Talibi on its "World News" program. An interview with a Baha'i spokesperson regarding Mr. Talibi and the general situation of the Baha'is in Iran was also broadcast on a national SBS radio program.

Mention of the situation of Iran's Baha'i community also received scholarly attention. The Emory International Law Review, in its Spring 1996 volume, on the theme "Religious Human Rights in the World Today," contained an article by Donna E. Arzt on "Religious Human Rights in Muslim States of the Middle East and Africa," which contained references to the history and the current situation of the Baha'i community in Iran, noting that "The 1979 Iranian constitution formally recognizes Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians [sic] but makes no mention of Baha'is, who constitute Iran's largest religious minority, even though, as a scriptural monotheism, the Baha'i faith should be entitled to dhimma status. There is little doubt, however, that Baha'is are the most persecuted minority in Iran."

At the United Nations

A resolution expressing "concern at the continuation of violations of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," noting in particular the situation of the Baha'is, "whose existence as a viable religious community in the Islamic Republic of Iran is threatened," and calling upon the government of that country "to implement fully the conclusions and recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance relating to the Baha'is and to other minority religious groups" 1 was passed on 24 April 1996 at the 52nd Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. This strong resolution, which included a request that the UN's Special Representative on Iran "submit an interim report to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the situation of minority groups such as the Baha'is, and to report to the Commission at its fifty-third

1. See *The Bahá'í World 1995-96*, pp. 142-43 for more on this report.

session," kept the persecution of Iran's Baha'is before the gaze of the international community.

In August 1996, in another United Nations forum, a representative of the Baha'i International Community made a statement to the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, detailing the continued persecution of the Iranian Baha'i community, expressing its hope that the Subcommission would continue to monitor the case, condemn the violation of the Baha'is' human rights, and request that the Islamic Republic of Iran guarantee religious freedom to the Baha'is of that country. A resolution of the Subcommission urged the Iranian government "to implement fully the conclusions and the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance relating to the Baha'is and to other minority religious groups, including Christians, until they are completely emancipated."

The reports of the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance and the Special Representative on Iran, detailed in *The Bahá'í World 1995-96*, were followed up by interim reports. The Special Representative, Maurice Danby Copithorne, submitted his written interim report in October 1996, including mention of the situation of the Baha'i community in seven of the report's seventeen paragraphs. Noting a description in the Iranian press of the Baha'i Faith as "an organized espionage ring" rather than a religion, the Special Representative concluded that "the situation for the Baha'is in the Islamic Republic can improve only if there is a significant change in attitude towards them on the part of the Iranian authorities" and further noted that "the condition of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran may well have deteriorated since [the Representative's] report earlier this year to the Commission on Human Rights."

The points raised by Professor Amor in his interim report, based

on conclusions and recommendations included in his previous report to the Commission on Human Rights, present the case of the Baha'is to the Iranian authorities and require their response. The following areas are those in which the Special Rapporteur has called for change by the Iranian government: that the ban on Baha'i organizations be lifted; that confiscated properties be returned and destroyed places of worship either be rebuilt or compensation be offered; that Baha'is be free to bury and honor their dead; that the

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question of religion be deleted from passport applications to provide Baha'is with greater freedom of movement; that Baha'is be given access to institutions of higher education and to the justice system; and that death sentences pronounced against Baha'is be set aside.

In his interim report, Professor Amor made specific mention of the three cases of apostasy pending against Baha'is in Iran.

On 12 December 1996, the Plenary of the fifty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly adopted a strongly worded resolution on the human rights situation in Iran, with 79 voting in favor, 30 against, and 54 abstentions. The resolution made specific mention of the Baha'is in three operative paragraphs and was identical to the resolution adopted by the Third Committee on 29 November.

One of these paragraphs states that the United Nations "expresses its concern at grave breaches of human rights of the Baha'is in the Islamic Republic of Iran and of situations of discrimination against the members of this religious community ... " Another, in the same wording as the Human Rights Sub-Commission's resolution, calls for the Iranian Government to implement the conclusions and recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance.

The third operative paragraph states that the United Nations will "continue examination of the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran including the situation of minority groups, such as the Baha'is, during its fifty-second session under the item entitled, 'Human rights questions' on the basis of the report of the Special Representative and in the light of additional elements provided by the Commission on Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council." The following April, in 1997, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights again expressed "grave concern" at the breaches of human rights and other situations of discrimination against Iran's Baha'is and again called upon the government "to implement fully the recommendations of the Special Representative and relevant recommendations of the Special Rapporteurs on religious intolerance and on freedom of opinion and expression, in particular the recommendations relating to the Baha'is, Christians, Sunni, and other minority religious groups." Finally, the Commission decided "to continue the examination of the situation of human rights

in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the situation of minority

## THE B AHA'I WORLD

groups such as the Baha'is during its 54th session under the agenda item 'question of the violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any part of the world.'"

Mr. Copithorne's report on the situation in Iran to the 53rd Session of the Commission on Human Rights, submitted on 1 April 1997, outlined further cases of persecution against the Baha'is, updated the cases previously treated, and again urged that "urgent attention" be paid to the October 1996 recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance, Abdelfattah Amor. By the year's end, however, none of these issues had been addressed, and the situation of Iran's Baha'i community remained perilous.

The Baha'f World  
on the  
World Wide Web

On 7 August 1996 the Baha'i International Community's Office of Public Information announced to the public the launch of its site on the World Wide Web, appropriately named The Baha'i World. The site, located at <[www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org)>, conveys the unified and global nature of the Baha'i community. With a visually appealing home page and stories and comments from Baha'is around the world, the site reflects the cultural and geographic diversity of the Faith's five million members, as well as their common understanding of and approach to issues currently facing humanity.

Aside from featuring the global Baha'i community, the site offers a wealth of information about the history and teachings of the Baha'i Faith. Visitors to the site can choose whether to view a brief introduction or a more detailed explanation of the central figures and institutions of the Faith, which contains main articles on Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi, the Universal House of Justice, the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, and the historical context of the Babi and Baha'i Faiths. Supplementary materials

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such as the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, excerpts from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, a statement on the protection of diversity in the Baha'i community, an account written by the English scholar Edward Granville Browne of his encounter with Baha'u'llah, and a description of two early Baha'i heroines are some of the other available materials.

Another main section of the site deals with theological subjects such as the Baha'i concept of God; life, death, and the soul; prayer, meditation, and fasting; the purpose of life; the oneness

of religion; and the Prophets or Manifestations of God.

The fourth major section outlines the Baha'i Faith's vision of humanity's future and features a statement by the Universal House of Justice addressed to the peoples of the world on the occasion of the United Nations International Year of Peace in 1986. Other statements by the Baha'i International Community can be found here, including *The Prosperity of Humankind*, which was first released at the UN World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995; *Turning Point for All Nations*, which was contributed by the Baha'i International Community to discussions of UN reform during the 50th anniversary of the United Nations; and a number of documents and statements regarding the role of women, some of which were published and distributed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Visitors can also access a library of other official statements on a range of topics made by the Baha'i International Community in various United Nations fora.

The web site launch was the culmination of many months of intense work by the Baha'i International Community's Office of Public Information, which saw to the design, content development, and coordination of technical work. The hard work paid off, as the site has attracted a steady stream of visitors during its first nine months- some 55,000 visitors from approximately 90 countries and territories, including places as far flung as Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Micronesia, Namibia, Liechtenstein, Swaziland, Sri Lanka, and Papua New Guinea.

Taking its teachings to the World Wide Web is a natural progression for a Faith that espouses the oneness of humankind. And as early as 1936 the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi,

#### WORLD WIDE WEB

The Baha'i World web site, launched in August 1996, welcomed more than 55,000 visitors during its first nine months of existence.

It anticipated the development of a global communications network like the Internet, stating in one instance that "A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity." 1

The site has received favorable publicity since its launch,

most notably a notice in the 22 August 1996 edition of USA

Today, a national daily newspaper in the United States with a circulation of more than 1.5 million.

In view of the diverse nature of the Baha'i community and its commitment to world unity, the site has been developed with the capability of being expanded to include many languages. Materials were originally available in English, with some French and Spanish, and plans are under way for expansion to include Portuguese

and other languages.

Future developments include plans for links between the Baha'i International Community's web site and those of national

1. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha 'u 'llah: Selected Letters*, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette: Baha 'i Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 203.

Baha'i communities around the world. National Spiritual Assemblies in some countries have already set up their own sites to provide details about the history of and current happenings in their communities. Such web sites also provide a means for people to get in touch electronically with the Baha'is in their own country or region of the world.

The Baha 'i World web site itself is dynamic, with plans scheduled for a section on Baha'i activities in the arena of social and economic development, perspective features on current global trends, and an expansion of selections from the Baha'i sacred writings, among other new features.

EssAYS,  
STATEMENTS,  
PROANF11Es

The resting place of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Baha 'i Faith, in London, England.

Glenford E. Mitchell profiles Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha 'f Faith from 1921 to 1957, highlighting his roles as community builder, interpreter, and visionary.

SHOGHI EFFENDI:  
GUIDE FORA

NEW MILLENNIUM

Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, who was born one hundred years ago in Ottoman Palestine, occupies a unique position in the annals of religion. What made him indispensable to the emergence of a worldwide community has also ensured for him a place in twentieth century history as a towering figure of enduring significance. Through thirty-six years of prodigious activity, he carried out his designated responsibility, both in literary and practical terms, as interpreter of the vision of world unity advanced by Baha'u'llah, Founder of the Faith. The potential of the incomparably diverse but united global community he raised up is to become a pattern for future society. Anyone acquainted with its workings will be impressed by the spirit that induces its coherence. The community's burgeoning along the lines traced by Shoghi Effendi strongly suggests that the demonstrated efficacy of his guidance and its salience for social reconstruction

of the planet are bound increasingly to impress themselves upon public consciousness and inevitably to influence the shaping of a millennium.

No celebration will mark the centennial of Shoghi Effendi's birth: such an observance would violate his clear instruction against the commemoration of his birthday or any other event associated with his life. Remembrance of his monumental achievements is, nevertheless, irrepressible and begs for expression at every opportunity. This anniversary offers a welcome incentive, then, for reflection on the nature of his work and the relevance of his thought to contemporary concern about the state and direction of human society, especially as the century about which he offered such illuminating and proven analyses draws to a close. The sheer volume and efficiency of his output in any one of his vocations, as exegete, author, translator, administrator, commentator on world trends, master planner, organizer of global undertakings, aesthete, is astounding, but it is the rarity of his inspired insight that lent a singular quality to his varied occupations and that remains as an exceptional and potent legacy.

Shoghi Effendi was born into a politically precarious environment at a time of rising global fermentation. His life encompassed the closing years of Ottoman rule, the entire span of the British Mandate, and virtually a decade of the independent State of Israel—altogether a period marked by social turmoil exacerbated by the upheavals of two world wars. The experience of his own family was as a barometer of the times. Almost half a century before his birth his great-grandfather, Baha'u'llah, had been officially banished from His native Persia as a consequence of charges imputed to His leadership role in a new religion; before that, Baha'u'llah's Forerunner, the Bab, had been put to death in dramatic circumstances.

Baha'u'llah's exile took Him to Iraq and Turkey, where, in both countries, He was confined as a prisoner for a number of years. It was during these years that He announced His mission as the bearer of a new revelation from God. Ultimately, Baha'u'llah was imprisoned in Acre, Palestine, arriving there with His family in August 1868. He was released from strict confinement after a few years but remained under detention in that area, where He passed away in 1892. His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, who had shared in His Father's exile and imprisonment, succeeded Baha'u'llah as head of the Faith and the appointed interpreter and exemplar of His teachings. The firstborn of 'Abdu'l-Baha's eldest daughter,

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Shoghi Effendi grew up under the sheltering eye of his beloved grandfather. Except for his sojourns abroad as a

student and other occasional travels, this scion of a historic family of Persian exiles lived and worked in the land of his birth.

'Abdu'l-Baha's death in November 1921 marked the beginning of an unusual career for Shoghi Effendi. Nothing had prepared the Baha'is, then scattered among some 35 countries, for the preeminent part he was destined to play in the making of their community-not the fact that Shoghi Effendi, before his appointment as he was a member of a family Guardian, at his small typewriter on the of primary distinction, nor that balcony of the room he occupied next to he had for some time acted that of 'Abdu'l-Baha's secretary in Persian and English. Nor was there any indication of ambition on his part. Consonant with his total dedication to the service of his grandfather, Shoghi Effendi's great aspiration had been to become a perfect English translator of the Baha'i writings. His letter of 11 June 1920, applying for admission to Oxford University, made this intention clear: "My sole aim," he wrote, "is to perfect my English, to acquire the literary ability to write it well, speak it well and translate correctly and eloquently from Persian and Arabic into English." His innocence of any expectation beyond such aspiration was shattered by the shock he sustained upon learning from 'Abdu'l-Baha's Will and Testament of his appointment as interpreter and Guardian. He was then only 25 and still a student at Oxford. His sudden awareness of this new responsibility overwhelmed him, so much so that he absented himself from the Holy Land for some time to collect his strength for the tasks ahead.

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### Shoghi Effendi as Community Builder

The young Guardian began his ministry in the unsettled aftermath of World War I. He was faced with the daunting challenge of rallying the forces and concentrating the efforts of loosely connected groups and isolated individuals who were for the most part unschooled in the details of the beliefs and practices of their new religion. If he were to succeed, he had not only to win their adherence to the fundamentals but, as well, to imbue them with a vision that would penetrate and transcend the gloom of the times. The matrix in which the Guardian must function was set by Baha'u'llah Himself, Who declared the oneness of humankind to be the central principle of His Revelation. If Baha'u'llah

was the author of this world-embracing concept, His immediate successor, 'Abdu'l-Baha, was the architect of the System that must realize it, and Shoghi Effendi, the latter's successor, would be the builder of the structure that would enable that System to operate. The Guardian summarizes Baha'u'llah's intention in these words:

For Baha 'u'llah, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these, He, as well as 'Abdu'l-Baha after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth. 1

Shoghi Effendi set about his tasks with unbounded and efficient energy. There was a divine Plan to be pursued. It required the raising up of new institutions, the execution of worldwide teaching programs, the development of local and national components of a world community, the protection of this nascent Faith from attack

1. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahri 'u 'lLah: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 19.

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of its adversaries—all a part of the process of building the new World Order proclaimed by Baha'u'llah. Thus Shoghi Effendi must do more than explain the sacred texts: he must direct and guide his trust through the permutations of individual and social transformation; he must forge a Baha'i community. His exegetic works were made to serve these essential purposes.

At the outset, Shoghi Effendi devoted paramount attention to building the local and national institutions called for in the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. For a community without a clergy, these democratically elected bodies were essential to every other development. Thus in a letter to the Baha'is in North America, dated 23 March 1923, he wrote:

And, now that this all-important Work may suffer no neglect, but rather function vigorously and continuously in every part of the Baha'i world; that the unity of the Cause of Baha'u'llah may remain secure and inviolate, it is of the utmost importance that in accordance with the explicit text of the Kitab-Aqdas,

the Most Holy Book, in every locality, be it city or hamlet, where the number of adult (21 years and above) declared believers exceeds nine, a local "Spiritual Assembly" be forthwith established. To it all local matters pertaining to the Cause must be directly and immediately referred for full consultation and decision. The importance, nay the absolute necessity of these local Assemblies is manifest when we realize that in the days to come they will evolve into the local House of Justice, and at present provide the firm foundation on which the structure of the Master's Will is to be reared in future.<sup>2</sup>

In that same letter, he issued a similar call for the formation of National Spiritual Assemblies under which the local ones would function.

In the West, particularly in North America, where 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit in 1912 had stimulated great interest in the Baha'i teachings and had drawn many to acceptance of the Faith, these words had a revolutionary effect. A course was now set for the formation of a different kind of community with its own laws and

2. Shoghi Effendi, *Baha'i Administration: Selected Messages 1922- 1932* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 37.

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procedures—a community dependent for its existence on voluntary effort and individual initiative. Through successive elaborations of the processes initiated—calling for elections without campaigning and nominations, for consultation as a basis of decision-making, and for the establishment of a fund supported by voluntary contributions for which receipts must be issued—Shoghi Effendi urged and guided the creation of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. It was an effort that changed the character of thought and behavior in the management of the spiritual and practical affairs of a clergyless, religious community. The measures of this transformation continually evolved to levels of complexity with the growth of the community and are initiated anew with every neophyte community, local or national. It is a mark of the dynamism of Shoghi Effendi's stewardship that, despite the disruptions of the Second World War and subsequent regional catastrophes, at the time of his death in 1957, there existed 26 National Spiritual Assemblies and more than one thousand Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world. With the necessary organization in place, he then focused the energies of the Baha'is on the systematic expansion and consolidation of their numbers. Sixteen years passed before the North American Baha'is, at the urging of their Guardian, embarked in 1937 on a teaching scheme known as the Seven Year Plan. This was the first organized attempt to respond to the series of fourteen letters, "Tablets of the Divine Plan," addressed to the North Americans by

'Abdu'l-Baha. Herein are guidelines for the global expansion of the Faith and also the assignment of special responsibility to the Baha'is of that continent for initiating such an undertaking.

The Tablets of the Divine Plan, described by Shoghi Effendi as the charter of teaching, had been penned by 'Abdu'l-Baha over the period of a year, from March 1916 to March 1917, during the course of the First World War. Because of conditions at that time only five had been delivered before the end of the war. In a conference known as the "Convention of the Covenant" and held at Hotel McAlpin in New York 26-30 April 1919, all fourteen tablets were displayed and discussed. This marked a historic moment for the North American Baha'is, but as the implications of these communications were not yet fully understood, only a few individuals responded, mostly on their own initiative, to the call to

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travel to other countries and teach the new Faith. It remained for Shoghi Effendi years later to set in place the instruments and to prime the processes that would guarantee a systematic and sustained response. Through an approach that was typical of his method of evoking action, Shoghi Effendi gradually trained the Baha'is to recognize and accept the necessity for such a response. The instrument of his approach was his untiring pen. Through it were conveyed his aptness of timing, his grasp of opportunity, his sense of history, his vision of future possibilities, and his appeal to wellsprings of the believers' faith and devotion; add to these the force and credibility of his logic, the candor of his argument, and his frequent, genuine commendations of the work of individuals and institutions—all expressed in a language of rhetorical excellencies that engaged the mind and enchanted the heart. He conveyed most of what he had to say in letters but found communicating by cablegram an expeditious means of dealing with the demands of a rapidly developing community. The latter medium suited his purpose in other ways, serving to accentuate the urgency of so many of his messages. He honed his prose to this abbreviated form of communication with extraordinary success, evolving a colorful, elliptical style that lent a sense of surprise, of drama, and of excitement to his announcements, as well as a depth of profundity to a vocabulary intensified by the stripping away of minor elements of speech.

It took a series of letters and cablegrams sent over a period of about two years to bring the North American Baha'is to the degree of action hoped for by the Guardian. The beginning and fruition of that extended effort can be gleaned from the following excerpts of some of these messages:

April 29, 1935. "APPEAL ASSEMBLED DELEGATES AND INCOMING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY EARNESTLY DELIBERATE

MEASURES REQUIRED STIMULATE ALL LOCAL COMMUNITIES GROUPS LEND IMMEDIATE UNPRECEDENTED IMPETUS TEACHING ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT STATES CANADA. SUSTAINED CONCENTRATION THIS PARAMOUNT ISSUE CAN ALONE REVEAL POTENTIALITIES BELOVED TEMPLE AND ENABLE SUPERB SELF-SACRIFICE ASSOCIATED WITH IT

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YIELD ITS FAIREST FRUIT." A vital element in the organization of the Baha'i community is the National Convention held annually at which delegates elected by the Baha'is throughout a country gather for two essential purposes: to elect the National Spiritual Assembly and to offer advice and recommendations to that body through a process of consultation among the delegates and between them and the outgoing and incoming members of the Assembly. Shoghi Effendi used such occasions to guide the community. In this instance, the Baha'is of Canada and the United States, who functioned under a combined National Spiritual Assembly at that time, were engaged in individual teaching activities in parts of these countries and had at the same time been struggling to build the first Baha'i House of Worship of the Western hemisphere, near Chicago.

October 26, 1935. The Guardian reinforces his previous message to which there has not been an adequate response, by

asserting: "A NEW HOUR HAS STRUCK IN HISTORY OUR BELOVED CAUSE CALLING FOR NATION-WIDE, SYSTEM-ATIC, SUSTAINED EFFORT IN TEACHING FIELD ENABLING THEREBY THESE FORCES TO BE DIRECTED INTO SUCH CHANNELS AS SHALL REDOUND TO GLORY OF OUR FAITH AND HONOR OF ITS INSTITUTIONS ."

January 10, 1936. In an amplification of the previous messages that takes cognizance of the ominous state of world conditions, he writes: "This new stage in the gradual unfoldment of the Formative Period of our Faith into which we have just entered- the phase of concentrated teaching activity-synchronizes with a period of deepening gloom, of universal impotence, of ever-increasing destitution and widespread disillusionment in the fortunes of a declining age." Furthermore, in indicating the state of readiness of the elected Baha'i institutions, he reasons, "Now that the administrative Organs of a firmly-established Faith are vigorously and harmoniously functioning, and now that the Symbol [i.e., the House of Worship in the United States] of its invincible might is lending unprecedented impetus to its spread, an effort unexampled in its scope and sustained vitality is urgently required so that the moving spirit of its Founder may permeate and transform the lives of the countless multitudes that hunger for its teachings."

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May 1, 1936. His cabled appeal to the next National Convention, calling attention to a historic moment, sets the sights of the delegates on 1944, the centenary of their religion: "FIRST CENTURY BAHAI ERA DRAWING TO A CLOSE. HUMANITY ENTERING OUTER FRINGES MOST PERILOUS ST AGE ITS EXISTENCE. OPPORTUNITIES PRESENT HOUR UNIMAGINABLY PRECIOUS. WOULD TO GOD EVERY STATE WITHIN AMERICAN REPUBLIC AND EVERY REPUBLIC IN AMERICAN CONTINENT MIGHT ERE TERMINATION THIS GLORIOUS CENTURY EMBRACE LIGHT FAITH BAHAU'LLAH AND ESTABLISH STRUCTURAL BASIS OF HIS WORLD ORDER." At this convention, together with decisions related to the ongoing construction of the House of Worship, a campaign of teaching is definitely adopted, but its focus is primarily on the home front.

May 30, 1936. He reiterates in a letter his original call for action on a broadened scale: "A systematic, carefully conceived, and well-established plan should be devised, vigorously pursued and continuously extended .... Its supreme immediate objective should be the permanent establishment of at least one center in every state of the American Republic and in every Republic of the American continent not yet enlisted under the banner of His Faith. Its ramifications should gradually be extended to the European continent. ... " He is more specific and more elaborate here.

Through successive messages up until now he is attempting to increase the North Americans' apprehension of the global magnitude of their spiritual obligation to spread the Baha'i teachings .

Having previously suggested a time frame for the hoped-for plan by mentioning the forthcoming Baha'i centennial, he registers a heightened feeling of urgency: "The field is immense, the task gigantic , the privilege immeasurably precious. Time is short, and the obligation sacred, paramount and urgent."

November 14, 1936. "The promulgation of the Divine Plan, unveiled by our departed Master ['Abdu'l-Baha] in the darkest days of one of the severest ordeals which humanity has ever experienced, is the Key which Providence has placed in the hands of the American believers whereby to unlock the doors leading them to fulfill their unimaginably glorious Destiny." Here is a reminder that Shoghi Effendi's repeated calls for a far -reaching teaching

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plan are based on the charter addressed to them by 'Abdu'l-Baha as far back as the time of the First World War.

March 22, 1937. In yet another letter, he persists in urging on the North American Bahais: "The progress of the teaching campaign is most remarkable and reassuring. The uninterrupted prosecution

of this holy enterprise and its extension to the South American continent and the islands of the Pacific will no doubt attract unimaginable blessings and must entail far-reaching consequences. In the course of this year, when the American believers are commemorating the 25th anniversary of 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to America, a mighty impetus should be lent to this campaign which you have so splendidly initiated."

May 1, 1937. It is the time for the National Convention again.

Shoghi Effendi's cablegram now brings matters to a decisive point: "ADVISE PROLONGATION CONVENTION SESSIONS ENABLE DELEGATES CONSULT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO FORMULATE FEASIBLE SEVEN YEAR PLAN .... " The impact of this message on the Convention is electrifying. A sense of mission galvanizes the consultations and a Plan is born.

The Guardian could and did issue directives as occasions demanded. But he preferred to see the Baha'is take action on the basis of initiative induced by internalized knowledge of the Baha'i teachings and of consultation among themselves. The foregoing excerpts from his messages show how through an alternation of letters and cablegrams, Shoghi Effendi persevered patiently and persistently in instructing, appealing to, and nudging the Baha'is to take actions that would form a pattern of their functioning. He also had the practice of expatiating on important actions once they had been set in motion, so as to fix that pattern, and so that in the process of carrying out a task or function the believers could adequately appreciate the significance of what they were doing. And so it was in the case of the implementation of the Seven Year Plan. A year and a half after its adoption, Shoghi Effendi penned one of the lengthiest letters of his ministry, which was published as a book entitled *The Advent of Divine Justice*. In it he amplified the meaning of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Tablets of the Divine Plan, producing a seminal work of interpretation and practical advice that galvanized efforts during the Seven Year Plan. That letter continues to be a

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major source of inspiration and guidance for Baha'is.

That first teaching plan encompassed the Western Hemisphere, operating for the most part during World War II. It was launched at a time when there were about sixty-five Local Spiritual Assemblies in the United States and Canada. Three objectives were specified:

- 1) opening all unopened provinces of Canada and states of the United States to the Faith by establishing at least one Local Spiritual Assembly in each of them; 2) taking the Faith to other countries in the hemisphere; and 3) completing the exterior ornamentation of the House of Worship, which at that time was being built in Wilmette, to the north of Chicago. By the end, April 1944, all objectives had been achieved, and this Plan set the pattern for more

extensive teaching and consolidation programs. A second Seven Year Plan was launched by the North American Baha'is in April 1946, which, together with plans of shorter duration undertaken by national communities elsewhere, ensured the penetration of the Faith into countries on other continents.

This second enterprise preceded the ambitious Ten Year International Teaching Plan initiated by Shoghi Effendi in 1953, at which time there were 12 National Spiritual Assemblies and 250 Local Spiritual Assemblies in the world. He died at the midpoint of the latter Plan in 1957 when the Faith had already been established in 200 countries and dependencies and the numbers of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies had increased to 26 and more than 1,000, respectively. The execution of that Plan involved the dispatch to territories all over the globe of large numbers of Baha'i teachers, known as pioneers, the stories of whose exploits chronicle an astonishing record of human adventure and endurance worthy of the acts of the apostles of Jesus Christ, but magnified manyfold. That Shoghi Effendi was able to inspire such a movement of scores of volunteers who were unschooled in missionary work, and whose sole qualification was their profound devotion to the Cause of Baha'u'llah, is an impressive index of the dynamism of his Guardianship. By the end of the Ten Year Plan in April 1963, the centennial anniversary of the declaration of Baha'u'llah's mission in Baghdad, His Faith had actually become a world religion: its reach had spread to virtually every country except those under the direct influence of communism. At that time, too, a major

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The Guardian 'sjinal map, drawn in November 1957, showing progress made by the midpoint of the Ten Year Plan (1953-1963).

SHOGHI EFFE NDI

expectation of the Baha'is was fulfilled: the Universal House of Justice, the international governing institution of the Faith which it was one of the main objectives of Shoghi Effendi to establish, was brought into existence at the first International Baha'i Convention, through an election in which all members of the then 56 National Spiritual Assemblies participated. At the writing of this article, the number of these Assemblies stands at 174.

Shoghi Effendi as Interpreter

As indicated in the above-cited examples of his calls for the formation of Baha'i elected institutions and for the adoption of an extensive teaching plan, Shoghi Effendi's interpretations were largely oriented to action. There was a synthesis between instruction and interpretation: in advising the community to form Spiritual Assemblies, he asserted the practical meaning of texts in the Kitabi-Aqdas and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha; in calling for a systematic plan of expansion, he breathed life into the Tablets of the Divine Plan. The timing of such developments was another matter, falling within the discretion of his authority as appointed guide. To a great extent his interpretations were responses to the expressed or demonstrated need of the community. He seemed completely to avoid gratuitous random interpretations of the sacred texts; the questions and needs of the community outlined the course and output of his exegesis. In a Jetter written on 12 May 1925, for example, he responded to communications dated 4 and 18 April 1925 from the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada that prompted him to explain further the manner of election for National Spiritual Assemblies:

Regarding the method to be adopted for the election of the National Spiritual Assemblies, it is clear that the text of the Beloved's Testament gives us no indication as to the manner in which these Assemblies are to be elected. In one of His earliest Tablets, however, addressed to a friend in Persia, the following is expressly recorded: "At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme Baytu'l-'Adl

(Universal House of Justice)."

These words clearly indicate that a three-stage election has been provided by 'Abdu'l-Baha for the formation of the

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International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His Will and Testament that the "Secondary House of Justice (i.e., National Assemblies) must elect the members of the Universal One," it is obvious that the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces. In view of these complementary instructions the principle, set forth in my letter of March 12th, 1923, has been established requiring the believers (the beloved of God) in every country to elect a certain number of delegates who, in turn, will elect their national representatives (Secondary House of Justice or National Spiritual Assembly) whose sacred obligation and privilege will be to elect in time God's Universal House of Justice. 3

Here then is a glimpse of the progressive stages of exegesis as they relate to the growth and actions of the community. It is thus possible to trace and gauge the development of the Baha'i community by reading Shoghi Effendi's writings chronologically. This possibility is increased by the fact that anniversaries and activity reports provided occasions for outpourings from his interpretative pen. The opening statements of two letters are illustrative of the effects of these stimuli on the Guardian's work:

April 21, 1933. "Fellow-laborers in the Divine Vineyard: On the 23rd of May of this auspicious year the Baha'i world will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Faith of Baha'u'llah. We, who at this hour find ourselves standing on the threshold of the last decade of the first century of the Baha'i era, might well pause to reflect upon the mysterious dispensations of so august, so momentous a Revelation." This is the introduction to a letter addressed "To the beloved of God and the handmaids of the Merciful throughout the West," an exegetic work of a significance that makes it indispensable to understanding the nature and purpose of the Central Figures of the Faith, the meaning of the Covenant established by Baha'u'llah to preserve the unity of His Faith, and the Administrative Order, which is the offspring of that Covenant. Among its unique contents is a penetrating exposition of the functions of the twin successors of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, namely the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, and their

3. Shoghi Effendi, Baha 'i Administration, p. 84.

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relationship to each other. This letter has been published under the

title "The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah." 4

March 31, 1930. "Dearly-beloved co-workers: Amid the reports that have of late reached the Holy Land, most of which witness to the triumphant march of the Cause, a few seem to betray acertain apprehension regarding the validity of the institutions which stand inseparably associated with the Faith of Baha'u'llah." This develops into another indispensable statement on the philosophy of Baha'i administration addressed to the Baha'is in the West and published under the title: "The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Some Further Considerations." 5

These examples of the Guardian's work serve also to underscore another significant fact. The interpretations given by him are not limited to time; they both satisfy and transcend the need of the moment and thus serve the future as well as the present. A relevant comment conveyed to an individual by Shoghi Effendi's secretary on his behalf made it clear that the interpretations of the Guardian cannot be abrogated, "as this would imply not only a lack of guidance but mistakes in making them." A "ruling laid down as a temporary necessity" could, however, be changed at a later time; and the Guardian made certain to identify such rulings. 6

Shoghi Effendi's thirst for information was insatiable; he sought it relentlessly and classified it meticulously. "I am eagerly awaiting the news of the progress of the activities initiated to promote the teaching work within, and beyond, the confines the American continent," said one of his cablegrams to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada in a typical request for information. 7 His eagerness in this respect is borne out by what Rul:iyyih Rabbani, his widow, has stated in her biography of him: " he did not always wait until official channels corroborated the arrival of a pioneer at his post or some other piece of good news which had been conveyed to him through a personal letter or by a

4. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha 'u 'llah*, p. 97.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

6. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 19 February 1947.

7. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1937), p. 7.

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pilgrim ... This practice of his should not, however, mislead us into thinking that he was not extraordinarily thorough. The exactitude with which he compiled statistics, sought out historic facts, worked on every minute detail of his maps and plans was astonishing." 8 Shoghi Effendi also sought news of the world from the various newspapers and magazines to which he subscribed. Rul:llyih Khanum writes that, "He assiduously kept abreast of the political news and trends of the world, through his *Times*, *The Jerusalem Post* and

sometimes the well-known European dailies Journal de Geneve and the Paris edition of the New York Herald Tribune." 9 Indeed his communications reflected an acute awareness of world affairs. The news and reports he received were undoubtedly put to various uses, but it is evident that the springs of interpretation were often activated by the influx of information.

The interpretive powers of the Guardian were, it is important to reiterate, not self-arrogated but were conferred upon him through an act of appointment deriving from a source authorized by Baha'u'llah, Who Baha'is believe to be a Messenger of God come to establish an independent dispensation. It is rare in religious history for an individual to have been assigned such a role by the Founder of a faith. In a statement on the office of interpreter, Baha'u'llah had written that the hearts of those who are the "appointed interpreters" of the Word of God are the "repositories of its secrets" and are the "only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom." 10 Thus, in this context, Shoghi Effendi's treatment of every issue the Baha'is might bring to his attention regarding their development as individuals and as members of institutions and of communities was inextricably linked to his designated role as "expounder" of the Word.

Interpretation of holy scriptures has, of course, been fundamental to the existence of religious communities throughout the ages.

In the past, each community has dealt with the need according to

8. Ruljiyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London : Baha' i Publishing Trust, 1969), pp. 127-28.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

10. Baha' u ' llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha 'u 'l/ah* (Wilmette: Baha ' i Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 175.

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O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Agb~an (Branches), the Afnan (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abha Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi-the youthful branch branched from

the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness,- as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghs, the Afans, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants.

One of the excerpts from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, in the original Persian and in English translation, explicitly appointing Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Baha'i Faith.

its particular circumstances, but the outcome has been disastrously contrary to the intention of every revealed religion to create a unified community. In the absence of any explicit directives in these texts for the administration of their derivative communities and for interpretation, individuals who assumed the role of interpreter were not able to silence the protests that arose over their offerings. The schismatic consequences have bedeviled society throughout history. It is therefore of crucial importance that the Founder of a religion principally concerned with achieving the unity of the whole human race should have made specific arrangements to secure it against the divisiveness of conflicting, unauthorized interpretations

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of its sacred Laws and ordinances. In the light of past experience, the explicit, authoritative appointment of 'Abdu'l-Baha, and then Shoghi Effendi, as interpreter, stands as a distinguishing feature of the Baha'i Faith.

It is important, too, to recognize that his function as interpreter was inseparable from his designation as Guardian. The absorption of the two into an indivisible whole ensured both explication of the theory and actualization of the practice of the new Faith. His interpretive work must be seen within the context of his broad responsibilities as the successor of 'Abdu'l-Baha: "For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Baha," the Will and Testament states, "the guardian of the Cause of God ... and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him." 11

The Guardian, as experience showed and the specifications in his appointment as interpreter or expounder indicated, not only interpreted specific utterances of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha but also expounded the teachings of the Faith. However, it is noteworthy that the appointed interpreter was not required to interpret everything in Baha'i scripture. His interpretations obviously provided for a unity of understanding, a unity without which it would be impossible to establish and ensure the unity of the community. There must, of course, exist a wide latitude for individual understanding of scripture. "I have no objection to your interpretations

and inferences so long as they are represented as your own personal observations and reflections," Shoghi Effendi wrote in his own hand to an individual, reasoning that, "no one has the right to impose his view or opinion and require his listeners to believe in his particular interpretation of the sacred and prophetic writings." 12 The Universal House of Justice, in replying to an individual's inquiry, thus clarified the difference between authoritative interpretation and individual understanding of the Baha'i sacred writings:

11. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1968), p. 25.

12. Shoghi Effendi, letter to an individual, dated 6 April 1928. *Unfolding Destiny:*

*The Messages from the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith to the Baha'i Community of the British Isles* (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 423.

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A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. 13

The Guardian was as a telescope with a clear lens through which others might see Baha'u'llah's purpose in bold relief. In a sense, he made himself transparent so that recipients of his explanations and guidance could fix their sight on Baha'u'llah as the source of their motivations and on 'Abdu'l-Baha as their exemplar. In a critical sentence, Shoghi Effendi clarified his attitude in this respect: "The fact that the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Baha'u'llah and of 'Abdu'l-Baha does not necessarily confer upon him a station co-equal with those Whose words he is called upon to interpret." 14 He was vigilant in avoiding an imposition of his personality that might in any way dim the pre-eminence of the Central Figures of the Faith. Although he met and talked with the many individuals who went to the world center of the Faith as pilgrims, he did not visit Baha'i communities and did not allow photographs of himself

to be circulated. His instruction to the Baha'is not to commemorate events associated with his life is an impressive example of the self-effacement that characterize his deferential relationship to these Figures. Besides, the styles of address he used in his letters to the Baha'is show clearly his desire not to be seen in a similar light to his grandfather, despite the high rank of his office as

13 . Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963- 1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 88.

14. Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha 'u '!!ah, p. 151.

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Guardian. "Fellow-laborers in the Divine Vineyard," "Dearlybeloved co-workers," "Friends and fellow-promoters of the Faith of God," "My dear fellow-worker"-all such salutations reflect the genuineness of his humility and the sincerity of his fraternal sentiments, which are even more deeply felt in his complimentary close and signature: "Your true brother, Shoghi."

The writings of Shoghi Effendi, for the most part, comprise an estimated 36,000 letters and messages addressed to institutions, national and local communities, the world community, and individuals. He conducted a vast correspondence with individuals, who wrote to him freely about their particular concerns regarding the work of the Faith, for personal advice as to how best they might serve it, and for answers to questions about the Baha'i teachings. This correspondence produced an immense treasury of guidance on a remarkably wide range of subjects. While he had to rely on the assistance of secretaries to convey his responses to letters, he managed almost invariably to append to each reply a postscript in his own hand, signifying that what had been written by his secretary had been reviewed by him and was therefore authentic. Some of the Guardian's letters and messages were voluminous enough to be published separately as books; others

have been drawn together in published anthologies. He wrote a stupendous history of the first hundred years of the Baha'i Faith, published under the title God Passes By. The versatility of his

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narrative style is richly displayed in this work of outstanding literary merit.

In addition to his writings, he provided translations of major works of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. Gifted with a masterly grasp of the rich vocabulary and subtle nuances of English and endowed with the power of unerring perception, he turned any such translation into a thing of wonder and delight. One of his most celebrated translations is The Dawn-Breakers, Nabil's narrative of the heroic happenings during the days of Baha'u'llah's Forerunner, the Bab. It is said by those who know the original Persian text of the narrative that Shoghi Effendi did more than translate it. He performed the rare feat of creating a translation more splendid than the original yet unflinching in fidelity to its source. His English translations became the basis for the translation of Baha'i literature into many other languages.

The Baha'is understand from the literature of interpretation how to believe, how to act, and how to grow spiritually. These in a broad, practical sense mean, among other things: how to manifest justice in their deeds and relationships; how to acquire the virtues of a chaste and holy life; how to eliminate racial and other forms of prejudice; how to translate the inherent equality of men and women into social practice; how to preserve the salutary essentials of politics; how to be loyal citizens without indulging in partisanship; how to cultivate a sense of civic responsibility; how to appreciate diversity in the human family, to be servants to their fellow humans of whatever background, to uplift the victims

Messages  
written by  
Shoghi Effendi to  
various Baha'i  
communities  
have been  
collected into a  
number of  
volumes, shown  
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of oppression; how to develop a world-embracing vision, to appreciate the basic oneness of the revealed religions, and to acquire the virtues of world citizenship.

If, through his writings, Shoghi Effendi has made indelible impressions on minds and hearts, he also has left ineradicable marks on the ground: superb evidences of his aesthetic acuity. His close, personal attention to the physical development of the Baha'i World Centre, which is situated in the twin cities of Acre and Haifa, actuated his creative energies. The buildings designed and erected at his initiative, his direct involvement in their interior decoration, the extensive gardens he himself designed to provide a proper ambience for the holiest sites of the Faith, have all ensured a legacy of beauty for generations to come. These efforts, too, were avenues of his interpretation of the will of Baha'u'llah, Whose "Tablet of Carmel" and specific indication of the spot on Mount Carmel for the tomb of His Forerunner, the Bab, foreshadowed the establishment of the world headquarters of His Faith.

In addition to completing the edifice for the Shrine of the Bab, which 'Abdu'l-Baha had commenced at the instruction of His Father, Shoghi Effendi traced in the form of an arc the path along which the buildings for the administrative institutions of the Faith would be erected. He himself approved the design for the first of these, the International Archives Building, the construction of which he supervised. It set the style for the other buildings, which even at this writing, are being constructed on that historic mountain. Moreover, in Shoghi Effendi's meticulous attention to the design

An aerial shot of  
the Shrine of  
Baha'u'llah,  
circa 1954,  
showing the  
extensive gardens laid out by  
Shoghi Effendi  
to beautify the  
resting place of  
the Founder of  
the Baha'i Faith.

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Aerial shot of current construction  
on the Bahri'i  
— properties in  
— Haifa, showing  
— the arc-shaped  
path delineated  
by Shoghi Effendi,

along which the  
administrative  
buildings are  
situated.

and beautification of the holy sites there was a means of educating the community; for through it he demonstrated modes by which physical arrangements can reflect reverence for the sacred.

#### The Vision of Shoghi Effendi

Shoghi Effendi's labors revolved around explicating and actualizing the pivotal Baha'i principle, the oneness of humankind. The global community he raised up is meant to embody that all-embracing code. But this core principle enunciated by Baha'u'llah more than a century ago is not simply the motto of a religious congregation. Its implications extend toward certain ultimate realities. It puts the peoples of earth on notice that human evolution has reached a wholly new stage, the stage of consummation; and it identifies the goal towards which all meaningful effort on the planet must now be oriented.

Early on, Shoghi Effendi dismissed the notion that the unity of mankind could be regarded as a "mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism," or that it should merely be identified with a "reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood." Though its message applies to the individual, he elaborated, it is primarily concerned with the "nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family ." The result it seeks, therefore, is a "world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units." 15

15. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahri 'u 'flrih* , p. 43 .

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But he is wary of any misgivings as to the animating purpose of this central principle, explaining that,

Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than

any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on the one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity .... 16

Commenting more than sixty-five years ago on the chaotic state of a world oblivious to the remedial possibilities of this principle, Shoghi Effendi exclaimed: "How pathetic indeed are the efforts of those leaders of human institutions who, in utter disregard of the spirit of the age, are striving to adjust national processes, suited to the ancient days of self-contained nations, to an age which must either achieve the unity of the world, as adumbrated by Baha'u'llah, or perish." 17 In the same vein, he observed, "No scheme which the calculations of the highest statesmanship may yet devise; no doctrine which the most distinguished exponents of economic theory may hope to advance; no principle which the most ardent of moralists may strive to inculcate, can provide, in the last resort, adequate foundations upon which the future of a distracted world can be built." 18 Elaborating further, he continued:

No appeal for mutual tolerance which the worldly-wise might raise, however compelling and insistent, can calm its passions

16. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha 'u 'flah*, pp. 41-42.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

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or help restore its vigor. Nor would any general scheme of mere organized international cooperation, in whatever sphere of human activity, however ingenious in conception, or extensive in scope, succeed in removing the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society. Not even, I venture to assert, would the very act of devising the machinery required for the political and economic unification of the world—a principle that has been increasingly advocated in recent times—provide in itself the antidote against the poison that is steadily undermining the vigor of organized peoples and nations. 19

His thought then concluded emphatically: "It is towards this goal the goal of a new World Order, Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features—that a harassed humanity must strive." 20

In the years since the *Guardian* penned those lines, the concept of globalization has seized the imagination and propelled the efforts of nations to deal with one another increasingly freely, at least at the level of trade and finance. Advances in communications technology

have accelerated this trend. Indeed, the entire world is involved in the implied processes of the unifying principle at the very heart of Baha'u'llah's Revelation, whereas attainment to a united world seemed exceedingly remote at the time of His appearance. Ambitious nations were then occupied with competing with one another in empire building while the majority of human beings seemed fit only for the role of oppressed minorities. But since then a sudden change has occurred in the social and political character of the world's peoples. The astonishing speed with which new nations have been born, especially since World War II, and the swiftness, indeed the sense of inevitability, with which the idea of globalization is being embraced are for the post-modern world an unconscious accession to the irresistible wisdom and timeliness of Baha'u'llah's foresight.

While the perilous conditions of humanity make a compelling case for world unity, the evident, new potentialities of the human race indicate that it is not only necessary but inevitable. Taken

19. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 34.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

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together, the unprecedented advances in science, technology, and the arts during this century alone lend substance to the burgeoning of these inherent human powers. It is a burgeoning that Baha'u'llah associated with the coming of age of humanity in the new Day He came to usher in. Every created thing, He averred, has been endowed with "all the potentialities it can carry." 21 The many new discoveries of intellectual and natural resources appear to affirm it; and it seems demonstrable, for example, in as basic a material as sand when one considers its use in the manufacture of the computer microchip. In this connection, too, Shoghi Effendi's enumeration of the implications of the oneness of mankind anticipates such developments as the "sharpening and refinement of the human brain" and the "prolongation of human life," 22 about both of which medical scientists have had much to report that is positive. As to communications, Shoghi Effendi in this same context wrote: "A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity." 23 Perhaps it has yet to be achieved fully, but when he penned this expectation sixty years ago, there was no way of appreciating the prospective cyberworld of the Internet. An outstanding effect of Shoghi Effendi's writings is the meaning they give to history and the prospect they assign to the future. The future, or, in other words, the destiny of humankind, is the dominant theme of his work, as might well be expected from the

fact that the oneness of mankind is as much a goal to be achieved as a principle to be lived. From his treatment of these matters we gather a hitherto unformulated understanding of the past and the present. His vision derives from fundamental propositions in Baha'u'llah's teachings. These hold, for example, that God, the Creator of all existence, is an Unknowable Essence, immeasurably exalted above anything that any person can conceive, unapproachably glorious in the loftiness of His own Self. Since this Supreme Being cannot reveal Himself directly to any of His creatures, He

21 . Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 169.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 203 .

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makes Himself known to humanity through His Messengers or Manifestations. These Manifestations appear from time to time as the bearers of God's message. As all come from the same Source, Their messages are essentially the same except in certain details that vary to suit the times of Their appearance. Truth is relative to time and conditions, and as the human race evolves, its need for spiritual and social renewal is inevitable. The progress of civilization is linked to the successive appearances of these Suns of Truth, ensuring a progressive revelation of God's purpose for humanity. Human beings have been created to "carry forward an ever-advancing civilization,"<sup>24</sup> of which the Revelations brought by the Manifestations are the fountainheads. For example, Moses, Zoroaster, Christ, and Muhammad are among the Manifestations of God that inaugurated dispensations during which civilizations were born and flourished.

Against such a background of basic Baha'i teachings, Shoghi Effendi explains that the Faith of Baha'u'llah should not be regarded "as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations. These, beginning with Adam and ending with the Bab, have paved the way and anticipated with an ever-increasing emphasis the advent of that Day of Days in which He Who is the Promise of All Ages [Baha'u'llah] should be made manifest." <sup>25</sup>

The factor of time looms large in such explanations, taking on unusual, historic dimensions and meanings. We find in Shoghi Effendi's messages a variety of treatments and contexts. The Baha'i cycle, he tells us, will last for 5,000 centuries, a far, far longer period than the 6,000-year Adamic cycle. Throughout this vast stretch of time many Manifestations will appear-Baha'u'llah states explicitly that the next one will come after at least a thousand years. Shoghi Effendi also shows the dispensation of Baha'u'llah as comprising three ages: the Heroic Age, the period from the

announcement of the Bab's mission to the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha; the Formative Age, the period in which the Administrative Order brought by Baha'u'llah will develop; and the Golden Age,

24. Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 215.

25. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 103.

the time when that Order will have been established and unity and peace will give rise to a new civilization functioning in accordance with the laws and ordinances of Baha'u'llah. Then again his writings present us with a concept of humanity's spiritual history divided into ten parts, representing, as he describes it, "the majestic process, set in motion at the dawn of the Adamic cycle," which will attain its consummation in the Golden Age of the Baha'i era. 26

The contemplation of such perspectives opens the mind to an entirely different appreciation of time and history. We have here access to a new paradigm that enables us to see history not simply as a sequence of haphazard events and potentially deadly conditions leading to the ultimate extinction of all civilization. We are offered instead an assurance of renewal in the continuity of an intelligent evolution of human society with all its inevitable snares and pitfalls. A future is possible. The awareness of an ever-advancing flow of history provides the basis for a fresh understanding of progress, decline, and decadence, which are inherent in the evolutionary processes of life in this world. The relevance of such conceptions of time and history is underscored by Shoghi Effendi's projection, as follows, of a mind-stretching exposition of the world-shaping prospects of Baha'u'llah's Revelation:

The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the everchanging fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the

26. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Baha'i World*, p. 153.

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Golden Age of the Baha'i Era-should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthest limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.<sup>27</sup>

This goes far beyond even the most hopeful views of future society being expressed by our foremost thinkers. It validates in an unusual sense the proposition that history is progress.

In the context of the goal of world unity, the twentieth century must be viewed as a critical part of a period of transition to a

wholly new state of society, a period in which the ground is being laid for a coming Golden Age for the entire planet. The tumultuous dynamics of this transition are being played out through a twofold process, "each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum," Shoghi Effendi writes, "to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of the planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive." <sup>28</sup> The integrating process itself comprises two parts which though basically related are outwardly separate, both leading to the same bright prospect: world peace. One is to lead to a preliminary stage, the other is to consummate the peace in which a new civilization will emerge and flourish.

Baha'i literature refers to the two parts of this integrating process as the "Lesser Peace" and the "Most Great Peace." The former is to be achieved through the reaction of political leaders to the painful consequences of a twentieth century world shrunken into a neighborhood by the advances of science but morally and socially deranged by its spiritual disorientation. The actions of world leaders that brought about the League of Nations and subsequently the United Nations offer hints as to the nature of the course to be taken. The latter, the Most Great Peace, is to be attained through the eventual spiritualization of the planet, a much more protracted and profound undertaking involving the inner transformation of the individual inhabitants of the earth through their voluntary

27. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 163.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

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acceptance of the principles enunciated by the latest divine Messenger. The progress of the Baha'is in spreading their message to millions in all parts of the world who are committed to the way of Baha'u'llah is indicative of the possibilities for this ultimate goal. For Baha'is this transition, with all its accompanying horrors and frustrations, is the natural consequence on a global scale of evolving to adulthood from adolescence-a period when the

struggle and rebelliousness of youth must, with the onset of maturity, eventually yield to a resolution of conflicting tendencies or else the individual will suffer the recurrent crises of a disoriented personality. The processes involved in the experience of the individual are reflected in those of a society at the threshold of its coming of age. Humanity as a whole is as yet reluctant to yield to the new situation; hence, it remains ill-prepared to extricate itself from the strife and confusion in which it is enmeshed.

Referring to the revolutionary dimensions of the transition in train, Shoghi Effendi remarked on the improbability of its being achieved through the ordinary processes of diplomacy and education. "We have but to turn our gaze to humanity's blood-stained history to realize that nothing short of intense mental as well as physical agony has been able to precipitate those epoch-making changes that constitute the greatest landmarks in the history of human civilization." 29 The second World War had yet to be fought when he made this observation. He devoted much attention to explaining the paradoxes of the "simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other" 30 - paradoxes that characterize a time of transition when the death pangs of the old order and the birth pangs of the new embrace. The concurrently destructive and constructive manifestations of this historic phenomenon have been conspicuous in the world-shaking happenings of the twentieth century. In an Age of Transition precedent to the new civilization promised by the advent of the Baha'i dispensation, this century could be seen as the paramount century

29. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahci 'u 'llah*, p. 45.

30. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 61.

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of that Age. A Baha'i view of it may well find expression in a Dickensian description: it has been the worst of centuries and the best of centuries.

So much attention has been focused on the ills of a century regarded, in the words of Isaiah Berlin, as "the most terrible century in Western history," that it is not necessary here to enumerate them. Suffice it to acknowledge that its excesses in acts of perversity and destruction have given rise to the gravest crises in the history of the race, and to a state of cynicism, confusion, and pessimism that casts doubt as to the future of civilization. Shoghi Effendi commented extensively on what he described in 1941 as the "triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various

forms and in different degrees, now worshipping." 31 His indictment of those who followed such theories and policies was thunderous. These, he said, are "the dark, the false, and crooked doctrines for which any man or people who believes in them, or acts upon them, must, sooner or later, incur the wrath and chastisement of God." 32 He saw this "triple curse that oppresses the soul of mankind in this day" as the offspring of irreligion; he attributed "other evils and vices" to the "weakening of the pillars of religion." Even so, he unflinchingly held out a vision of hope.

Search for feasible instruments of global governance is among the stirrings that excite expectations in a world rapidly approaching the end of the twentieth century. The system of World Order adumbrated by Baha'u'llah and amplified by Shoghi Effendi offers a concept of governance unique to human experience. While validating salutary features of established forms of government, it at the same time excludes objectionable aspects without being a mere synthesis of these forms or becoming simply a replica of any one of them. "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order," 33 is

31. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 113.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 113- 14.

33. Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1992), p. 84, para. 181.

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Baha'u'llah's own pronouncement on the system He has introduced. He adds in a further reference to it: "Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System-the like of which ~~~

mortal eyes have never witnessed." 34 The disequilibrium monument at the resting place of Shoghi Effendi, in London, England, in world affairs appears in this sense, then, to be simultaneously negative and positive manifestations of a deeper truth than mere historical analysis can uncover.

### Conclusion

Historians and social scientists pondering the twentieth century might well pause to examine Shoghi Effendi's commentaries on the ills and portents of this "Age of Extremes," as one historian has called the period. 35 Thinkers interested in sorting out the questions posed by the bewildered state of so-called "post-Communist" or "post-Capitalist" society will encounter much in his writings to stimulate and challenge their outlook. They will be treated to unusual perspectives in his explanations of Abdu'l-Baha's thoughtawakening metaphors that designate the twentieth century as the

"century of the revelation of reality and, therefore, the greatest of all centuries,"<sup>36</sup> as the "sun of previous centuries, the effulgence of which shall last forever,"<sup>37</sup> and as the "century of light."<sup>38</sup> They will discover, too, in his majestic and evocative prose a source of intellectual and spiritual refreshment. For he was, indeed, a master writer who succeeded in distilling the virtues of language,

34. Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 84, para. 181.

35. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century (1914-1991)* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994).

36. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912* rev. ed. (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 140.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-26.

38. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 39.

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making it reflect the spirit  
and wholesomeness of truth.

But he went beyond this. He  
achieved far more than his  
wish to translate from the  
language of Revelation into

English. As appointed interpreter and guide, he also  
translated words into deeds.

Galvanized by the energy of  
his messages and the vision  
they inspired, the Baha'is  
embarked successfully on the  
vast enterprise of erecting the  
banner of Baha'u'llah's Faith  
in countries throughout the  
world. This engaged people

from the widest range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds few months before his passing in 1957.

in efforts by which a renewal of civilization might be effected.

This was, and continues to be so, because the effects of these  
efforts by Baha'is go beyond the internal objectives of the Baha'i  
community to provide vital benefits to society as a whole. For one  
thing, Baha'i principles and practices aim at strengthening the  
social fabric by instilling a high sense of civic responsibility. In a  
world inclined increasingly towards democratic ways of conducting its affairs,  
it is significant that the rank and file of the Baha'is

everywhere are required to participate in the administration of their  
community at all levels. For instance, they are continually learning  
and applying the art of consultation as the means of problem-solving and  
decision-making for individuals, groups and institutions;

they also engage in a method of electing their institutions by secret ballot without electioneering or nominations. An outstanding fact in the latter regard is that in scores of countries Baha'is, lettered and unlettered, were the first among native populations to experience, through the operation of their communities, any form of election. An emergent community has sprung up. It claims members in every country and dependent territory, drawn from some 2,000 ethnic

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groups; and selections from its literature have been translated into more than 800 languages. At the same time that the Baha'is benefited practically from the community-building instructions Shoghi Effendi's writings offered, they were enabled to see through his inspired views beyond the topsy-turvy state of society to the peace-fashioning goal of their Faith. They were invited into a realm of thought by which they could achieve a soul-satisfying transcendence while attending to the practical circumstances of life in a time of cataclysmic disturbances. The Baha'i community is a global laboratory in which an unprecedented transformation in individual and collective behavior is progressing towards the realization of that world-shaping principle around which it revolves. In such a community can be discerned, thanks to the indispensable ministry of Shoghi Effendi, the glimmerings of a new World Order. That such a figure as Shoghi Effendi lived in the twentieth century ensures to the annals of the period a dimension that cannot long be ignored. Two points become clear. The first is that Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship was not merely a significant transitional episode in the development of a religious community. The second is that any interpretation of contemporary events that overlooks the emergence of the world-embracing community he raised up, and which fails to appreciate the central principle that motivates and sustains its existence, lacks a guide to the future. If the claims of Baha'u'llah are to be understood aright, Shoghi Effendi's legacy bodes well to be increasingly regarded as a wellspring of authentic guidance from which the forces of civilization will draw renewed virtue for at least a full millennium.

Ann Boyles offers a perspective on the meaning of "community," its condition today, and what it will look like in the next millennium.

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It was Aristotle who first defined the word "community" as a group established by men having shared values. That initial

definition has been refined and expanded through the years. We have come, for example, to recognize that people can belong to a number of different "communities" simultaneously-communities of place; cultural communities; communities of memory, in which people who may be strangers share "a morally significant history"; and psychological communities "of face-to-face personal interaction governed by sentiments of trust, co-operation, and altruism." 1 The world, we are repeatedly reminded, has contracted into a "global village." One effect of this contraction is the bringing together of hitherto isolated peoples, allowing for the development of new patterns of civilization-but also creating new tensions . Thus, challenges now confront communities at local, national, and global levels. For example, new information technologies have created "networks" and "cybercommunities" in the world

1. Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and its Critics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 14.

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of the Internet that link individuals and organizations around the globe without regard for national boundaries; small communities around the planet are affected by urban migration or by degradation of the natural and built environment; the existence of national communities- nation states- is under threat from assaults by ethnic or tribal enclaves. Ironically, while the emergence of a global community wielding effective power is seen by many as a necessity in order to combat the ill effects of unfettered market economics, the whole idea that a real global community can ever come into existence is met with deep misgivings or complete skepticism by others. How, then, can we understand "community" at the end of the twentieth century-and what will its future be in the next millennium?

A number of significant challenges to community have arisen from developments in global information technologies. While pundits ponder whether or not Internet users form any kind of viable community as they sit at their computers in farflung corners of the world, a deeper and more serious issue is the manner in which the entire structure of computer networks undermines more traditional kinds of community organization.

As Jessica Mathews points out in her essay "Power Shift," which appeared in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, these new information technologies have challenged established societal hierarchies . They have empowered civil society, which in turn has allowed the world's peoples generally to be more involved than previously in issues that were once the sole province of states and to forge new links between democracy, human rights, and international security. Yet, the technologies themselves are not always used to achieve constructive ends. They have , for

example, also promoted the spread of global organized crime, and they have enabled individuals to cross borders easily to subvert governments and, at times, create new societal divisions.

The future of the state, in her view, is therefore uncertain.

Information technologies, she points out "disrupt hierarchies, spreading power among more people and groups." She continues,

In drastically lowering the costs of communication, consultation, and coordination, they favor decentralized networks

over other modes of organization. In a network, individuals or

groups link for joint action without building a physical or formal institutional presence. Networks have no person at the top and no center. Instead, they have multiple nodes where collections of individuals or groups interact for different purposes. Businesses, citizens organizations, ethnic groups, and crime cartels have all readily adopted the network model. Governments, on the other hand, are quintessential hierarchies, wedded to an organizational form incompatible with all that the new technologies make possible. 2

The technologies, she concludes, weaken community by empowering individuals, and her article contains this dire prediction:

The prophets of an internetted world in which national identities gradually fade, proclaim its revolutionary nature and yet believe the changes will be wholly benign. They won't be. The shift from national to some other political allegiance, if it comes, will be an emotional, cultural, and political earthquake. 3

Mathews raises important questions: What kind of community can be forged in an internetted world, where the structure of the technology promotes anarchy, with its emphasis on complete freedom of expression and lack of regard for authority? Does this spell the end of the nation-state and, if so, what other kind of political entity might arise in its stead? The challenges posed by the new information technologies may generate significant crises felt throughout the world, but such a development looms on the horizon. There are, however, a number of current crises facing community. Loss of the sense of community based on "place" is a worldwide phenomenon. Millions of people all over the planet are being displaced from their homes. Some are refugees fleeing escalating political strife. Others are forced from their homes by economic necessity, such as farmers from rural China who are migrating to cities in vast numbers, searching for factory work. Such movement destroys families, undermines the traditional sense of trust found in community, increases feelings of isolation and dislocation, and creates a host of social problems.

2. Jessica T. Mathews, "Power Shift," *Foreign Affairs* (January- February

1997), p. 52.

3. Ibid., p. 65.

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Even where people still maintain their homes, there are challenges to the sense of place. A case in point is America, where planners are in revolt against the manner in which the built environment of communities has been shaped in the latter part of the twentieth century. A movement widely known by the name "new urbanism" protests against the "fantastic, awesome, stupefying ugliness" of "the gruesome, tragic suburban boulevards of commerce" so common in American towns and cities, contending that "this ugliness is the surface expression of deeper problems" and contributes substantially to the widely expressed sense of "loss of community" felt throughout the society. 4

The new urbanists posit that going back to the planning and design principles that shaped the traditional neighborhoods of America is a way of recapturing this lost sense of place and community, of reversing a pattern of development they see as "economically catastrophic, an environmental calamity, socially devastating, and spiritually degrading." Discarding the zoning laws that segregate various activities, they seek to create neighborhoods (or hamlets or villages) of manageable size which, when clustered together, become towns and cities. Each neighborhood is constructed on a "human scale"; it contains both residential and commercial property and provides housing for people of different levels of income.

The proposal is not fantastic. Many traditional European towns, for example, have preserved this element of "human design." But to make such a change, citizens everywhere must take an active role in decisions regarding the environment in which they live:

Human settlements are like living organisms. They must grow, and they will change. But we can decide on the nature of that growth-on the quality and the character of it-and where it ought to go. We don't have to scatter the building blocks of our civic life all over the countryside, destroying our towns and ruining farmland . . . It is within our power to create places that are worthy of our affection. 5

4. James Howard Kunstler, "Home From Nowhere," *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1996), p. 43 .

5. Ibid., p. 66.

Such loss of "community of place" can also bring loss of communities of memory and communities governed by trust. In the late nineteenth century Ferdinand Tonnies theorized that in the development of systems of culture, communities invariably move from a period of *Gemeinschaft*, where shared experience and

likeness are most important, toward a period of *Gesellschaft*, where individuals exist in isolation from each other, there is a strong sense of competition, relationships are contractual, and monetary values prevail. Such a progression has been noted by others as well. In this century, Pitirim A. Sorokin, for example, saw societies moving through ideational, idealistic, and sensate stages, away from spiritual truth and values towards self-indulgence and material values. But is such a progression inevitable?

If we again take the case of America and look at it in Tonnies' terms, we see that the society is in a period of *Gesellschaft*. William Leach, in his insightful 1993 volume *Land of Desire*, analyses the forces that have shaped modern America as "a distinct culture, unconnected to traditional family or community values, to religion in any conventional sense, or to political democracy .... The cardinal features of this culture were acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness; the cult of the new; the democratization of desire; and money value as the predominant measure of all value in society." <sup>6</sup> As this culture grew, Leach writes, "Increasingly, the worth of everything—even beauty, friendship, religion, the moral life—was being determined by what it could bring in the market." <sup>7</sup>

Leach characterizes the dominant mode of interaction in twentieth century life as an amoral "brokering style," the features of which are "repressing one's own convictions and withholding judgment in the interest of forging profitable relationships." Contending that it "occupies a preeminence in today's political and moral economy," he writes, "Brokers are now busy in nearly every sphere of activity, and they have helped inject into American culture a new amorality essentially indifferent to virtue and hospitable to

6. William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Random House, 1993), p. 3.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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the ongoing inflation of desire." <sup>8</sup> Because America, with the collapse of communism, is now the world's undisputed single superpower, its role as the leading exponent of Western capitalist values which have been exported throughout the entire world—is crucial.

Indeed, some writers have gone so far as to characterize the current devotion to those values as a worldwide "religious" phenomenon. David Loy writes:

.. .our present economic system should also be understood as our religion, because it has come to fulfill a religious function for us. The discipline of economics is less a science than the theology of that religion, and its god, the Market, has become a vicious circle of ever-increasing production and consumption by pretending to

offer a secular salvation. The collapse of communism—best understood as a capitalist "heresy"—makes it more apparent that the market is becoming the first truly world religion, binding all corners of the globe more and more tightly into a world view and set of values whose religious role we overlook only because we insist on seeing them as "secular." 9

George Soros shares this view, stating, "What used to be a medium of exchange has usurped the place of fundamental values .... The cult of success has replaced a belief in principles .

Society has lost its anchor." 10 Concluding that "there is something wrong with making the survival of the fittest a guiding principle of civilized society," he proposes an "open society" as the antidote to the havoc that laissez-faire capitalism and market values are wreaking in democratic society, where the guiding principles of "nonmarket values" are eclipsed by the influence of market values. Current confidence that "the unhampered pursuit of self-interest will bring about an eventual international equilibrium" is, in his view, "misplaced." An "open society" would promote institutions that allow people to live together in peace, in spite of their different views, interests, and beliefs concerning

8. Leach, p. 11 .

9. David R . Loy, "The Religion of the Market," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62.2 (Summer 1997), p. 275.

10. George Soros, "The Capitalist Threat" in *The Atlantic Monthly* (February 1997), pp. 45- 58.

what is true. He concludes, however, that there is currently no willingness to establish the means to preserve a global open society. Another commentator, William Greider, in his book *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*, also contends that the widespread adoption of market economics does not and will not bring social and political stability, which have often been touted as long-term benefits. In fact, he says, the spread of market economics destroys the fabric of traditional societies and provides ideal conditions for contending political forces to fight each other for control.

In a response to Greider' s book in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Lester Thurow concurs, saying, "Capitalism is myopic and cannot make the long-term social investments in education, infrastructure, and research and development that it needs for its own future survival. It needs government help to make those investments, but its own ideology won't allow it either to recognize the need for those investments or to request government help. That is the ideological paradox of our time." 11

According to Greider, we stand at a watershed in history: "A revolutionary principle is embedded in the global economic system,

awaiting broader recognition: Human dignity is indivisible. Across the distances of culture and nations, across vast gulfs of wealth and poverty, even the least among us are entitled to dignity, and no justification exists for brutalizing them in the pursuit of commerce." 12

He continues, "any prospect of developing a common global social consciousness will inevitably force people to reexamine themselves first and come to terms with their own national contradictions and hypocrisies. And just as Americans cannot claim a higher morality while benefiting from inhumane exploitation, neither can developing countries pretend to become modern 'one world' producers and expect exemption from the world's social values." 13

11. Lester Thurow, "The Revolution Upon Us" *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1997), pp. 97- 100.

12. William Greider, excerpted from *One World: Ready or Not* and published under the title "Planet of Pirates" in *The Utne Reader* (May- June 1997), pp. 72- 73.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

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While there is, as yet, no set of social values generally accepted by the world, attempts have recently been made to introduce an internationally accepted "Charter of Human Responsibilities." This document would "provide a broader ethical context to the principles inherent within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" to "accentuate those positive obligations each individual should assume in the service to humanity and the rest of creation." 14 The charter has not yet gained wide acceptance, but its formulation is a hopeful sign. Values are also a main concern of Philip Selznick, a communitarian philosopher who contends not only that social justice must be the foundation of community but that it is the responsibility of both individuals and the collective. Thus, the communitarian concept of community is a "unity of unities"-a sort of "federal" unity that preserves the integrity of the parts by emphasizing individual moral autonomy as well as the moral bonds of civility, which are seen to be interdependence and reciprocity. 15 The concept of "stewardship" in governance further binds social power to moral ideals. 16 It is a concept that looks outward rather than inward-or, as Selznick puts it, moves towards "the 'we' of humanity." 17 In this concept of community the balance of particularism and universalism is regarded as crucial, respecting diversity "without allowing its claims to override those of basic humanity and justice." 18 It is not surprising that movements such as the communitarians have arisen to revisit the roots of Western society and to reexamine the values underpinning its culture. Their response to "the weakening of institutions, the blurred line between liberty and license, the widespread preference for short-run gains," is to prescribe "more

extensive responsibility in ever; aspect of personal experience and social life" as the antidote. 1

14. Taken from the Core Initiatives of "The State of the World Forum'95."

15. Philip Selznick, "Social Justice: A Communitarian Perspective," in *The Responsive Community* 6.4 (Fall 1996), p. 15. For further discussion, see also Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 367- 71 .

16. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 23 .

18. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Two other communitarians have offered some valuable insights into a community-friendly, sustainable system of economics. In their book *For the Common Good*, Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., make a distinction between two different paradigms of economic behavior: chrematistics and oikonomia. Chrematistics, they say, "can be defined as the branch of political economy relating to the manipulation of property and wealth so as to maximize short-term monetary exchange value to the owner"-a model that conforms to Leach's, Soros' and Greider's view of capitalism, as epitomized by the American system. In contrast, oikonomia "is the management of the household so as to increase its use value to all members of the household over the long run." They continue, "If we expand the scope of household to include the larger community of the land, of shared values, resources, biomes, institutions, language, and history, then we have a good definition of 'economics for community.' " 20

The concept of oikonomia seems quite close to Selznick's "stewardship." Cobb and Daly's assertion that "True economics concerns itself with the long-term welfare of the whole community"<sup>21</sup> posits a conception of humans as something quite different from mere consumers-and of community as something much different from a mere marketplace. They argue that seeing people only as beings "bent on optimizing utility or satisfaction through procuring unlimited commodities," <sup>22</sup> which is the view underlying current economic theory, leads to "policies that weaken existing patterns of social relationships." <sup>23</sup> They advocate, instead, that "economics should be refounded on the basis of a new concept of Homo economicus as person-in-community," <sup>24</sup> recognizing that the well-being of a community as a whole is constitutive of each person's welfare ... because each human being is constituted

20. Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr. , *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 138.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

22. Ibid. , p. 159.

23 . Ibid., p. 163 .

24. Ibid., p. 164.

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by relationships to others, and this pattern of relationships is at least as important as the possession of commodities. These relationships cannot be exchanged in a market. They can, nevertheless, be affected by the market, and when the market grows out of the control of a community, the effects are almost always destructive. Hence this model of person-in-community calls not only for provision of goods and services to individuals, but also for an economic order that supports thefattenm of personal relationships that make up the community.<sup>2</sup>

Daly and Cobb argue strongly for a conscious movement towards the adoption of social behavior and values that will enhance "the common good" and build the foundations of a community that will protect the environment and promote ways of living that provide for a sustainable future. Such an approach addresses some of the key challenges facing community.

At the broadest level of discussion, many contemporary thinkers, such as Daly and Cobb, see the global nature of environmental crises and the interconnectedness of national economies, for example, as leading inexorably towards the establishment of a global community of some sort. Others, however, see the whole idea as an utter impossibility. Some of the most provocative pieces to appear in print on this topic during the past several years have been authored by Samuel P. Huntington, whose essay "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs* sparked a firestorm of debate on his thesis that the emergence of a global civilization is a utopian fantasy. Huntington later expanded his position to a full-length book, notably dropping the question mark at the end of the title to read *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. The phrase "world community" "has become the euphemistic collective noun (replacing 'the Free World' ) to give global legitimacy to actions reflecting the interests of the United States and other Western powers," <sup>26</sup> he contends. The West, whose system of liberal democracy has recently been touted as the pinnacle of social evolution and achievement, is not, in his view , a universal

25.Daly and Cobb, pp. 164--165.

26. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 184.

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civilization. "What is universalism to the West is imperialism to the rest," he states. <sup>27</sup>

While Huntington focuses on "civilization," which he defines as "the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species," the elements he sees as shaping civilizations are quite similar to those generally accepted as characteristics of community: "common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions" and "the subjective selfidentification of people. " 28

He is extremely skeptical that any kind of unified global civilization can ever develop. At the individual level, he asserts that there must always be "the civilizational 'us' and the extracivilizational 'them'" because we fear and distrust people who are different; we experience difficulty in communicating with them; and we are unfamiliar with what motivates them, how they conduct social relationships, and so on. 29 In opposition to Daly and Cobb, he states that "it is human to hate"; "for self-definition and motivation people need enemies: competition in business, rivals in achievement, opponents in politics. They naturally distrust and see as threats those who are different and have the capability to harm them." 30 This rivalry extends to the sphere of religion. As Huntington says, "Whatever universalist goals they may have, religions give people identity by positing a basic distinction between believers and nonbelievers, between a superior in-group and a different and inferior out-group."31 Further, "if a universal civilization is emerging," he asserts, "there should be signs of a universal language and a universal religion developing." He concludes, "Nothing of the sort is occurring." 2

Andrew Bard Schmookler, while also identifying "intersocietal anarchy" as "the overarching context of civilized life," is somewhat more optimistic than Huntington about the development of a united

27. Ibid., p. 184.

28. Ibid., p. 43.

29. Ibid., p. 129.

30. Ibid., p. 130.

31. Ibid., p. 97.

32. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Many Faces of the Future," *The Utne Reader* (May- June 1997), pp. 75- 77.

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global civilization. "As long as the human cultural system was fragmented into a multiplicity of separate units," he asserts, "the problem of power remained insoluble." 33 He contends that now "an escape from this fragmented system is beginning to emerge," although dangers still remain:

For the first time, the world is becoming a single interdependent system in which all the world's peoples are in contact.

Meanwhile, the age-old struggle for power goes on and may

annihilate us before we can create an order that controls power. But the centuries ahead give us the opportunity to place all human action within a structure that for the first time makes truly free human choice possible. Even so, it is far from clear how to get from here to there, or even what kind of world order "there" should be. 34

Malaysia's deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim advances one possible path for humanity to tread. In his forthcoming book *The Asian Renaissance*, he criticizes Huntington's approach as "nothing more than Orientalism in a new garb," a view he characterizes as "false and dangerous":

It is false because it implies an inherent impermeability of cultures, an inability to absorb each other's characteristics, and presupposes the existence of a "Great Wall" separating the civilizations of the world. It is dangerous because it generates paranoia and breeds animosity and suspicion and may, therefore, become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, the question is not whether civilizations will clash, but whether civilizations ought to clash. 35

To avoid such conflict, he asserts that if we reflect on "higher ideals,"

we will discover that there is less difference between East and West than is often made out to be ... The challenge at hand is to conceive a common vision of the future which goes beyond

33. Andrew Bard Schmookler, *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), p. 33.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 33- 34.

35. Anwar Ibrahim, "A Global Convivencia vs. The Clash of Civilizations," excerpted in *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Summer 1997), p. 41.

our current concerns and preoccupations, advancing toward the creation of a global community, dominated neither by the East nor the West, but dedicated to the ideals of both. 36

He advocates a "civilizational dialogue," undertaken with the goal of achieving a "global convivencia—a harmonious and enriching experience of living together among people of diverse religions and cultures." 37

The uncertain hope expressed by Schmookler, the pessimism of Huntington, the fundamental structural changes described by Mathews, the ills outlined by Leach, Greider, Soros, and others, and the prescriptions advanced by Daly, Cobb, Selznick, and Ibrahim all provide differing perspectives on the strenuous debate currently taking place around the subject of community. Where the world will go from here remains uncertain. Various individuals and organizations have attempted to address the ills of society,

which are generally perceived to be worldwide in scope, but, as Soros comments rather bitterly, no will exists to establish institutions and mechanisms that would effectively govern a global community. And certainly there is no wide agreement about what exactly the fundamental values of such a community should be. It is clear from the number and variety of problems confronting humanity at this stage in its history that community development must be pursued at all levels, from the local to the global. Religion is one powerful means to address these problems, since it has traditionally been concerned with two broad questions: the purpose of existence and the nature of the community. In fact, the word "religion" itself is derived from religio, meaning "to bind together." Members of the world's youngest independent religion, the Baha'i Faith, who now number some five million souls from more than 2,000 tribes, races, and ethnic groups, have forged a united, dynamic community that is flourishing at the local, national, and global levels. The vision that unites this diverse group comes from Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith. He taught that all people worship one God, Who has guided the development of

36. Ibrahim, p. 41 .

37. Ibid., p. 42.

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humanity through successive Messengers Who have founded the world's major religions. The human race, Baha'u'llah said, now stands at the threshold of maturity, and the time has come for the uniting of all peoples into a peaceful and integrated global society. His prescriptions for humanity all lead toward that end.

Bahais are, therefore, deeply concerned with the process of community building. To help them advance in their understanding of this issue, the Universal House of Justice, the Faith's international governing council, has offered a definition of "community," which it characterizes as "more than the sum of its membership":

it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress. 38

Because spiritual values have the power to simultaneously unite peoples and transform political order into a moral community, the Baha'i Faith has tremendous capacities to promulgate the model of a healthy, dynamic community. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, writing about the Baha'is, once referred to

"the society-building power which their Faith possesses." 39  
The principle that has enabled the Baha'i Faith to achieve an unprecedented level of unity as a world community and yet preserve local communities' and individuals' unique identities is that of "unity in diversity," about which Shoghi Effendi offers this commentary:

The Faith of Baha'u'llah has assimilated, by virtue of its creative, its regulative and ennobling energies, the varied races, nationalities, creeds and classes that have sought its shadow, and have pledged unswerving fealty to its cause. It has changed

38 . The Universal House of Justice, Riqyan Jetter to the Baha' is of the world,

B.E. 153 (April 1996).

39. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha 'u 'llah: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Baha' i Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 195.

#### WORLD WATCH

the hearts of its adherents, burned away their prejudices, stilled their passions, exalted their conceptions, ennobled their motives, coordinated their efforts, and transformed their outlook. While preserving their patriotism and safeguarding their lesser loyalties, it has made them lovers of mankind, and the determined upholders of its best and truest interests. While maintaining intact their belief in the Divine origin of their respective religions, it has enabled them to visualize the underlying purpose of these religions, to discover their merits, to recognize their sequence, their interdependence, their wholeness and unity, and to acknowledge the bond that vitally links them to itself. This universal, this transcending love which the followers of the Baha'i Faith feel for their fellow-men, of whatever race, creed, class or nation, is neither mysterious nor can it be said to have been artificially stimulated. It is both spontaneous and genuine. They whose hearts are warmed by the energizing influence of God's creative love cherish His creatures for His sake, and recognize in every human face a sign of His reflected glory.<sup>40</sup>

This sense of spiritual unity that provides the basis of community structure pervades all aspects of Baha'i community life. As one writer puts it,

...the meaning of Community is a meaning which can only be gradually unfolded as our experience in living the ideals of Community grows and evolves. Beyond our sense of friendship and fellowship and social interaction there is the reality of spiritual unity ....

...unity is the essence of the Baha' i Faith, because it is the

principle of spiritual unity applied at a social level, a spiritual unity which has never before been realized in any community, a spiritual unity which flows from the communion of the individual soul with God and from the vision of God revealed in the soul of every other believer in that Community.<sup>41</sup>

True civilization does not arise from material progress, but rather is founded on the transcendent values that hold society

40. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 197- 98.

41. John Davidson, *A Baha'i Approach to Community: Process and Promise*, Vol. 1, *Baha'i Studies in Australasia: Baha'i Community and Institutions* (Association for Baha'i Studies- Australia, 1993), p. 36.

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together. Bahais believe that the theories and practices that promote self-indulgence and disrupt the connections among individuals must be directly challenged. Service to humanity and a commitment to a deeper level of engagement with each other and the problems of society are key motivating forces behind the Baha'i community. As Baha'u'llah has written:

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race .... Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth .... It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens. <sup>42</sup>

Such service is the hallmark of true religion. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha, son of Baha'u'llah:

Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind. It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization. <sup>43</sup>

To support the spiritual unity and desire to serve humanity that form the basis of community in Baha'u'llah's teachings, a structure to guard that unity and to promote acts of service is also explicitly laid out in the Faith's sacred writings. As the eminent Baha'i writer Horace Holley comments:

42. Baha ' u ' llah, Gleanings from th e Writings of Bah a 'u 'llah (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 250.

43 . 'Abdu 'l-Baha, The Secret of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Baha' i Publishing Trust, 1994), p. 98.

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Faith alone, no matter how wholehearted and sincere, affords no basis on which the organic unity of a religious fellowship can endure ...

The Baha'i teaching has this vital distinction, that it extends from the realm of conscience and faith to the realm of social action. It confirms the substance of faith not merely as a source of individual development but as a definitely ordered relationship to the community. 44

He goes on to discuss the nature of the authority to which Baha'is commit themselves:

Sovereignty, in the Baha'i community, is attributed to the Divine prophet, and the elected representatives of the believers in their administrative function look to the teachings of Baha'u'llah for their guidance, having faith that the application of His universal principles is the source of order throughout the community. Every Baha'i administrative body feels itself a trustee, and in this capacity stands above the plane of dissension and is free of that pressure exerted by factional groups. 45

Here one finds an application of the concept of "stewardship," as mentioned by Selznick. Indeed, as Holley says, the Local Spiritual Assembly, the council that is elected annually, "represents the collective conscience of the community with respect to Baha'i activities." 46 In short,

Spiritual Assemblies, local and national, combine an executive, a legislative and a judicial function, all within the limits set by the Baha'i teachings .... They are primarily responsible for the maintenance of unity within the Baha'i community and for the release of its collective power in service to the Cause. 47

The administrative model conceived by Baha'u'llah promotes a concept of leadership embodying trustworthiness, wisdom, and willingness to sacrifice for the common good, and whose highest

44. Horace Holley, "Aims and Purposes of the Baha ' i Faith," *The BahQ 'i World*, Vol. XII (1950- 54), p. 8.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

## THE BAHAI WORLD

expression is service to the community. It also fosters collective decision making and collective action through a process called "consultation." Conducted in a spirit of unity, its purpose is to search out the truth. Those engaged in the process are enjoined to express their views with "all freedom," but at the same time "with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care, and moderation."<sup>48</sup> In this way, participants can avoid antagonism and conflict, and all can freely express their views without fear of displeasing or alienating anyone. Here, one sees how the "right" of freedom of speech is balanced by the "responsibility" of moderate expression. Indeed, Baha'u'llah states that "Human utterance is an essence which aspires to exert its influence and needeth moderation." Its influence, He says, "is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure," and its moderation should be "combined with tact and wisdom." <sup>49</sup> Because the Baha'i community—just a century and a half old—is only "at the very beginning of the process of community building," the House of Justice also provides, in its *Rivian* 1996 letter, guidance regarding the elements necessary for healthy community growth. To facilitate the healthy growth of communities that can engage in an "unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress," the House of Justice emphasizes that they must promote patterns of behavior "by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth." These patterns include the integration and inclusion of all the adults, youth, and children in "spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities," as well as "local plans of teaching and development." Another distinctive pattern of behavior is seen in the "collective will and sense of purpose" to establish and maintain Baha'i administrative institutions, particularly evident in the annual election of Spiritual Assemblies in communities around the world. A final pattern

48. 'Abdu'l-Baha, cited in *Consultation: A Compilation* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980), # 10, p. 6.

49. Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 143.

involves "the practice of collective worship of God" through regular devotional meetings, seen as "essential to the spiritual life of the community."

And indeed, the spirit of unity underlying their communities and the structures that govern them are not only for Baha'is, who believe that through time a unified global community will be forged, whether "reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated

by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior" or "embraced now by an act of consultative will." 50 As Shoghi Effendi wrote,

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machine<sup>f</sup>( that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life. 5

Shoghi Effendi describes the global society promised in the Baha'i sacred writings as follows:

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

50. The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1985), p. 1.

51. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahri 'u 'llah*, p. 202.

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by Baha'u 'llah, an Order that shall come to be regarded as the fairest fruit of a slowly maturing age.<sup>52</sup>

In the Baha' i view, such a development is not a utopian vision; it is the next and highest step in the development of "an ever-advancing civilization," "the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society." 53

A response to Huntington's objection that there can be no global civilization because no universal religion or language is emerging is found within the Baha'i Faith. First, it is a universal religion. As Baha'u 'llah wrote over one hundred years ago,

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world,

of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. 54

Further, He states,

Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One .... Great indeed is this Day! The allusions made to it in all the sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest its greatness . The soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day. All the divers kindreds of the earth have, likewise, yearned to attain it. 55

With regard to the choice or development of a single language, Baha'u'llah says in His book of laws:

0 members of parliaments throughout the world! Select ye a single language for the use of all on earth, and adopt ye likewise a common script ... . This will be the cause of unity,

52. Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahci 'u 'llah , p. 41.

53 . Ibid., p. 163.

54. Baha'u ' llah, Gleanings, p. 217.

55.Ibid., pp. 10-11.

## WORLD WATCH

could ye but comprehend it, and the greatest instrument for promoting harmony and civilization, would that ye might understand! 56

While all the elements necessary for the establishing of a global society are present in the Baha'i sacred writings, the forging of a world community will, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, be a "gradual process." The first step towards it will be the establishment of what Baha'is call "the Lesser Peace," a political union reached by the nations of the world:

This momentous and historic step, involving the reconstruction of mankind, as the result of the universal recognition of its oneness and wholeness, will bring in its wake the spiritualization of the masses, consequently to the recognition of the character, and the acknowledgment of the claims, of the Faith of Baha'u'llah-the essential condition to that ultimate fusion of all races, creeds, classes, and nations which must signalize the emergence of His New World Order. 57

"Then," Shoghi Effendi continues, "will the coming of age of the entire human race be proclaimed and celebrated by all the peoples and nations of the earth." The "Most Great Peace" will be established with the universal recognition of the message of unity brought by Baha'u'llah, following which "a world civilization [will] be born, flourish, and perpetuate itself, a civilization with a fullness of life such as the world has never seen nor can as yet conceive." 58

The establishment of a world civilization, promoting an unimaginable "fullness of life," is assured. With confidence in the eventual achievement of this aim, Baha'is face the uncertainty of the transition period in which we are now living.

While others are not so confident, even the more pessimistic express some vague hope that a peaceful world community will

56. Baha 'u 'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1993), p. 87, paragraph 189.

57. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette: Baha' i Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 123 .

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 123- 24.

somehow arrive. At the end of his book *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, Robert Kaplan asks a crucial question: "As a species, we can imagine justice and harmony. But how can justice and harmony be possible for much of humanity, given the evidence of history, plus the inflammatory potential of a fourfold increase in population since the nineteenth century, with antennas rising from mudhuts to allow the poor to see how the rich live?" 59 Kaplan has no answer to this question, but he closes his book with a quotation from the poem "Addressed to Haydon" by the visionary English poet John Keats:

And other spirits ... are standing apart  
Upon the forehead of the age to come;  
These, these will give the world another heart,  
And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum  
Of mighty workings?-  
Listen awhile ye nations, and be dumb.

Baha'u'llah delivered His message to humanity short years after Keats penned these lines. "The world's equilibrium," He stated, "hath been upset by the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System-the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed." 60 Baha'u'llah called the peoples of the world together in unity; He delineated the structure of a community that can function unitedly on the local, national, and global levels to promote justice and build a peaceful world. When considering the challenges facing communities at the end

of the twentieth century, thinking people would do well to study the model that has brought together, in some 153 years, more than five million people from extremely diverse backgrounds and has enabled them to establish a single, united global community that both nourishes the individual and safeguards the good of the whole. These are indeed, in Keats' words, "mighty workings": here is a model that can benefit all the inhabitants of the planet.

59. Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (New York: Random Books, 1996), p. 437.

60. Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 84, para. 181.

At the Habitat II conference in Istanbul, in June 1996, the Baha'i International Community shared its vision of communities of the future—a vision that addresses many of the challenges facing us at the end of this turbulent century:

Communities that thrive and prosper in the new millennium will do so because they acknowledge the spiritual dimension of human nature and make the moral, emotional, and intellectual development of the individual a central priority. They will guarantee freedom of religion and encourage the establishment of places of worship. Their centers of learning will seek to cultivate the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness and will pursue as a major goal the participation of all peoples in generating and applying knowledge. Remembering at all times that the interests of the individual and of society are inseparable, these communities will promote respect for both rights and responsibilities, will foster the equality and partnership of women and men, and will protect and nurture families. They will promote beauty, natural, and man-made, and incorporate into their design principles of environmental preservation and rehabilitation. Guided by the concept of unity in diversity, they will support wide-spread participation in the affairs of society, and will increasingly turn to leaders who are motivated by the desire to serve. In these communities the fruits of science and technology will benefit the whole society, and work will be available for all.

Communities such as these will prove to be the pillars of a world civilization—a civilization which will be the logical culmination of humanity's community-building efforts over vast stretches of time and geography. Baha'u'llah's statement that all people are "born to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization," implies that every person has both the right and the responsibility to contribute to this historic and far-reaching, collective enterprise whose goal is nothing less than the peace, prosperity, and unity of the entire human family. 61

61. The Baha'i International Community, Sustainable Communities in an Integrating World, a concept paper shared at the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, Turkey, 3- 14 June 1996. See pp. 27 5- 281 for the full text of this statement.

PROFILE:

TH~WILLIAM  
MASETLHA  
FOUNDATION,  
ZAMBIA

"Banani has taught me to be true to myself" "Spending my last three years of school here has changed me quite a lot. I appreciate the virtues I have been taught and the good days I had here." "One thing I like about Banani is that I found out who I really am and what I want to become ... I'm sure if given the chance I will be able to help change the world to make it a better place to live in." "Let your vision be world embracing."

These comments, written in the school's first yearbook by members of the 1996 graduating class of the Banani International Secondary School in the Chisamba district of Zambia, clearly reflect the ideals of the institution, which opened in 1993 to provide secondary education for young women.

The Banani School forms one part of the William Mmutle Masetlha Foundation, a Baha'i agency founded in 1995 under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Zambia, which aims to deepen individuals' knowledge of spiritual principles and to provide training in health, literacy, and a range of practical skills and trades. In addition to overseeing the operations of the Banani School, the Foundation has responsibility for the

direction of the William Mmutle Masetlha Institute, dedicated to the development of human resources in Zambia.

The development of the Masetlha Foundation shows how the expansion of grassroots development activities leads to a natural evolution of established structures, governed by the needs and priorities of the people they serve. The Baha'i approach to social and economic development is distinctive, in that it promotes a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical elements of life. People learn to apply spiritual principles, to behave uprightly, and to practice the art of Baha'i consultation so that they can become increasingly self-sufficient and self-reliant. Further, projects arise from an expressed need from people at the grassroots level rather than being imposed from the top. The basic principle is that all people, regardless of their circumstances or resources, can participate in this joint enterprise of increasing the systematic application of the principles of the Baha'i Faith to

improving the quality of human life.

This approach recognizes that as people develop their capacity to make decisions about their spiritual and material progress and then to implement those decisions, the level at which they operate will become increasingly complex. The growth in complexity, however, is not imposed from without but arises naturally from the growth in capacity of those participating in the projects. 1

#### The William Masetlha Institute

This kind of growth can clearly be seen in the development of the Masetlha Foundation, which has its roots in the founding of the William Masetlha Institute in 1983. The Institute was originally established to work towards the betterment of life among the 50,000 people that constitute the rural population in the Kabwe district, eighty kilometers north of Zambia's capital, Lusaka. The Institute sought to develop human resources through combining a study program in the Baha'i teachings and service to the Baha'i Faith with vocational training in rural technology, farming, food production, arts and crafts, health and hygiene, and other practical

1. See also pp . 293- 302 for further a report on two Baha'i social and economic development projects, including the William Masetlha Foundation.

#### THE "WILLIAM MASETLHA FOUNDATION

skills. In this way, the people would be able to see the spiritual principles involved in their work.

In accordance with the Baha'i teachings, the promotion of the advancement of women has occupied the Masetlha Institute since its early days. In 1987, a program for women was created which included components on spiritual enrichment, literacy and numeracy, mothering skills, and agricultural training. More recently, the establishment of the Banani Secondary School for girls has reinforced the Baha'i commitment to the spiritual principle of equality.

An important element in the success of any program is reinforcement of learned information and behavior. One effective way in which such reinforcement is achieved is through the publication of a newsletter which was begun by the Institute so that former participants in the programs could continue to stay in contact with each other and develop effective networks to reinforce their newly acquired skills and knowledge.

Surveying the conditions of the area, the Institute eventually developed two main projects, the first addressing an illiteracy rate that runs as high as sixty percent and the second with the goal of improving grassroots knowledge about health care in the villages of the area. Thus, the Baha'i Literacy Campaign and the Baha'i Primary Health Care Project were born.

#### The Baha'i Literacy Campaign

The Baha'i Literacy Campaign is another example of how a simple project begun at the grassroots level can evolve to become more complex. The first stage in this process was a Baha'i literacy project, which was begun by the Masetlha Institute in the early 1990s. Its object was to train some 200 tutors who would then each hold literacy classes for approximately twenty students. After the conclusion of the initial effort, the Zambian Baha'i community became part of a Baha'i Literacy Campaign coordinated by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Baha'i World Centre in 1996.

The Campaign had begun as a pilot project in three countries- Cambodia, the Central African Republic, and Guyana- in 1994. By 1996, enough had been learned from the pilot project for its expansion into seven additional countries: Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malaysia, Panama, Thailand, and Zambia.

The twin objectives of the campaign are to improve literacy standards within the Zambian Baha'i community and to endow participants with the power to communicate in such a way that they can shape their own destiny. This is achieved not merely through functional literacy but by giving people access to the Word of God and means to apply that Word in their lives. Thus, while focusing particularly on women and youth, the literacy project seeks to educate entire villages in concert with efforts to improve their social conditions. The first, year-long phase of the campaign includes the development of a core curriculum, the training of facilitators and trainers of facilitators, and the establishment of a number of literacy classes throughout the region. In line with the approach to development described above, subsequent developments built upon results and findings from this initial phase.

#### The Primary Health Care Project

Intended to assist the Government of Zambia in its campaign to achieve "Health for All by the Year 2000," the Baha'i Primary Health Care Project began in August 1993. Its goals are to identify and train over a hundred Community Health Care Workers to actively promote preventive health education methods in their own communities. On a broader level, the project provides a health education training model that can be made available to other development agencies. Other goals include an increase of ten percent in the level of immunization coverage in targeted areas and an increase in knowledge of primary health care, with an emphasis on AIDS and malaria prevention. The key to achieving this final goal is the integration of primary health care into a broad range of development-related training programs. By 1995, more than 70 of 93 trained community health workers had conducted health education activities; by the end of 1996, 149 had been trained.

The encouraging results of the training program are seen in the following comments of Kate Bwalya, a public health nurse for

Zambia's Ministry of Health. She notes that health workers "willingly volunteer to get trained, but they are not wholeheartedly prepared to serve. They need something to sustain their zeal. They don't seem to know who they are really serving. But the Baha'i-trained health educators know that they are serving. And

#### THE WILLIAM MASETLHA FOUNDATION

from what I see, the difference .. is the spiritual stand." Indeed, the emphasis on service is a prime objective of the program.

The future development of the primary health care project is currently under consideration, but certainly consolidation of gains made is one priority. Refresher courses for workers already trained, as well as courses for new workers to replace those who are no longer active, community education, and the training of village health committees are ways in which the project may evolve.

#### The Banani International Secondary School

Since its opening in January 1993, the Banani School has undergone steady growth and progress. In 1996, for example, a new library, computer lab and swimming pool were opened, and the academic success of the school was reflected in the fact that all of the members of the senior class earned their International General Certificate of Secondary Education (I GCSE) according to the standards of the University of Cambridge Examinations Syndicate, while the grade nine class rated second in the district for its passing rate.

In 1994, more than 90 students attended the school, while that number expanded to some 116 girls in the five grades during 1996.

From an academic staff of eleven hailing from six countries in 1994, Banani grew to some seventeen teachers and administrators, as well as other support staff, in 1996.

Subjects offered include English as a second language, French, mathematics, geography, history, English literature, agriculture, biology, chemistry, and physics. Courses on world religions and character development have been developed by the school, and a community service program is a key element in the moral training received by students. In this program, students work in groups, with a teacher advisor, and offer different forms of social service to the school and the surrounding community. Scholarships for deserving students have been offered since 1993.

#### Conclusion

The genesis, evolution, and future prospects of the Masetlha Foundation have been dictated by the needs of the people in the area it serves. The challenge taken up by this Baha'i agency is to channel energy into the most effective means of meeting those needs. As people gain experience and expertise in the process of applying

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Parents,

students, and  
guests celebrate the  
inauguration  
of the  
Banani  
School for  
Girls.

A dance by  
a group of  
students,  
featured  
in the  
opening

Banani  
School.

-- .....-

spiritual principles to promote their own social well-being, there is no doubt that the Foundation will evolve further, guided by the belief that "the training that can make it possible for the earth's inhabitants to participate in the production of wealth will advance the aims of development only to the extent that such an impulse is illumined by the spiritual insight that service to humankind is the purpose of both individual life and social organizations."<sup>2</sup> Only through this kind of training can development efforts succeed in "equipping people and institutions with the means through which they can achieve the real purpose of development: that is, laying foundations for a new social order than can cultivate the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness." <sup>3</sup>

2. From a statement of the Baha'i International Community's Office of Public Information, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, originally prepared for the United Nations World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, March 1995, pp. 12- 13 . See also *The Bahri 'i World 1994-95*, pp. 273- 296 for the full text of this statement.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

This article describes five  
Bahri '£-initiated moral training programs  
operating around the world.

NEW ViRTUE s'  
NEW MORAL STANDARDS,  
NEW CAPACITIES:  
Moral Development Activities  
in the Baha'i World Community

All created things have their degree or stage of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit-bearing ... The

animal attains a state of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the light of his intelligence attains its greatest power and development. .. Similarly there are periods and stages in the collective life of humanity. At one time it was passing through its stage of childhood, at another its period of youth, but now it has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent... That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race can neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day, this period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former state of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity. 1

1. 'Abdu'l-Baha, cited in *The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1991), pp. 163-65.

This passage from the Baha'i writings summarizes the Faith's basic approach to the development of humankind. Baha'is see the unfolding of history as the path of an "ever-advancing civilization," the progress of which is dependent upon humanity's moral as well as material development. We stand now at the threshold of maturity, for which we must acquire new virtues, new moral standards, and new capacities in order to reap the benefits of the age. Elsewhere in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Son of the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, this theme has been elucidated as follows:

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.<sup>2</sup>

2. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1982), sec. 225, pp. 283- 84.

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'Abdu'l-Baha's statement outlines the basic approach of the Baha'i community around the world in the activities it has undertaken with regard to moral development. Material progress is desirable, but it should be accompanied by spiritual growth both individual and collective. During a talk given in America in April 1912, 'Abdu'l-Baha compared these two elements or powers to the wings of a bird, saying, "Both must be developed, for flight is impossible with one wing."<sup>3</sup>

While the Baha'i Faith is still a relatively young religion, it has made a number of efforts throughout the world to develop programs that will promote both the material and the spiritual progress not only of its members but of the wider communities in which they live. Many of these activities fall under the broad heading of social and economic development-health care and literacy training, the establishment of schools, income-generating projects- but some have a distinct focus on moral training. This article will survey five such projects and programs around the world: "ZIPOPO," or "The Happy Hippo Show," a television program in Russia that promotes awareness and discussion of moral issues among youthful viewers; the moral leadership training program at Nur University in Bolivia; the "On the Wings of Words" literacy project in Guyana; the School of the Nations in Macau; and the Moral Education Project in St. Petersburg, Russia.

"ZIPOPO" or "The Happy Hippo Show"

This television show was first developed by Shamil Fattakhov, a journalist from Kazan, to promote consultation in youth groups on situations centered around themes connected to moral education. The name of the program, "ZIPOPO," is taken from the first letters of the words "Zaochniy institut pozitivnovo povedeniya," which translates as "The Academy of Positive Behavior." In English the

program is called "The Happy Hippo Show," a title inspired by a story related about 'Abdu'l-Baha, who, during His trip to America in 1911-12, is reported to have said to a crying child, "Don't be sad, be a happy hippopotamus! "

3. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 60.

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The concept underlying "ZIPOPO" is to present viewers with an opportunity to look at moral or ethical issues and to provide them with the means to approach life problems and find positive solutions through specific dramatic examples. As Mr. Fattakhov has noted, the power of positive example has a long and distinguished history in Russia. He cites the instance where, following the publication in the late nineteenth century of Leo Tolstoy's novel *The Resurrection*, about a man who forfeits his wealth and prominent position in society to repent for an evil deed he committed in his youth, many readers of the popular work radically changed their lives, confessing to crimes they had committed, donating their possessions to charity, and performing good works.

"ZIPOPO," which runs weekly in a number of cities in Russia and is about 40 minutes in length, features a dramatic skit performed by actors, a live audience of between eighty and a hundred people—mostly youth—and hosts who facilitate the discussion. The hosts begin by warming up the audience and introducing the topic for the show, after which the first scene of a situation based on the topic is acted out. The drama freezes at a crucial point of tension, and audience discussion opens up, facilitated by the hosts who, from time to time, interject relevant points or perhaps quote brief passages from various literary or religious sources to further fuel the exchange of viewpoints. Sometimes an expert on the topic is present to contribute ideas as well. Following the discussion, which always focuses on finding positive solutions to the situation, the dramatic sketch resumes and one possible solution to the particular moral dilemma is presented. A second round of audience discussion following the dramatic conclusion helps those present to recognize a pattern of response to the problem, based on moral principles. Many of the scripts have been developed by Mr. Fattakhov, but he welcomes other authors and encourages youth to submit their ideas for future programs; one scenario was written by a seventeen-year-old high school student. Well over two hundred such sketches have now been written and performed, including ones on topics such as how to avoid drug addiction, suicide, the difference between sex and love, youth and the police, stealing, unemployment, racial conflict, divorce, running away from home, how to find

the right partner to establish a healthy family life, how to develop

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virtues, and so on. In one sketch, for example, a girl and her boyfriend are sitting on a park bench talking about how much they love each other. He begins to pressure her to have sex; she says she wants to wait until they are married. "But everybody does it," he argues, and besides, they should "test each other out" before marriage. Finally he delivers an ultimatum: if she doesn't prove that she loves him by sleeping with him tonight, their relationship is over. At this point the action freezes. Should she give in or not? The audience discusses the issue before the sketch resumes to present one possible resolution to the situation.

The program has become very popular, not only with youth but with entire families, because it features ordinary people exploring moral solutions to common dilemmas that are often not addressed in society. Viewers, then, see how they can practically apply moral principles in their own lives. Mr. Fattakhov describes the goal of the program as "the healing and education of society through regular collective deepening in moral aspects, based on the highest moral principles proclaimed by prophets of all world religions, by outstanding philosophers and prominent people, accumulated by the wisdom of the whole of mankind."

The use of drama makes the problem more emotionally immediate and provides the opportunity for different social and age groups to share a common experience. The discussion allows youth to broaden their knowledge of life and experience consultation in a supportive atmosphere where collective thinking is used in search of positive solutions to life's problems. Positive actions and behavior are thus legitimized in the minds of young viewers; individuals can become responsible for their own moral choices, make positive decisions, and take action. Families, too, can consult in their own homes on topics introduced in the shows.

Audience bases for "ZIPOPO" are expanding. Host training workshops have been held since 1994, and as a result the show is now established in a number of Russian cities, including Chita, Khabarovsk, Izhevsk, Ulan-Ude, Kazan, Leninogorsk, and Perm. It has also been introduced into India, China, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Italy, Moldova, Latvia, and the Ukraine. And while "ZIPOPO" began as a program primarily directed at youth, different variations of the show have been developed, aimed at children,

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ZIPOPO's

host-originator

Shami! Fattakhov •

with young

participants at an outdoor summer camp in the far east city of Khabarovsk, in July 1994.

women, families, and social groups such as teachers, businessmen, journalists, and so on. Because the format of the show is flexible and portable, it can be (and has been) done in locations as varied as kindergartens, youth camps, schools, colleges and universities, and on mass media, including radio, television, and newspapers. In the city of Khabarovsk eighteen-year-old Tanya Maros, who had been trained as a host, was galvanized to start up a radio version of the show, which she produced and hosted herself. Another young host, Leonid Osokin, hosted a live TV program called the "Orange Show," modeled on "ZIPOPO," for some two years in his home city of Ulan-Ude. The popular show, which ran biweekly, reached some one million people and was discontinued only when Mr. Osokin left to pursue a doctoral degree in morality and ethics. Recently, Mr. Fattakhov has adapted the basic format of "ZIPOPO" for different audiences. For example, he has offered seminars to businessmen on subjects such as ethics in business-an issue of real concern in Russian society. The dramatic sketch presented at one such seminar opens with a businessman advising his wife over the telephone not to buy fruit or vegetables from a particular vendor who uses chemical sprays that could endanger the health of their family. Immediately following this conversation two people are ushered into the man's office, the first complaining about the pollution released by the businessman's factory and its effects on her child. The second, who is meanwhile quietly sobbing and obviously carrying something bulky under her coat, suddenly throws aside her wrap and deposits a dead dog on the businessman's desk,

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crying that this was her beloved pet that was poisoned by drinking from the stream next to the man's factory. At that point the action freezes and the seminar participants are invited to discuss what has happened, identify the moral principles involved in the situation, and devise a positive solution. According to Mr. Fattakhov, the businessmen at the seminar were galvanized by the sketch and engaged in a very energetic discussion of ethics in business practices-something they claimed they had not done previously.

Responses such as those of the businessmen- as well as the popular reception of "ZIPOPO" on the television and radio in various cities-underscore people's hunger for presentations and programs that address in a substantive, participatory way the issues

of morality and ethics that are central to their lives. And the format developed by Mr. Fattakhov also shows that addressing such issues is far from a dull, dry exercise.

Moral Leadership Training Program at Nur University,  
Bolivia

Universidad Nur, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1996, is a private educational institution in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, founded by a number of Baha'is who were concerned with the lack of higher educational opportunities for Bolivians and were motivated by the need for trained professionals who could contribute to the development of the country.

Nur's mission statement is "to contribute to an educational process that facilitates individual and social transformation through the development of human capabilities, fostering a dynamic coherence between the intellectual, spiritual, and physical dimensions, for the establishment of a just, peaceful, and harmonious global society."

Nur began its first academic year in April 1985 with 97 students; it currently has 2,600 undergraduate, 500 graduate, and more than 2,000 continuing education students; women compose 43% of the student body.

Underlying Nur's approach to education is the belief that the mere transfer of information and knowledge will not raise up people who can bring about a personal and collective transformation in service to the common good. Therefore, the university emphasizes ethical and moral education; courses also look at the integrative and disintegrative forces at work in the world that will eventually

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lead to the establishment of peace and the acceptance of the concept of world citizenship. Latin American nations are still consolidating stable forms of democratic government, which many leaders of thought in the region believe must be rooted in moral leadership. Nur hopes that its programs will help create such leaders.

Nur has identified eighteen specific moral leadership capabilities that it seeks to develop, including the following: to participate effectively in consultation; to act with rectitude of conduct based on ethical and moral principles; to evaluate one's own strengths and weaknesses without involving the ego; to take initiative in a creative, disciplined form; to learn from systematic reflection on action within a consistent and evolutionary conceptual framework; to commit to empowering educational activities; to create a vision of a desired future based on shared values and principles, and to articulate it clearly and simply so that it inspires others to work for its fulfillment; to understand relationships based on dominance and to contribute towards their transformation into relationships based on interconnectedness, reciprocity, and service; to contribute to the

establishment of justice.

Emphasis in the moral leadership program is placed on the individual's moral responsibility to search for and recognize truth, and then to apply that truth in all aspects of his or her life. Students are encouraged to find principles that can serve as the basis of their lives and then to base decisions and actions on them, while remaining open to the investigation of new principles so as to allow for continuing growth. Students thus develop a principle-based vision of the desired future of their community and examine different points of view and facts in order to investigate the truth.

A framework for teaching moral leadership has been incorporated into Nur's core curriculum. Since 1990, all undergraduate students have been required to complete 120 hours of community service as a requirement for graduation. Almost 1,000 students have now participated in more than 200 projects, some taking the initiative to offer leadership workshops to local high schools as part of their service.

Other programs also contain moral leadership components. A pilot project, carried out from May 1993 to October 1995 in the

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Participatory  
learning at Nur  
University in  
Bolivia.

departments of Santa Cruz and Tarija, sought to empower 460 rural teachers to become community development agents. Emphasis was placed on the role that rural teachers can play in aiding communities to pursue their own path of development by analyzing their own needs, establishing their order of priority, and managing their own projects. Rural teachers, acting as facilitators, can serve as a source of initiative, knowledge, and guidance in community organization, in the empowerment of grassroots organizations, and in the management of their projects.

Training for the project was carried out by means of a threesemester degree course for the teachers, conducted through distance education. Spiritual principles, which are seen as an essential part of life and the development process, formed a central aspect of the course through an emphasis on moral leadership. The five elements underlying this component of the course are that leadership should be oriented towards service and should not be an exercise of power; that the aim of development is an active engagement in the process of individual and collective transformation; that participants commit to the fundamental moral responsibilities of searching for truth, of recognizing truth, and of applying truth in all aspects of their lives; that moral leadership is based on eternal values and a commitment

to service and the process of personal and collective transformation; and that emphasis should be placed on the development of personal, interpersonal, and societal capabilities of leadership. Another program seeks to strengthen women's leadership role in the field of community health, emphasizing moral leadership

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capabilities that increase women's ability to take initiative in improving health in their communities. Components of the program include study of moral leadership for social transformation and consultation as a method of group decision-making, learning how to form a collective vision and how to learn from reflecting on experience, how to take creative initiative, and how participatory evaluation aids in collective learning. The National Public Health System of Bolivia, women from a number of rural communities who belong to a Rural Women's Center, and the 35 member organizations of the Santa Cruz branch of the National Confederation of Women's Organizations have also received moral leadership training. Several Bolivian NGOs active in the fields of women's rights, children's education, child survival, literacy, the protection of the environment, and the improvement of agricultural production have had their management and field staff trained in moral leadership by Nur, as have the National Secretariat for Popular Participation, the state government of Santa Cruz, and several municipal governments. Members of the Baha'i community, including members of the institution of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants and Baha'i rural school teachers, have also received training. Further extension of these activities is planned. Nur is developing a strategy to apply moral leadership training to environmental issues. It is seeking funding for a project focusing on the health of female adolescents, addressing problems such as venereal disease, AIDS, and abortions resulting from unwanted pregnancies by educating adolescents in these health risks, emphasizing the importance of moral responsibility and developing participants' capacity to prevent problems before they occur. Collaborating with the Harvard Institute for International Development, Nur is also working to design a comprehensive program to provide training in moral leadership, public administration, and concepts of just governance to civic authorities in 46 Bolivian municipalities.

"On the Wings of Words," Guyana

In 1994, pilot literacy projects were undertaken by the Baha'i communities in three countries-Guyana, Cambodia, and the Central African Republic-at the invitation of the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Baha'i World Centre as the initial part of a proposed global literacy campaign. The literacy projects

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seek to address the concern of the Universal House of Justice, which prompted it to call, in 1989, for systematic efforts toward the eventual elimination of illiteracy in the Baha'i community.

The campaign is based on a concept of literacy achieved through a combination of study of the Baha'i writings on education, the experience of some Baha'is in the field, the application of the work of Paulo Freire, and guidance received from the Baha'i World Centre.

In this view, literacy is seen as more than skills in basic reading, writing, and numeracy. The project combines spiritual and moral themes with the mechanics of writing, an approach that acknowledges each individual's need for direct access to the Word of God.

"On the Wings of Words," as the literacy project is called in Guyana, operates under the guidance of the Varqa Foundation, a Baha'i-inspired agency. The program was initially offered in ten Baha'i communities, and approximately thirty Baha'i facilitators received intensive training in how to use the materials that had been developed, how to structure a literacy class, and how to use the generative themes to encourage development of the moral and spiritual aspects of the program.

Five of the ten initial areas began to flourish, as groups of up to 25 youth between ages ten and sixteen gathered weekly. The task force that had originated the project supplied study workbooks, which were supplemented by materials from local Baha'i community libraries.

By the end of the first year, the project was strengthened when it was opened up to the involvement of the wider public. Concern

Members of the  
Literacy Task  
Force conduct  
one of the training  
sessions for  
facilitators of the  
"On the Wings of  
Words" literacy  
project in  
Guyana.

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about Guyana's declining literacy rate created a greater receptivity for the program among the country's leaders of thought and educators. Indeed, one leading columnist wrote, "I can think of no more important initiative under way in Guyana now." The Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, the extramural arm of the University of Guyana, became a partner of the Baha'i community in the endeavor and offered a certificate to facilitators who received training and participated in the program.

In May 1996, the project's new phase was launched at Guyana's National Cultural Center, attracting over 200 people from all over the country. The launching was listed among events celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Guyana's independence and received attention on both radio and television. The country's Senior Minister of Education, Dale Bisnauth, lauded the Baha'is for their initiative and mentioned that he was particularly pleased that the program focused not only on the mechanics of reading and writing but on moral aspects as well. The Director of the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education and a member of the Baha'i Literacy Task Force also addressed the meeting.

A follow-up session a month later brought together 200 participants who learned more about the vision of the program and the materials to be used. They also consulted about how to popularize the program in their home communities. The next step was the holding in Georgetown of a five-day training program for the facilitators, who comprised a diverse group from different parts of the country, different religious backgrounds, different ages, and different levels of qualification. One indication of the success of the training sessions was that there were no dropouts; in fact, additional people appeared each day until the organizers regretfully had to turn away more prospective participants.

Some of the topics covered were the vision of literacy underlying the project, the concept of generative themes, the mechanics of reading, testing for baseline data, planning, memorization, logistics, aids and games, teaching styles and methodologies, and singing. The overall themes of the project—"We are noble beings," "We have control over our actions," and "Our actions affect others"—were also addressed. Additional training sessions were held in remote areas for people who wished to become facilitators but

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could not afford to attend the session in Georgetown. Organizers afterwards commented on the spirit of active participation throughout the initial training session and on the proactive approach of the facilitators in getting support from their communities when they began to set up classes.

In all, 33 literacy classes for over 1,200 children were held over the summer in the regions of Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice, with a high level of interest and enthusiasm on the part of both facilitators and students. In the fall, after the rainy season, eight regions of the interior Rupununi region also held classes, which were attended by an additional 300 children. Support for the project was received from the Guyana Book Foundation, which provided \$3,800 in funding, offered one set of free books to each community group that requested one, and made other books available on the same nominal terms on which they are provided to schools.

An evaluative meeting held at the end of the summer looked at the challenges encountered, and materials for new modules were introduced. Facilitators commented on the positive attitudinal changes they saw in the youth who had participated, and the spiritual aspect of the program came in for high praise from those present. Guyana TV covered the event and broadcast highlights. Throughout the following months further meetings provided continued training and support to the facilitators and helped them look back and evaluate the progress of the program. Weekend and vacation-time sessions with students also continued the education process throughout the year, and a newsletter on the groups' activities was started to provide students with reinforcement and encouragement. Other training programs are being planned for the future.

The Project has also arranged a "Festival of Words" in each area where literacy classes have been held, during which the students present to the public a selection of songs, poems, and stories.

In July 1997, a national Festival of Words, with youth representing each village, sub-region, and region, will be held in Georgetown.

School of the Nations, Macau

Founded in 1988, the School of the Nations has pioneered the development of a moral education component in the country's school curriculum. Generally, in Macau formal education is geared to academic subjects. Moral development, while a concern of teachers, is

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Students and  
teachers of  
the School  
of the  
Nations in  
Macau.

handled by them on an individual basis or by the parents of the student. Societal changes and pressures, however, have indicated an increasing need for a more formal program of moral education.

The Badi Foundation, which runs the School of the Nations, is a private non-governmental organization whose purpose is to develop human resources for the social and economic progress of the region.

All of the Foundation's programs include elements for the development of moral or spiritual values, qualities, and capabilities.

International in character, the School of the Nations has approximately 500 students from 36 different countries and runs from kindergarten through Form 6 or 12th grade. Some 70 percent of

the students are from Macau, Hong Kong, and China.

The school has committed itself to concerted experimentation in curriculum development in the area of moral education, focusing on the development of moral capabilities-particularly at the kindergarten and secondary levels. The activities and the qualities, attitudes, skills, abilities, and concepts promoted are geared to the children's level.

In kindergarten, the development of moral capabilities forms part of every subject-from math to science to languages-in the belief that not to include moral questions is to say that they are irrelevant.

The concept fundamental to the development of any moral capability is seen to be the oneness of humankind, which is reinforced throughout the curriculum. In science class, for example, the students study the scientific concept of "system" by looking

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at the family, the elements that compose it, and the behaviors and virtues that can be found in it; from here, they move on to look at the ways different families in their community interact; and finally, they expand their investigation to all the families in the world-the family of humankind. In mathematics, a similar approach is taken to teaching sets, where students look at concrete sets-sets of children who are happy or who want to be obedient, sets of children in their class, the set of children in Macau, and the set of children in the world.

The concept that each of us chooses his or her own behavior-and can choose to change-is also taught in various ways.

In the science class for five-year-olds, for example, after learning the names of parts of their bodies, students discuss what the parts do. A mouth eats and sings, but it also speaks. Does the mouth decide what it will say? Do the feet decide where they will walk?

By answering such questions, students become aware that there are decisions to be made and that they themselves-their spirits or souls-are what decides. This concept is, again, reinforced across the curriculum.

At the secondary level, the focus is on the development of five moral capabilities: creating a healthy family; empowering others; bringing joy to others; preserving and rationally using the environment; and consultation. All activities are organized around the core concept of service. Elements of the program include two hours weekly in moral education class, either doing service projects in the community or in the classroom, where students are asked to reflect on activities they have completed or to plan future activities. Consultation with teachers, with other students, and with the population they are serving, as well as the writing of journals and other assignments, all lead the students towards deep reflection and discussion on the capability they are exploring so that they

can relate their experiences to the rest of their lives.

The Form 1(Grade8) students' program centers around working with the kindergarten students in the school and studying elements of child development and education. Students also reflect on their own families' values and values they have adopted for themselves.

The following year students undertake service to promote environmental conservation and beautification of the environment, outside

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the school. In Form 3, cooperation with the Cultural Institute of Macau is the focus. Students have assisted in recording the history of Macau and have worked with social service organizations, seeing how a society takes care of its members and their own role in that process. During their final two years at the school, students work at homes for the elderly or with programs for the homebound and at a home for the mentally handicapped, receiving special training from professional social service workers. By the end of the program, the students have learned how to make others comfortable, how to listen and encourage others, and how to be more courageous, compassionate, and humble.

The moral capabilities program at the School of the Nations is continually being developed. It does not claim to turn out students who are perfect models of moral behavior, because it sees the development of moral capabilities as a lifelong process, but it does give students a start along the path of their own spiritual growth, encountering challenging life situations and seeing the reality of applying moral values in society—a process involving difficulties and ambiguities as well as rewards and triumphs. For its efforts in this area, the School of the Nations recently won an award from the Department of Education as Macau's top moral education program and was awarded third place in an international competition for moral education programs.

Moral Education Project, St. Petersburg, Russia

Begun in 1995, the Moral Education Project based in St. Petersburg aims to promote the development of a course on moral education for youth, to present lectures on religion and science at the university level, and to prepare materials on moral education for publication in English and Russian. In these endeavors, the Baha'is who spearhead the project seek to collaborate with Russian intellectuals and academics working in this field.

In 1996, the project sponsored a regular full-semester course in moral education at the St. Petersburg Electrotechnical University, in which 38 third-year public relations students enrolled.

Given the positive response to this initial offering, it appears likely that the course will be repeated. William S. Hatcher, the project founder, also presented a paper at the plenary session of an international conference on pedagogical issues in university education,

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held at the Electrotechnical University, using materials from the project.

At the request of the head of the ethics department of St. Petersburg State University, a short course on ethics based on the materials from the Moral Education Project was given, and future collaboration between the project and the university in the formulation of a new fundamental course in ethics, required for all philosophy students, is likely.

A monograph on moral education, generated by the project, is soon to be published in English in St. Petersburg, after which it will be released in Russian. This material will then form the basis of an annual course in moral education in the Master's program at Landegg Academy, Switzerland. Project materials have also formed the basis of lectures at the university in Minsk, in Brest, Belarus, and in Finland.

Publications include two booklets, containing some twelve lectures on various themes related to the Baha'i Faith; a booklet compiling statements of philosophers, scientists, and artists concerning the existence and nature of God; a Russian translation of an article entitled Economics and Moral Values; and basic course materials for the project's program, entitled "A Non-Ideological Approach to the Moral Education of Youth and Young Adults." The approach taken by the Moral Education Project is simply this: that moral development is a process that leads to the development of each individual as an independent human being who is able to attain true well-being. Project members call this model "non-ideological" because it is founded on the premise that the source of moral behavior comes from an individual's understanding of what they refer to as "the moral law of cause and effect" rather than through inculcation of a moral credo or a set of rules for moral behavior. The program, in fact, views religious fanaticism and sectarianism as moral evils because they lead to dependence on a restrictive moral credo rather than to authentic knowledge of moral law; they also contribute to various antisocial attitudes undermining one's own and others' spiritual well-being. Moral development, then, is a process by which the individual learns how to generate and sustain positive encounters with the law of cause and effect embedded in every aspect of reality. According to our reading of these encounters, we construct our own individual "value paradigm," which is the system-albeit largely unarticulated-by which we make our value choices. The Moral Education Project sees the essential challenge of moral education as the understanding of this moral law of cause and effect and, as a result, the development of a correct value paradigm. To develop this paradigm we reflect upon and strive to understand the fundamental moral

principles underlying our encounters with reality. The curriculum the project has developed for youth identifies and elaborates these fundamental principles. It also leads them towards experiencing "transformative interactions" and allows students to see for themselves the operation of the moral law of cause and effect in various contexts.

There are a number of categories of these interactions with reality on which the program focuses, including, notably, the self (which refers to the individual soul or spirit, as defined in the Baha'i writings) with the Divine; the self with the self, the self with other humans, with social groups, and with objects and collections of objects.

Through developing an understanding of the dynamics of value choice in these various categories, the project pursues the goal of developing a scientifically based, Baha'i-inspired curriculum for youth and young adults. Project founders identify scientific ideas or theories as "Baha'i-inspired" insofar as they have been examined in light of the Baha'i writings and fit with the basic spiritual conception of the human being that is found there. Since Baha'u'llah has taught that science and religion agree, the process is seen as both scientific and Baha'i in nature.

If the goal of spiritual education is seen as producing genuinely happy and autonomous human beings, then training young people to recognize and evaluate their own experiences of the world-and to acquire the motivation to make moral choices that will bring about their own spiritual well-being-is an important contribution to that end. It rests on the belief that people's capacities of mind, will, and heart, when properly developed, will enable them to recognize the truth about reality, to pursue goodness, and to love and be faithful to beauty. The program of moral education conceived by the project begins this development with an examination of the origin

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of the most common notions about human value. The curriculum takes students through a critical examination of the concept of human value found in collectivism and individualism and then moves on to look at the spiritual conception of human value as an alternative to these two extremes. In the latter system, it is posited that the soul, which has inherent capacities not determined by external forces as in the other two systems, is directly created by God and thus possesses intrinsic universal value. Acting in accordance with this spiritual conception of human value gives meaning to individual life and also creates social harmony-without sacrifice of the quality and meaning of individual life nor the overall good of the collectivity.

One exercise that reinforces the spiritual conception of human value and assists students to learn to make moral choices has

them compile a list of all their possessions, following which they are asked to determine which ones cannot be taken away by circumstances of life beyond their control. Through this exercise students learn that, in fact, there are no material possessions that cannot be taken away and that the proper relationship between the self and material objects is not "possession"-which is largely illusory-but rather "legitimate use." Knowing this, individuals can reevaluate their relationship to material things, which, of course, are not ends in themselves. Students can also formulate from this exercise a general moral principle concerning their interactions: that a higher or more valuable thing should never be sacrificed or made a means to obtain a lesser or less valuable thing. Through the means developed by the project, students can experience spiritual growth, the true purpose of moral education, as a process of creative discovery.

### Conclusion

While the five efforts surveyed in this article represent a wide range of undertakings to promote moral education and training in different parts of the world, they hold several common tenets of belief: first, that each human being is a noble creation-a "mine rich in gems of inestimable value," in the words of Baha'u'llah, which education alone can bring to the surface; second, that the individual, who must take responsibility for his or her own actions, can be trained in how to make decisions that will foster spiritual growth; and third, that the individual, his or her family, and society as a whole will benefit from such training. The moral person is a social actor who, having effected change in himself or herself, also has responsibility to contribute to the transformation of the social order.

At a talk He gave in Paris in 1912 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke of the "patient lives of active service" through which "the elect of God" have "brought light into the world." He exhorted His listeners,

Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers. Turn towards God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble. Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute! This is the work of a true Baha'i, and this is what is expected of him. If we strive to do all this, then are we true Baha'is, but if we neglect it, we are not followers of the Light, and we have no right to the name.

God, who sees all hearts, knows how far our lives are the fulfillment of our words. 4

With this high ideal in mind, Baha'is strive to promote moral as well as material development of the peoples of the world.

4. 'Abdu 'l-Baha, Paris Talks : Addresses Given by 'Abdu 'l-Baha in Paris in 1911-1912 (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 80-81.

In this essay, Matthew Weinberg looks at contemporary discourse on the subject of human rights through the eyes of the teachings of the Baha'i Faith.

## THE HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE: A Baha'f Perspective

In 1912, in anticipation of an awakening aspiration of the world's peoples, 'Abdu'l-Baha, the head of the Baha'i Faith from 1892 to 1921, envisioned the approach of the day when "there shall be an equality of rights and prerogatives for all mankind." <sup>1</sup> Tragically, the first substantive steps toward the realization of this vision occurred only after two global conflagrations had produced levels of death and suffering never before experienced in human history. Moral and practical impetus was given to the creation of a universal code of human rights by the appalling extermination of entire groups and populations. The emergence of a comprehensive system of international human rights law has profoundly altered international relations and the manner in which nations treat their own citizens. Indeed, the evolution of the international human rights regime, particularly the adoption

1. 'Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu 'l-Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 rev. ed. (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 3 18.

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of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and of subsequent Covenants and Conventions elucidating and extending the provisions of that Declaration, has been the chief determinant in shaping a normative international moral order.

In the process of setting human rights standards, a moral ethos with global ramifications has been progressively articulated. This remarkable development, clearly foreseen in the Baha'i writings, attests to the period of collective maturity which humanity is now entering. Human beings, 'Abdu'l-Baha states, "must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities." <sup>2</sup>

As humanity comes to terms with the reality of an interdependent world and new avenues of rational inquiry and perception, many of the entrenched social inequities of the past are, for the first time, being systematically and directly confronted. On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the creation of an international community bound by legal

and moral norms can no longer be regarded as a passing idealistic exercise. The Declaration's promulgation of basic civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights for "all members of the human family" has firmly established "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations."<sup>3</sup> The efflorescence of the human rights movement portends a fundamental reshaping of human relations and suggests that "human beings have a substantial capacity for moral understanding and progress."<sup>4</sup>

The unfolding human rights discourse is a vast subject with many different dimensions: legal, political, philosophical, and moral. What follows here is a modest sketch of the salient features of this discourse and an exploration of the unique perspectives that the Baha'i teachings offer concerning the foundations of human rights and their future evolution. It is surely significant

2. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha 'u 'llah: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 165.

3. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948.

4. James W. Nickel, *Making Sense of Human Rights: Philosophical Reflections on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 41.

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that, concurrent with the development of a universal human rights regime, a religious community animated by a commitment to justice in all aspects of life has spread throughout the globe. Observers will be struck by a strong congruence between the contemporary conception of human rights and the view of human nature advanced in the Baha'i writings.

The seeds of present human rights thinking can be traced back to the egalitarian philosophies of antiquity, but it is only in the past few centuries that a clear formulation of human rights has emerged.<sup>5</sup> In recent decades this formulation has been further refined and delineated. The central tenets of modern human rights law can be summarized as follows:

- Every human being has certain rights that are inherent. Such rights can be enumerated or deduced; they are not earned or acquired but inhere in all people by virtue of their humanity alone.
- Every human being's basic rights are indefeasible or inalienable that is, such rights can never be annulled or denied by outside parties or even by the affected individuals themselves.
- Conflicts between different rights must be resolved in accordance with just and impartial laws and procedures.<sup>6</sup>

Although the idea of universal human rights is being increasingly accepted on practical grounds, from a theoretical point of view there is not a universally shared justification for such rights.

The ratification of international instruments, while significant, does not establish that there is a universal concept of human rights.

A review of the literature quickly reveals that the philosophical foundations of human rights remain highly contested. The major

5. For example, citizens of certain ancient Greek city-states enjoyed rights of equal freedom of speech and equality before the law. Subsequently, the Stoic philosophers developed the concept of "natural rights" which belonged to all human beings at all times. Such rights, the Stoics argued, could be derived from reason alone. In medieval Christendom, such natural rights were viewed as an expression of the law of God. Thus the idea of natural law as a universal moral law has pervaded Western thought for more than 2,000 years. See Maurice Cranston, *What Are Human Rights?* (London: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1973), pp. 10- 11.

6. P. Sieghart, *The International Law of Human Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983 ), p. 8.

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international human rights documents ratified by the nations of the world during the past fifty years do not address underlying philosophical issues. These documents have in some sense bypassed the philosophical debate by simply establishing a set of positive legal norms. 7

Because human rights proponents are confronted with a variety of obstacles in their efforts to preserve individual freedoms, including claims of state sovereignty, cultural autonomy, and collective rights, to have a clear theoretical foundation for human rights would be extremely helpful in overcoming such obstacles and implementing concrete legal instruments. Moreover, as the theorist Michael Freeman observes, "rights without reasons are vulnerable to denial and abuse. The human rights struggle is certainly motivated by passion, but it is also influenced by argument." 8 For the moment anyway, regardless of the diverse and sometimes inconsistent reasons put forward for upholding certain human rights, the international community has been able to sustain a consensus on some basic rights and the commitment to safeguard them.

In general, philosophers tend to identify the following sources for human rights: divine authority, natural law, or considerations concerning human nature. As can well be imagined, the possibility of an objective, transcendent Source for human rights is readily dismissed by secular theorists. None of the major international human rights documents refers to God, presumably because the existence of a supernatural authority is not subject to objective proof. 9 But interestingly, natural law-the system of moral imperatives allegedly accessible by human reason alone and championed by Enlightenment thinkers-is also dismissed by many human

7. Nickel, p. 38.

8. Michael Freeman, "The Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 16, 1994, pp. 491 - 514.

9. A traditional "foundationalist" argument for human rights attributes their existence to a supernatural authority. John Locke, for instance, locates the source of rights with God and not with nature as is sometimes supposed. However, since the existence of God is apparently not universally verifiable, secular theorists have attempted to develop non-theistic foundationalist arguments for human rights.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE

rights theorists. The use of reason, and particularly the methods of deduction and induction, it is argued, cannot escape the influence of particular cultural codes. Thus, natural law is generally regarded as a "nebulous" source that cannot ground any particular set of human rights, let alone a universal ensemble of rights. 10

The last major justification for human rights essentially relies on intuition—that is, it is demonstrably apparent that certain actions are wrong because of widespread anthropological evidence that human beings have an aversion to violations of well-being. 11 Considerations of prudence lead rational individuals to embrace standards and social arrangements that promote their autonomy, security, and dignity. As purposive or volitional agents, human beings are entitled to certain minimum levels of physical and psychological well-being as well as freedom of action. Hence, Ronald Dworkin sets forth the principle that each person has the right to "equal concern and respect." 12 This, however, is simply an axiomatic but a compelling moral axiom—that cannot be logically derived, and therefore, critics contend, it is subject to change depending on social, historical, and cultural context. Equality and dignity, for example, are highly elastic concepts. It becomes clear, then, that moral and cultural relativism have decisively affected the human rights discourse on the philosophical level.

The challenge that relativism presents to the human rights movement is not only theoretical, but political and practical. It has been nearly fifty years since the American Anthropological Association issued its now famous and emphatic rejection of "the applicability of any Declaration of Human Rights to mankind as

10. Alison Dundes Renteln, "The Unanswered Challenge of Relativism and the Consequences for Human Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly*, 7.4, pp. 514--40.

11. That concepts of rights and justice generally must at some point appeal to intuition is accepted by many philosophers. John Rawls, for example, refers to justice as a "mental capacity" whose import and application is dependent on a process of rigorous examination or "reflective equilibrium." Rawls asserts that "any conception of justice will have to rely on

intuition to some degree." John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 41 - 51.

12. Freeman, p. 513.

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a whole." 13 However, the contention "that other people's truths are contained in their own classifications and understanding," and that no one culture offers a "self-evidently privileged standard of verity" is now undergoing serious revision. 14 The anthropologist Alison Dundes Renteln, for example, asserts that "relativism in no way precludes the possibility of cross-cultural universals discovered through empirical research," and that the "requirement of relativism that diversity be recognized in no way destroys the possibility of an international moral community." 15

Contemporary anthropological research is revisiting the evidence supporting moral universalism. Richard Beis has identified some twenty moral precepts that appear to be transcultural. These include "the prohibition of murder or maiming without justification; economic justice; reciprocity and restitution; provision for the poor; the right to own property; and priority for immaterial goods [such as freedom]." 16 The essence of the story here is that when researchers want to look for differences they will find differences, and if they search for cross-cultural similarities these can also be readily discovered.

Robert Edgerton in his work *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony* has offered compelling evidence refuting the anthropological dogma that distinct cultural practices and beliefs represent an inviolable set of diverse truths and consequently are immune to outside criticism. His research demonstrates that entire societies can be sick—a reference to the systematic and unjust treatment of certain of its members such as women—and that such dysfunctional societies inevitably perish. More often than not, their social and decision-making structures serve no other purpose than to institutionalize inequality and injustice. Thus, the mere fact that differences across cultures exist does not mean that all variations in social and cultural practices are right

13. Ann-Belinda S. Preis, "Human Rights as Cultural Practice: An Anthropological Critique," *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 18, pp. 286-315.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Renteln, p. 540.

16. Donald J. Puchala, "The Ethics of Globalism," *The 1995 John W Holmes Memorial Lecture: Reports and Papers*, No. 3 (Academic Council on the United Nations System, 1995).

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or acceptable. 17 On these grounds, relativism itself has been critiqued as

immoral. 18

The relativist position is now being subjected to a number of other criticisms. Perhaps most importantly, relativism itself has to look beyond itself for its philosophical justification. In particular, the very claim of a right to difference, whether cultural or moral, implicitly appeals to the idea of universal principle. Moral relativism can be an accurate description of social reality only if notions such as mutual tolerance and noninterference are universally accepted. 19 On a more practical level, even proponents of relativism condemn the morally egregious-slavery, genocide, torture, human sacrifice, ritualistic mutilation, and various forms of collective discrimination. That the relativist challenge to human rights is ultimately not plausible is affirmed by the 1993 Vienna Declaration-a consensus statement adopted by 171 nations: "Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of Governments ... regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems." "The universal nature of these rights and freedoms is beyond question ... " 20 Despite this recognition, relativism is still employed as a political device. For example, in the Bangkok Declaration of 1993, a coalition of Asian governments declared that human rights instruments must take account of "the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds."21 On the surface, this is a reasonable appeal in favor of pluralism-that there cannot be a single understanding of human well-being or only one code of moral truth in a diverse world. In

17. Robert B. Edgerton, *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

18. Puchala.

19. Ibid.

20. Vienna Declaration, World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 14-25 June 1993, U.N. Document A/Conf. 157/24 Part I.

21. Cited in Adamantia Pollis, "Cultural Relativism: Through a State Prism," *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 18, 1996, pp. 316-44. This language was also incorporated into the Vienna Declaration, indicating that although a consensus statement was agreed to by the world 's nations, differences of understanding concerning human rights persist.

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reality, such statements are often intended to insulate governments from international criticism regarding the treatment of their citizens. There is no real justification to the contention that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is in conflict with Asian value systems. As the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has noted, the Buddhist concept of authority entails very specific obligations: "The Ten Duties of Kings are liberality, morality, self-sacrifice,

integrity, kindness, austerity, non-anger, nonviolence, forbearance and non-opposition to the will of the people." 22

Although existing international human rights instruments have an unmistakable Western imprint-both in terms of origin and methodology of implementation-this does not in any way invalidate the moral content that they embody. Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian writer and Nobel laureate, has rejected the assertion that Western human rights standards are inapplicable to other parts of the world: "Any suggestion that freedom of expression is a luxury of the West insults the historic struggles of individuals and communities ... We are all agreed what torture is. What rape means. What child prostitution is. What genocide entails. Then let us not pretend not to know what human rights truly represent." 23

Yet it is important to acknowledge, as the German scholar Heiner Bielefeldt has emphasized, that human rights cannot be considered "a self-evident expression of Occidental culture" or modernity alone. 24 Comparable concepts of human respect, dignity, and duty can be found in all parts of the world. The right to resist oppression can be found in the traditions of many cultures in Africa and Asia. 25 The widespread cultural pattern of offering hospitality to strangers is perhaps evidence of a broad moral

22. New York Times, December 10, 1995. A recognition of the dignity of human life, as expressed by an emphasis on the cultivation and development of the human person, is also central to Confucian thought. In the Confucian view, human beings are independent moral actors who have basic rights as well as responsibilities. See Anwar Ibrahim, "The Asian Renaissance," *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Summer 1997), pp. 31-43.

23. Obinna Anyadika, "Soyinka: Power-Freedom Gulf," *Terra Viva*, June 18, 1993.

24. Heiner Bielefeldt, "Human Rights in a Multicultural World," paper delivered to the Law Faculty of the University of Toronto, Spring 1994.

25. *Ibid.*

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imperative in which outsiders are viewed as being equally human. Some societies may in fact possess the concept of rights without having an explicit vocabulary that expresses or codifies it. 26 In addition, the principle of the golden rule is common to the scriptures of all the major world religions and hence is given expression in many cultures. The injunction of Buddha to "act in a such a way, as if it were happening to yourself" 27 and the oral statement of Muhammad that "kindness is a mark of faith, whoever hath not kindness hath not faith" are clear ethical precursors of modern human rights thinking. 28

In short, human rights are not arbitrary in nature because they are grounded in the universal realities of human experience and embody values presupposed by a wide range of cultures. 9 As the philosopher

Martha Nussbaum observes, there are "features of humanness that lie beneath all local traditions and are there to be seen whether or not they are in fact recognized in local traditions."<sup>30</sup> Such "humanness" includes a set of potentialities, not wholly determinable, that are actualized differently by every human being. The logical extension of this point is that all human beings are entitled to flourish, if not as a claim on God or nature, then as a claim on each other. This implies a universal obligation to promote collective well-being and suggests that human morality itself must be universal. <sup>31</sup> Human rights can then be regarded as a vehicle for shaping social conditions "so as to realize the possibilities of human nature." <sup>32</sup>

26. Damien Keown, "Are There Human Rights in Buddhism?" *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2, 1995.

27. Cited in Udo Schaefer, *The Light Shines in Darkness* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1979), p. 149.

28. Cited in Marzieh Gail, *Six Lessons on Islam* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 21.

29. Although it is logically possible to reject the idea that human rights have philosophical foundations, in light of widespread anthropological realities and a deepening global political consensus it cannot be plausibly argued that the concept of universal human rights is an arbitrary construct. Freeman, p. 514.

30. Cited in Michael J. Perry, "Are Human Rights Universal?" *Human Rights Quarterly* 19, 1997, pp. 461 - 509.

31 . Puchala.

32. Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights: In Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1989, fourth printing 1996).

The human rights discourse over the past five decades has produced a gradual elaboration and expansion of the initial list of rights enumerated in the 1948 Universal Declaration. The European jurist Karel Vasak has provided one framework for describing this process with his notion of "three generations of human rights." <sup>33</sup> The first generation pertains to civil and political rights-those rights as found in Articles 2-21 of the Universal Declaration that address questions of liberty: the right to life, freedom of thought, expression, conscience, religion, and movement; the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; the security of person; freedom from slavery, torture, and cruel or degrading punishment; the right to own property; the right to full equality and fair treatment before the law. These rights generally reflect the philosophical doctrines of liberal political theory which place primacy on the individual and seek to limit the powers of a minimalist state. The second generation pertains to economic, social, and cultural rights-those rights concerned with issues of equality that are promulgated in Articles 22-27 of the Universal Declaration and more specifically in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of 1966: the right to social security; the right to work

and to protection against unemployment; the right to rest and leisure; the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of self and family; the right to education; the right to protection of one's scientific, literary, and artistic production. While some theorists consider such rights as inseparable from rights relating to basic freedoms, others do not regard economic, social, and cultural rights as fundamental because they demand positive duties on the part of governments rather than straightforward duties of restraint. The third generation pertains to the area of collective or solidarity rights . This category of rights was adumbrated in general terms in Article 28 of the Universal Declaration which declared: "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights set forth in the Declaration can be fully realized." At present, third generation rights include the following: the right to political, economic, social, and cultural self-determination; the right to economic and social development; the right to participate

33. Ibid., pp. 143-44.

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in and benefit from the "common heritage of mankind"-for example, the resources of earth and space; and scientific, technical, and other products of human progress; the right to peace; the right to a vital and healthy environment; the right to humanitarian assistance in times of emergency. Such collective rights reflect the idea that political, economic, and social rights are indivisible and are each integral aspects of development. They also imply a need for new forms of international collaboration.

These "three generations" of rights represent the varying perspectives of Western and non-Western countries, of developed and developing societies, and of democratic and non-democratic regimes. They reflect underlying tensions between those who place primacy on the rights of the individual versus those of the community. In many respects, the task of understanding the foundations of human rights and of developing and applying human rights standards is just beginning.

In a very real sense the international human rights regime is the fruit of an ongoing process of moral dialogue among diverse nations and peoples. More than establishing normative standards, the human rights discourse provides a mechanism for people of divergent convictions to learn about each other, resolve particular disagreements, and arrive at new understandings of what is possible for human beings. This cross-cultural enterprise, as evidenced by the increasing interaction among governments and organizations of civil society, has gradually given rise to a new ethos of human solidarity and collective responsibility. It has led to the adoption of new legal instruments that explicitly address the rights

of women, children, and racial and religious minorities. Yet, if this global dialogue is to produce a "compelling core of shared values" and a further refined set of universally accepted moral norms, the "cooperative search for truth," as the philosopher Jurgen Habermas calls it, must be intensified. 34 The establishment of peaceful and

34. Amitai Etzioni, "The End of Cross-Cultural Relativism," *Alternatives*, 22. 2 (April-June 1997); Jurgen Habermas cited in George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1996), p. 295. Some concrete examples of how transcultural discourse can lead to new understandings concerning long-held beliefs and practices are highlighted in Perry, "Are Human Rights Universal?"

progressive patterns of living throughout the world will inevitably depend upon an open and sincere consultative process among all peoples. In the words of Baha'u'llah, Founder of the Baha'i Faith, "No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation. " 35

However important the human rights discourse has been to securing basic human freedoms, if that discourse is to remain relevant to a world experiencing unprecedented political, social, and economic turmoil, it must respond to the deep-seated spiritual inclinations that guide and inspire its inhabitants. The basic processes of civilization can be reordered to embrace justice only if the spiritual dimension of human existence is fully recognized. For the vast majority of humankind, the perception that human reality is fundamentally spiritual in nature is a self-evident truth that finds expression in all spheres of life. To the extent that this understanding of human identity becomes a central feature of the discourse concerning human rights and social development, the upheavals now deranging human affairs will give way to new vistas of freedom and opportunity.

More than a century ago, Baha'u'llah not only anticipated the rise of the human rights movement, but provided an underlying moral and spiritual framework upon which to view human rights in the modern age—a period He described as the "stage of human maturity."<sup>36</sup> His vision of a unified global community gives central consideration to the safeguarding and enhancement of the rights of all human beings.

35. Baha' u ' llah, in *Consultation: A Compilation* (Wilmette: Baha' i Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 3.

36. Baha' u ' llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha' u ' llah* (Wilmette: Baha' i Publishing Trust, 1983), p.77. Humanity has moved through stages in its collective development which are analogous to the periods of infancy, childhood, and adolescence in the lives of its individual members. It is now entering the period of its collective maturity. The principal challenge of maturity is for the peoples of the world to recognize their

interdependence as a single human family whose homeland is the earth itself. "O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth," Baha'u'llah urges, "Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you." Ibid., p. 217.

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In addressing the world's rulers Baha'u'llah warns: "If ye stay not the hand of the oppressor, if ye fail to safeguard the rights of the down-trodden, what right have ye then to vaunt yourselves among men?"<sup>37</sup> And: "They that perpetrate tyranny in the world have usurped the rights of the peoples and kindreds of the earth and are sedulously pursuing their selfish inclinations."<sup>38</sup> He further elucidates the essential requirements of just governance:

It behoveth every ruler to weigh his own being every day in the balance of equity and justice and then to judge between men and counsel them to do that which would direct their steps unto the path of wisdom and understanding. This is the cornerstone of statesmanship and the essence thereof. From these words every enlightened man of wisdom will readily perceive that which will foster such aims as the welfare, security and protection of mankind and the safety of human lives.<sup>39</sup>

In exhorting His followers to the path of justice, Baha'u'llah declares:

Thou must show forth that which will ensure the peace and the well-being of the miserable and the down-trodden. Gird up the loins of thine endeavor, that perchance thou mayest release the captive from his chains, and enable him to attain unto true liberty.

Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression. The thick clouds of tyranny have darkened the face of the earth, and enveloped its peoples.<sup>40</sup>

Baha'u'llah not only addresses human rights issues in general terms, but condemns and prohibits specific practices such as slavery. His strong censure of two great European powers for the persecution of their Jewish populations, represented, in a sense, an early example of the principle of external intervention into the affairs of a sovereign state, a concept that has received considerable currency

37. Baha'u'llah, *The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1967), p. 10.

38. Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1978), p. 85.

39. Ibid., pp. 166-67.

40. Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'í 'Alláh*, p. 92.

only recently.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, all of His epistles and pronouncements to

the governors of human society could be regarded as such.

In the writings of Baha'u'llah the voice of the Creator speaks to the fundamental equality of all: "Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other."<sup>42</sup> And: "Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world has been laid waste. It hath become desolate ... Indeed, man is noble, inasmuch as each one is a repository of the sign of God. Nevertheless, to regard oneself as superior in knowledge, in learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference, is a grievous transgression."<sup>43</sup>

So in 'Abdu'l-Baha's words: "Baha'u'llah taught that an equal standard of human rights must be recognized and adopted. In the estimation of God all men are equal; there is no distinction or r,referment for any soul in the dominion of His justice and equity."<sup>44</sup>

That the standard of justice established by Baha'u'llah is applicable to all members of the human race is made abundantly clear by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, in a letter to members of the Baha'i community in 1925:

[Baha'is] should have the most scrupulous regard to safeguarding the legitimate personal and civil rights of all individuals, whatever may be their chosen career or station in life, and irrespective of their racial, religious or ideological backgrounds. It is not permissible in matters related to such rights to make distinctions and discriminations or show preferences. In all transactions and dealings that affect basic human rights, the standard required of the chosen supporters of Baha'u'llah—a standard that must claim their unhesitating and unreserved acceptance, and which they must meticulously and assiduously uphold—is that they should not make the slightest distinction between friend and stranger, believer and unbeliever, supporter and antagonist.<sup>45</sup>

41. Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahci 'u 'llah*, p. 170.

42. Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1985), Arabic #68, p. 20.

43. Baha 'u 'llah, cited in a letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 27 March 1978.

44. 'Abdu 'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 182.

45. Translation of a letter from Shoghi Effendi to the Baha'is of Iran, July 1925: courtesy of Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.

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The Baha'i commitment to justice is an essential and tangible expression of faith. In contrast to the secular liberal theory that gave rise to the present human rights regime, the Baha'i teachings ground human rights in what is regarded as the objective spiritual nature of the human person. "I knew My love for thee," is the Divine assurance, "therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee

Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty." 46 A loving Creator exists Who is the Source of all that is. 47 It is not simply because human beings have the capacity for rational choice that they deserve moral protection, as modern philosophic liberalism would claim, but that they are spiritual beings who have the capacity to reflect Divine attributes such as love, creativity, and charity. As the 1947 statement of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada eloquently affirmed: "The source of human rights is the endowment of qualities, virtues and powers which God has bestowed upon mankind without discrimination of sex, race, creed or nation. To fulfill the possibilities of this divine endowment is the purpose of existence."48 In short, human beings must be free in order to discover and know God: " ... to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves."49 This process of spiritual discovery and development is the essence of life itself. The innate and fundamental aspiration to investigate reality is thus not only the right but the obligation of every human being. And it is for this very reason that 'Ab du' 1-Baha states that the "conscience of man is sacred and to be respected ... " 50

46. Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic #3, p. 4.

47. For Baha'is, Baha'u'llah's claim to be the Messenger of God for this age reaffirms traditional foundationalist arguments that human rights ultimately derive

from an objective and transcendent Supreme Being. In referring to His own Revelation and to the standard of justice it creates, Baha'u'llah declares:

"Weigh

not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you,

for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men."

Baha'u'llah,

*The Kitilb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1993), p. 56, para 99.

48. Submitted to the first session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, February 1947.

49. Baha'u 'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha 'u 'llah*, p. 5.

50. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *A Traveller 's Narrative* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 91.

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That human rights are ultimately grounded in the successive Revelations of God's will to humanity is explicitly affirmed by 'Ab du' 1-Baha:

Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they

have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind. It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization. 51 As repeatedly emphasized throughout Baha'u'llah's writings, the primary purpose of God in revealing His will through His Messengers is to effect a transformation in the spiritual and material life of society. The transformation called for by Baha'u'llah is directed to the inner life and character of every human being and to the organization of human affairs itself-a transformation that engenders cooperation, compassion, rectitude of conduct, and justice. The establishment of justice is contingent upon a fundamental reformulation of all human relationships- among individuals themselves, between human society and the natural world, between the individual and the community, and between individual citizens and their governing institutions. 52 It implies a basic reconceptualization of social reality; a reality that in spirit and practice reflects the principle of the oneness of humankind. To accept that "the body of humankind is one and indivisible" is to recognize that every human being is "born into the world as a trust of the whole." 53

From this basic principle of the unity of the human family is derived virtually all other concepts concerning human rights and freedoms. If the human race is one, any notion that a particular racial or ethnic group is in some way superior to the rest of humanity must be dismissed; society must reorganize its life to give

51. Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 98.

52. For a detailed discussion of this point see the Baha'i International Community statement, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, reprinted in *The Baha'i World* 1994-95, pp. 273-96.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

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practical expression to the principle of equality between women and men; 54 each and every person must be enabled to "look into all things with a searching eye" so that truth can be independently ascertained; 55 and all individuals must be given the opportunity to realize their inherent potential and thereby contribute to "an ever-advancing civilization." 56

Even some of the more challenging rights claims such as the right to development, shelter, food, employment, and basic health services are subsumed by the principle of the oneness of humanity. As 'Abdu'l-Baha states, "Every human being has the right to live;

they have a right to rest, and to a certain amount of well-being ... Nobody should die of hunger; everybody should have sufficient clothing; one man should not live in excess while another has no possible means of existence." 57 If liberty truly involves a genuine opportunity to determine a way of life, then the set of rights necessary to achieve that way of life cannot be restricted to civil or political rights alone. Social and economic imperatives cannot be segregated from basic civil and political protections. "Justice is not limited," 'Abdu'l-Baha emphasizes, "it is a universal quality." 58 Under conditions of true justice, "all mankind will find comfort and enjoyment in life .. In the future there will be no very rich nor extremely poor. There will be an equilibrium of interests, and a condition will be established which will make both rich and poor comfortable and content." 59 While affirming private property rights and the value of individual economic initiative, the Baha'i teachings "advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the

54. Baha'u'llah emphatically states that "Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God." He insists upon the emancipation of women from long-entrenched patterns of subordination and calls for the full participation of women in the social, economic, and political realms of civilized life. Women: Extracts from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice (Thornhill, Ontario: Baha'i Canada Publications, 1986), No. 54.

55. Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 157.

56. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 215.

57. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Baha in Paris in 1911- 1912 (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1972), pp. 131- 32.

58. Ibid., p. 159.

59. 'Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 132.

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equalization of wealth. For equalization must be imposed from without, while sharing is a matter of free choice."60 Reciprocity and altruism are then integral features of the Baha'i vision of a just social polity. As Baha'u'llah counsels, "if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbor that which thou chooseth for thyself. " 61 The imperative of preserving cultural diversity is also implied by the Baha'i principle of "the oneness and wholeness of human relationships." 2 If a peaceful international order is to emerge, then the complex and infinitely varied cultural expressions of humankind must be allowed to develop and flourish, as well to "interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilization." 63 That there must be a cross-cultural basis for human rights is fully recognized by the Baha'i teachings. The very diversity of the human race is, in fact, a means for creating a world based on unity rather than uniformity. "The diversity in the human family," 'Abdu'l-Baha

states, "should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord." 64 Ultimately, the recognition of the unity of the human race suggests that the principle of unrestricted state sovereignty must give way to a true global system of law and order. 65 The

60. 'Abdu 'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu 'l-Bahil* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982), sec. 79, p. 115.

61. Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahil 'u 'llah*, p. 64.

62. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha 'u 'llah*, p. 202.

63. *The Prosperity of Humankind*, p. 282.

64. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 53.

65. Baha'u'llah outlined a number of steps that would lead to permanent stability in international relations. At the heart of His vision was a set of new

institutional mechanisms based on participation and consultation among the world 's peoples. The main institutions envisaged include a freely elected world legislature with genuine representation and authority, an international court having final jurisdiction in all disputes between nations, and an international executive empowered to carry out the decisions of these legislative

and judicial bodies. These institutions would have the means to ensure and maintain a general disarmament by applying principles of collective security.

They would neither usurp nor suppress the basic autonomy of nations,

and would safeguard the personal freedom and initiative of individuals. The

system of governance propounded by Baha'u'llah emphasizes the importance of grassroots decision-making, but also provides mechanisms of coordination and authority that make cooperation possible on a global scale.

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Baha'i concept of the oneness of humanity therefore goes beyond basic communitarian notions of mutual obligation for it not only embraces human diversity but anticipates a definite framework of rights and duties in the context of a global society.

Although, as we have seen, there is considerable convergence between Baha'i belief and the principal objectives of the unfolding

international human rights discourse, there do exist some rather substantive differences with the liberal philosophic thought that

underpins that discourse. At the heart of contemporary liberal philosophy is the notion that personal prerogative defines the structure of society, and that "as free and independent selves"

individuals are entitled to remain "unencumbered by moral or civic ties they have not chosen." 66 Consequently, the institutions of

civil society are viewed as necessary only because the separate

interests of individuals inevitably interfere with each other. Government and community are thus regarded as "procedural" imperatives

that must be lived with. 67 There is no moral bond with others

unless individuals choose to concern themselves with the interests of the community. Furthermore, current conceptions of liberal thought essentially view rights as being prior to and often unconnected to duties. The rights of individuals are often seen as rights that provide immunity from communal interests. Even though Article 29 .1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights specifies that "everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible," the brevity and less than prominent location of this statement hardly does justice to the notion that rights must correlate with obligations. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Most Holy Book of Baha'u'llah, His Book of Laws, opens by specifying the duties of all human beings rather than their rights. "The first duty" is "recognition" of the Divine Authority that is the foundation of all

66. Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press , 1996), p. 6.

67. A society that "asserts the priority of fair procedures over particular ends" -

ends such as concerning oneself with the welfare of the community- has been described as "procedural" in nature. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

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law; the second is observance of that law. 68 To exercise these twin duties "may be regarded as the highest expression of free will with which every human being is endowed by an all-loving Creator." 69 From this perspective, the right to exercise freedom of conscience in the matter of religious belief comes into being so that one can fulfill the spiritual duty of observing the commandments of God. In short, it is the requirement of individuals' being able to meet fundamental spiritual and moral obligations that gives rise to human rights.

The Baha'i Faith teaches that a balance must be struck between the latitudes of individual freedom and the promotion of the collective good.

"True liberty," Baha'u'llah says, can only be achieved by following the path of moderation. 70 It is by relinquishing a degree of personal liberty to a commonly accepted set of laws and collective interests that the individual helps shape a social milieu that returns far greater benefits in terms of personal freedom than any sacrifice required. Individual well-being is intimately tied to the flourishing of the whole. It is thus a reciprocated benevolence and selflessness, rather than utilitarian self-interest, that underlies the Baha'i idea of social life. As 'Abdu'l-Baha states, "the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good." 71 While preservation of "personal freedom and initiative" is considered essential, so too must the relational aspect of human existence

be recognized. 72 The "maintenance of civilized life," the Universal House of Justice-the international governing body of the Baha'i Faith-explains, "calls for the utmost degree of understanding and cooperation between society and the individual; and because of the need to foster a climate in which the untold potentialities of the individual members of society can develop, this relationship must allow 'free scope' for 'individuality to assert itself' through modes

68. Baha 'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 21, para. 1.

69. Universal House of Justice, *Message to the Baha'is of the World*, November 26, 1992.

70. Baha' u' llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, pp. 63, para. 122- 25.

71. 'Abdu ' l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 2.

72. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha 'u 'llah* , p. 203.

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of spontaneity, initiative and diversity that ensure the viability of society. " 73

The Baha'i community therefore has much in common with peoples whose traditional values are more communally oriented and less individualistic than with those who adhere to the secular liberal conception of social life. Interestingly, this understanding of the place of the individual in society strongly resonates with the original strand of liberal philosophy enunciated by John Locke. In his *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke asserts that "The first and fundamental natural Law, which is to govern even the Legislative itself, is the preservation of the Society, and (as far as will consist with the publick good) of every person in it." 74 The individual human being, he further argues, "and all the rest of Mankind are one Community." 75 Consequently, "the end of Government (is) the preservation of all," and "the end of Law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge Freedom." 76 The modern secular turn away from Locke's conception of human nature is made apparent by his statement that "God having made Man such a Creature, that, in his own Judgement, it was not good for him to be alone, put him under strong obligations of Necessity, Convenience and Inclination to drive him into Society, as well as fitted him with Understanding and Language to continue and enjoy it." 77 Locke then not only set forth a communitarian conception of justice but also found the ultimate ground for justice in a transcendent Supreme Being. 78

The creation of an "equilibrium of responsibilities" among all members of society has been a long sought after and elusive goal. 79

73. Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha' u 'llah* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1989), p. 20.

74. John Locke, cited in Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights: In Theory and Practice*, p. 92.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., pp. 100-01.

77. Ibid., p. 92.

78. For a detailed discussion of Locke's belief that morality is ultimately derived from God see Wendy M. Heller, "Covenant and the Foundations of Civil Society," in *The Baha'i World 1995-96*, pp. 185- 222.

79. Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 20.

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'Abdu'l-Baha states that the "moderate freedom which guarantees the welfare of the world of mankind and maintains and preserves the universal relationships, is found in its fullest power and extension in the teachings of Baha'u'llah." 80 The establishment of laws and institutions has one primary purpose, the promotion of "human happiness"-happiness that, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha, achieves its fullest expression by drawing "closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race." 81 In consequence, justice, 'Abdu'l-Baha explains, "means to have no regard for one's own personal benefits and selfish advantages," and to "consider the welfare of the community as one's own." 82

In the Baha'i teachings a construction of justice is presented which views justice not as a static legalistic end or an unapproachable ideal, but as an evolving capacity that individuals, communities, and institutions must continually seek to develop. The realization of justice is dependent upon universal participation and action among all members and agencies of society. In essence, creating a "universal culture of human rights" is bound up with a process of moral and spiritual development. 83 As a moral capacity, justice is a vehicle that bonds the individual to the common weal. "The purpose of justice," Baha'u'llah explains, "is the appearance of unity among men." "No radiance," He continues, "can compare with that of justice. The organization of the world and the tranquility of mankind depend upon it." 84 Individual rights must then be interpreted in light of the law of universal fellowship. "The supreme need of humanity," 'Abdu'l-Baha underscores, "is cooperation and reciprocity. The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness

80. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, sec. 227, p. 305.

81. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 60.

82. Ibid., p. 39.

83. Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, *Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education*,

1995-2004, para. 2 (1995).

84. Baha'u'llah, cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 28.

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and accomplishment in all planes of human activity." 85 Only in unity can human rights be secured and the release of the human spirit achieved. Unity must be the guiding concept of humanity's attempts to construct an international community that truly embraces the justice of which Baha'u'llah speaks and for which the peoples of the earth desperately seek.

Baha'u'llah established specific institutional mechanisms to ensure the realization of justice in human affairs. The unique and unprecedented covenantal arrangements of Baha'u'llah's Administrative Order offer a definitive moral and spiritual basis for a universal system of human rights. 86 The evolution of a social milieu that promotes the development of individual and collective capacities, and an understanding of our rights and obligations as spiritual beings, is explicitly provided in the Baha'i dispensation by these arrangements. 87 This divinely conceived System depends, as the

85. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 338.

86. Baha'u'llah's Covenant with His followers ensures both unity of understanding of His Faith's fundamental doctrines and actualization of that unity

in the Baha'i community's spiritual and social development. In particular, this Covenant explicitly specifies the structures and principles of the Baha'i Administrative system. To ensure that power is used as an instrument of justice, and that governance serves humanity's true needs, decision-making authority, Baha'u'llah insists, must rest with corporate bodies and not be left

in the hands of individuals. Founded on a unique set of electoral and consultative principles that are democratic in spirit and method, the Baha'i Administrative Order is organized around freely elected governing councils which operate at the local, national, and international levels. Baha'u'llah called these governing councils "Houses of Justice." Baha'is believe that this administrative system offers a model of the institutional structures necessary for global community life. For more on the underlying principles of the Baha'i Administrative Order see Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 143-57. For more on the covenantal basis of social order see Wendy M. Heller, "Covenant and the Foundations of Civil Society."

87. The institutions of the Baha'i Administrative Order are charged with protecting the rights of all persons-Baha'is and non-Baha'is alike. The ultimate guarantor of these rights is the Universal House of Justice, whose constitution explicitly sets out as its responsibilities: "to safeguard the personal rights, freedom and

initiative of individuals; and to give attention to the preservation of human honor. .. " The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1972), p. 5.

Universal House of Justice states, "not so much on the force of law, which admittedly must be respected, as on the recognition of a mutuality of benefits, and on the spirit of cooperation maintained by the willingness, the courage, the sense of responsibility, and the initiative of individuals—these being expressions of their devotion and submission to the will of God." 8 In the Order of Baha'u'llah, the House of Justice continues, "the individual is not lost in the mass but becomes the focus of primary development, so that he may find his own place in the flow of progress, and society as a whole may benefit from the accumulated talents and abilities of the individuals composing it. Such an individual finds fulfillment of his potential not merely in satisfying his own wants but in realizing his completeness in being at one with humanity and with the divinely ordained purpose of creation." 89 Hence, the Baha'i Faith does not simply outline a set of minimal conditions necessary for the protection of human dignity, as various national and international charters do, but rather offers a comprehensive vision of the purpose of human life and society. Embedded in this covenantal or spiritually centered understanding of life is a social ethic of deep commitment that goes far beyond the idea of a social contract that simply establishes legal bonds among individuals with disparate interests. Baha'u'llah's vision of the oneness of humankind involves not just the safeguarding of human rights, the deepening of human solidarity, or the establishment of an enduring international peace, but rather "an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. " 90 It calls for a pattern of social interaction that cultivates the moral and creative capacities latent in human nature; it embraces a concept of prosperity in which material advancement makes possible new avenues of intellectual endeavor and spiritual expression rather than being an end in itself; it anticipates the "emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture ... " 91

88 . Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 9.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

90. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha 'u 'llah*, p. 43.

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In some respects, the covenantal grounding of rights and obligations is not new. As the sociologist Robert Bellah has suggested, the processes of social breakdown now taking place in America can

be attributed, in great measure, to the displacement of an early American social order based on religious and moral duty by one based on individualism and self-interest. 92 At the heart of that covenantal order was a set of concepts that explicitly acknowledged the spiritual foundations of human life: "the free and willing recognition of a binding duty, originating in or guaranteed by a transcendent source"; the need to act collectively in a purposive manner according to a commonly accepted set of moral norms; and measures to ensure individual accountability in fulfilling obligations to the community. 93 The teachings of Baha'u'llah reaffirm the vision of a deep and inseparable connection between the spiritual and practical dimensions of human existence. Inherent to such a perspective is the idea that human rights and freedoms are not only necessary but sacred. The assurance that every human being is indelibly imprinted with the image of God affords the ultimate respect that all persons seek. That each individual has been bestowed with a unique destiny by God—a destiny which unfolds in accordance with the free exercise of the choices and opportunities presented in life—lies at the center of Baha'i belief. For the Baha'i community, the protection of human freedoms is part of a larger spiritual enterprise of fostering a set of attitudes and practices that truly release human potential. Genuine social progress, it believes, can only flow from spiritual awareness and the inculcation of virtue. Universal recognition of the dignity of every person, without reference to the spiritual provenance of that dignity, will not guarantee the protection of basic human freedoms. Without a transcendent basis for rights—a power that reaches to the heart of human consciousness and motivation—humanity will not be able to develop an integrating moral framework that will secure the advancement of all peoples. Human rights founded on materialistic criteria

91. Ibid., p. 163.

92. Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury, 1979).

93. Heller, "Covenant and the Foundations of Civil Society," pp. 205--06.

alone, no matter how logically compelling, are ultimately limited in their power to transform—to fuse diverse and contending peoples into a universal community. Without such a universal identity there can be no basis for universal moral action. In this regard, the teachings of Baha'u'llah could be said to embody a new generation of human rights that are based on the belief that humanity is now entering its long-awaited stage of maturity and collective awakening. More than urging humankind to free itself from destructive patterns of behavior and static cultural imperatives, Baha'u'llah has laid the foundations for a global civilization wherein the rights and innate capacity of every human being can be realized. "A new life," Baha'u'llah avers, "is, in this age, stirring

within all the peoples of the earth." 94

A tangential point should be made here. Baha'is certainly recognize that secularism played a pivotal role in freeing humanity from the shackles of religious fanaticism. The Enlightenment, and the period of modernity to which it gave birth, can be understood as part of a larger spiritual and historical process—a process guided by God Himself. But unfortunately secularism has assumed a dogmatic character just as pernicious as the religious orthodoxies that preceded it. Much of the confusion of contemporary life can be traced to the failure to tap in a balanced way the powers of both reason and faith. In His exhortation to the peoples of the world "to observe tolerance and righteousness," Baha'u'llah is affirming that it is possible to believe in God and to be tolerant. 95 In this respect, it is important to note that the "very purpose" of the Baha'i community "is regulated by the twin directing principles of the worship of God and of service to one's fellow-men." 96

Although the Baha'i understanding of human rights is not well known, the affirmative response to the Revelation of Baha'u'llah from within virtually every national, racial, and ethnic group on the planet cannot be casually dismissed. In its models of unity and

94. Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 196.

95. Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahil'u'llah*, p. 36.

96. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Baha'is of North America, 1932-1946* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Committee, 1947), p. 24.

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justice now being put into practice throughout the world, the Baha'i community is demonstrating the universal applicability of the concepts it propounds. The Baha'i perspective on human rights draws its legitimacy not only from its belief in a benevolent and omnipotent Source—from the recognition of the spiritual reality that transcends and pervades all life—but also from the content of that belief. Whether the precepts, laws, institutions, and provisions for international order found in the teachings of Baha'u'llah offer a distinct and comprehensive approach to the establishment of justice in world affairs is for humanity itself to decide. From the Baha'i view, however, it is no coincidence that the principles of human rights and human well-being enunciated in the Baha'i teachings have been, and continue to be, at the center of the ongoing human rights discourse.

It is clear that the Faith of Baha'u'llah is intimately concerned with the process of liberating the human race from its baneful heritage of oppression and suffering and guiding it to the path of "true liberty"—the path of "freedom, well-being, tranquillity, exaltation, and advancement ... " 97 In the words of the Universal

House of Justice:

Consider what Baha'u'llah has done: He revealed laws and principles to guide the free; He established an Order to channel the actions of the free; He proclaimed a Covenant to guarantee the unity of the free.

Thus, we hold to this ultimate perspective: Baha'u'llah came to set humanity free. His Revelation is, indeed, an invitation to freedom—freedom from want, freedom from war, freedom to unite, freedom to progress, freedom in peace and joy.<sup>98</sup>

97. Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 92.

98. Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 22.

A concept paper prepared by the Baha'i International Community for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) held 3-14 June 1996 in Istanbul, Turkey.

#### SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IN AN INTEGRATING WORLD

With the approaching dawn of the twenty-first century, governments, organizations and peoples are expending enormous energies to develop communities which are socially vibrant, united and prosperous. The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), which builds on the major global conferences of this decade, is a milestone in these efforts and portends major advances in community development.

In the long term, however, community-building efforts will succeed only to the extent that they link material progress to fundamental spiritual aspirations, respond to the increasing interdependence among the peoples and nations of the planet, and establish a framework within which all people can become active participants in the governance of their societies.

It is to these three foundational elements of sustainable communities that the following comments are addressed.

#### Material Progress Must Reflect Spiritual Principles and Priorities

Human nature is fundamentally spiritual. Communities are unlikely, therefore, to prove prosperous and sustainable unless they take into account the spiritual dimension of human reality and seek to foster

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a culture in which the moral, ethical, emotional and intellectual

development of the individual are of primary concern. It is in such a milieu that the individual is likely to become a constructively engaged, service-oriented citizen, working for the material and spiritual well-being of the community, and that a common vision and a shared sense of purpose can be effectively developed.

It follows that the material aspects of community development—environmental, economic and social policies; production, distribution, communication and transportation systems; and political, legal and scientific processes—must be driven by spiritual principles and priorities. Today, however, the substance and direction of community development are largely determined by material considerations.

Our challenge, therefore, is to redesign and develop our communities around those universal principles—including love, honesty, moderation, humility, hospitality, justice and unity—which promote social cohesion, and without which no community, no matter how economically prosperous, intellectually endowed or technologically advanced, can long endure.

Among the considerations and principles that should guide this undertaking are the following:

- The protection of the family and the promotion of its well-being must become central to community processes. The family is the primary institution of society and the principal incubator of values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. When it is spiritually healthy, it contributes significantly to the development of happy and responsible citizens.
- The physical, social, economic, legal and political designs of our communities must serve all members of society, not just the privileged. A truly just and equitable society will require a citizenry which understands that the interests of the individual and of the community are inextricably linked; that the advancement of human rights requires full commitment to the corresponding responsibilities; and that when women are welcomed into full partnership with men in all fields of human endeavor, families, communities and nations will prosper and advance.
- Work is both a means of livelihood for the individual and a way of contributing to the prosperity of the community as a whole. As such, it helps give meaning to one's life. Therefore, community design must ensure that the creative energies of the individual have a

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channel of useful employment in which they can be expressed. For his or her part, the individual must assume responsibility in carrying out this trust. Progress in this area will lend great momentum to the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty in the world.

"Religion," the Baha'i writings state, "is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein." <sup>1</sup> In every community, therefore, freedom of religion must be ensured, including

the right to establish centers of worship. 2 Places of worship provide

1. Although enormous injustices have, throughout history, been perpetrated in the name of religion, it is impossible to deny the primary role that faith has played in social progress, motivating individuals to develop spiritual qualities, empowering them to sacrifice for their fellow human-beings and to contribute to the betterment of their communities.

2. Centers of worship, and the institutions and activities to which they give rise, should become a fundamental part of every hamlet, village, town and city-indeed of all types of human settlements in every nation-but they must contribute to the community's overall harmony, peace, well-being, understanding and tolerance. If not, they will only serve to retard the development of sustainable and prosperous communities, and the people will eventually abandon them as they come to recognize the divisive and parochial role they play in society.

Of course, almost any place can serve as a center of worship. One of the prayers revealed by Baha'u'llah stresses this point: "Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the

refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island,

and the meadow where mention of God hath been made and His praise glorified." The importance, however, of physical, community-based centers for the development and expression of faith cannot be overemphasized.

The Baha'i Mashriqu'l-Adhkar (the Dawning-Place of the Praise of God) is one such center which, by its very design, integrates worship and service, or, put another way, expresses the spiritual in practical ways. At the heart of this complex lies the House of Worship which is open to all people, regardless of faith. Surrounding the House of Worship, and animated by it, are to be nine dependencies-or institutions----dedicated to social, administrative, humanitarian, educational and scientific affairs. As each Mashriqu'l-Adhkar complex develops, these dependencies will include "a hospital, a drug dispensary, a travelers' hospice, a school for orphans, and a university for advanced studies." This practical model for harmonizing the moral and ethical, the physical and environmental, and the economic and social aspect of human settlements is worthy of study by those involved in community-building processes.

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a venue for prayer and meditation, acts of devotion through which the individual can come closer to the Creator, thereby strengthening his or her spiritual capacities for sacrifice and service. As physical monuments, these buildings also often serve to express the cultural genius of the society.

- The promotion of beauty, whether natural or man-made, should become a guiding principle in community planning, for beauty can touch the heart and inspire the soul to noble sentiments and actions.

- Community development will need to incorporate principles of environmental preservation and rehabilitation, not only to bring our current civilization into a sustainable pattern of development, but also to respond to the human spirit's great need for close contact with the natural world. The primary role of the farmer in food and economic security also needs to be carefully considered in the design of all human settlements.
- The vast forces of science and technology must be harnessed to serve the material, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of the entire human family. This will require that all peoples be involved in generating scientific knowledge and determining its applications. As participation increases, technologies which have tended to desensitize and alienate, to make satisfying work and crafts redundant, to destroy the environment, and to cause sickness, infirmity or death, will, no doubt, be reconsidered, redesigned or abandoned.

#### Interdependence among the Peoples and Nations of the World Will Only Increase in the Years Ahead

The peoples and nations of the planet are being drawn together as they become more and more dependent upon one another. Settlements worldwide—from hamlets, villages and towns, to cities and megalopoli—are becoming home to increasingly diverse populations. This growing interdependence and the intensifying interaction among diverse peoples pose fundamental challenges to old ways of thinking and acting. How we, as individuals and communities, respond to these challenges will, to a large degree, determine whether our communities become nurturing, cohesive and progressive, or inhospitable, divided and unsustainable.

Unity in diversity is at once a vision for the future and a principle to guide the world community in its response to these challenges.

#### S USTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Not only must this principle come to animate relations among the nations of the planet, but it must also be applied within both local and national communities if they are to prosper and endure. The unifying, salutary effects of applying this principle to the redesign and development of communities the world over, would be incalculable, while the consequences of failing to respond appropriately to the challenges of an ever-contracting world will surely prove disastrous. Obviously, humanity must be prepared for the opportunities and responsibilities that are emerging as a result of this growing interdependence. People need to develop the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary to participate confidently and constructively in shaping the world community, on all levels, so that it might reflect principles of justice, equity and unity. Education will play an indispensable role here. It must help the individual develop a sense of place and community—not limited to the local or national level,

but extending out to include the whole world.<sup>3</sup> It should cultivate virtue as the foundation for personal and collective well-being, and should nurture in individuals a deep commitment to the welfare of their families, their communities, their countries, indeed, all mankind. <sup>4</sup> Education should also encourage thinking in terms of historical process, seeing in history an inexorable movement toward a world civilization, a movement whose successes are the patrimony of all peoples and whose challenges we must now, as a single race, address.

Humanity Must Move toward More Participatory, Knowledge-Based and Values-Driven Processes of Governance

Top-down models of community development can no longer adequately respond to modern day needs and aspirations. The world community must move toward more participatory, knowledgebased and values-driven systems of governance in which people

3. In this regard, community might be conceived of as a set of concentric circles, with the local community being the smallest, and the global community being the largest.

4. The concept of world citizenship helps integrate all levels of community: being a responsible citizen on the local and national levels is not at odds with love for all humanity; rather, these multi-layered allegiances and obligations form a tightly woven web, an inseparable whole.

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can assume responsibility for the processes and institutions that affect their lives. These systems need to be democratic in spirit and method, and must emerge on all levels of world society, including the global level. Consultation<sup>5</sup>-the operating expression of justice in human affairs-should become their primary mode of decisionmaking. Naturally, old ways of exercising power and authority must give way to new forms of leadership. Our concept of leadership will need to be recast to include the ability to foster collective decision making and collective action. It will find its highest expression in service to the community as a whole.

Toward a Common Community, a Common Destiny

In conclusion, communities that thrive and prosper in the new millennium will do so because they acknowledge the spiritual dimension of human nature and make the moral, emotional and intellectual development of the individual a central priority. They will guarantee freedom of religion and encourage the establishment of places of worship. Their centers of learning will seek to cultivate the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness and will pursue as a major goal the participation of all peoples in generating and applying knowledge. Remembering at all times that the interests of the individual and of society are inseparable, these communities will promote respect for both rights and responsibilities, will

foster the equality and partnership of women and men, and will protect and nurture families. They will promote beauty, natural and man-made, and incorporate into their design principles of environmental preservation and rehabilitation. Guided by the concept of unity in diversity, they will support wide-spread participation in the affairs of society, and will increasingly turn to leaders who

5. In consultation, the individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of a body with its own

interests and goals. In an atmosphere characterized by both candor and courtesy, ideas belong not to the individual who presents them, but to the group as a whole, to take up, discard, or revise as seems to best serve the goal pursued. Consultation succeeds to the extent that all participants support the decisions arrived at, regardless of the individual opinions with which they entered the discussion. Under such circumstances an earlier decision can be readily reconsidered if experience exposes any shortcomings.

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are motivated by the desire to serve. In these communities the fruits of science and technology will benefit the whole society, and work will be available for all.

Communities such as these will prove to be the pillars of a world civilization—a civilization which will be the logical culmination of humanity's community-building efforts over vast stretches of time and geography. Baha'u'llah's statement that all people are "born to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization," implies that every person has both the right and the responsibility to contribute to this historic and far-reaching, collective enterprise whose goal is nothing less than the peace, prosperity and unity of the entire human family. 6

6. It is interesting to note that a number of the concepts in this paper were also present in the statement that the Baha'i International Community delivered to the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in 1976. More recent Baha'i statements which shed light on the subject of sustainable communities include *The Prosperity of Humankind*; *World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development*; and *Turning Point for All Nations*.

The Bahci 'i International Community presented this statement to the 53rd session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in March 1997, in Geneva.

UNITED NATIONS  
DECADE FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
EDUCATION

One of the most striking features of this century is the transformation technical and scientific advances have brought to all forms of human interaction. Modern means of travel and communications have contracted our planet, and created a global web of commerce, migration and intellectual and scientific exchange that has made discussions of global interdependence commonplace. Despite the overwhelming evidence of our interdependence and increased contact with diverse people, differences of culture, language and religion are still considered grounds for suspicion and hostility. Even in countries where people of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds have lived side by side for generations, ancient rivalries and suspicions lurk just below the surface, ready to erupt with disastrous consequences for human rights.

To defuse these conflicts and to protect human rights a new foundation of universal understanding—a new framework of values within which diversity is seen not as a threat but as an aspect of our common humanity—will be required. Laying this moral and ethical foundation for what some have referred to as "a universal culture of human rights" is one of the most important aspects of human rights education.

In the Baha'i view, the foundation of universal understanding and, therefore, for human rights education is the oneness of humanity, a spiritual principle amply confirmed by all the sciences. Anthropology, physiology and psychology recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied. If we see ourselves as members of one human family, interconnected and interdependent, we will be unable to violate the rights of another member of that family without feeling the pain ourselves.

Violations of human rights are sometimes a misguided expression of loyalty. Human rights education, by applying the principle of the oneness of humanity, can help people to see that loyalty to a large entity does not necessarily conflict with loyalty to a small entity. We live and work in many social units and institutional environments, often nested one within the other, that are complementary and often mutually supportive. Love of one's country does not preclude love of family or community, rather, it enlarges the circle of relationships.

The enlargement of social organization from clan to nation state has opened new opportunities for the expression of human capacity, as it has expanded the circle of those deemed deserving of recognition and respect. For stability in any social organization, the rights of all, including minorities, need to be respected. Current conflicts in Africa and in Europe involve gross violations of human rights, some based on ethnicity, others on religious belief, which are destructive of the foundations of society. The evolution of ever-larger circles of organic relationships and interactions now

embraces the entire planet. As we educate our children to accept diversity as part of the human condition and to extend respect and full human rights to the entire human family, civilization will benefit from an unimaginable wealth of contributions.

In that respect, human rights education could be considered basic education for life in the modern world. According to the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, "learning to live with others," which necessitates respecting their rights, is "one of the major issues in education today." The Commission also points out that children and youth are coping with special

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tensions that come from living in a contracting and interdependent world. Among them are the tension "between the global and the local: people need gradually to become world citizens without losing their roots"; the tension "between the universal and the individual: culture is steadily being globalized, but as yet only partially"; and the tension "between the spiritual and the material." Human rights education grounded in the principle of the oneness of humanity, can provide children and youth the tools and the philosophical framework to enable them to resolve these tensions for themselves.

Religion has an important role to play in human rights education. The Plan of Action for the Decade for Human Rights Education states that "Education should promote understanding, tolerance, peace and friendly relations between nations and all racial and religious groups ... " Historically, religion has always shaped the laws and social values that determine how individuals treat each other. The Plan of Action also calls for education directed to "the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity." Religion teaches people who they are and why they are here and calls them to transcendence and service. "Noble have I created thee," Baha'u'llah asserts, "yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then to that for which thou wast created." Religious convictions empower individuals to confront their own character defects, to root out undesirable behavior, and to cultivate such virtues as truthfulness, compassion, trustworthiness, and generosity. These spiritual qualities taught by all religions are conducive to nobility and to respect for the rights of others.

The worldwide Baha'i community has historically been a strong supporter of United Nations human rights programs and activities. In 1947 Baha'is presented a statement on human obligations and rights to the newly formed UN Commission on Human Rights. As soon as the UN established December 10th as Human Rights Day, national and local Baha'i institutions began planning commemorations. Over the years, Baha'is have circulated widely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in a number of languages.

When the United Nations adopted conventions implementing the various articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Baha'i communities worldwide disseminated these documents,

held public meetings to explain them, and, in some cases, participated in efforts in their countries to ratify them.

The Baha'i International Community has invited all 174 national Baha'i councils to lend their support to the Decade for Human Rights Education.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that changing attitudes and values after they are formed is inevitably a difficult and gradual process. Therefore, human rights education efforts should be concentrated on reaching children and youth, who are still in the process of forming the values that will shape their lives. Instilling in our children respect for themselves and others, recognition of the oneness of humanity, appreciation of unity in diversity, and a sense of citizenship in a world community will be the best guarantee of improved protection of human rights in the years to come.

The Baha'i International Community presented a joint Non-Governmental Organization statement to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva on 23 April 1996 on Agenda item 20(a): Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

#### CONVENTION RIGHTS ON THE OF THE CHILD

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The Baha'i International Community is pleased to offer, on behalf of 34 non-governmental organizations, comments under this agenda item on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action emphasizes the importance of the implementation of this human rights instrument, and states that "measures should be taken to achieve universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child." We therefore welcome the continued attention given to the Convention by the Commission on Human Rights. Persistent attention to this vital issue, since 1983, by the NGO Group on the Convention and the cooperation evinced among many organizations of civil society as well are a source of hope and encouragement to people throughout the world.

The universal ratification and full implementation of the Convention is an essential and compelling task. We believe that ensuring the

well-being of this most important, yet often overlooked, segment of society is the responsibility of the whole of society. Its neglect has grave consequences not only for the children themselves and for THE BAHAI WORLD

present-day communities, but also for future development and the fate of generations to come. We therefore believe that full implementation of the Convention is a universal responsibility, the attainment of which will contribute significantly to the advancement of humanity toward the establishment of justice, peace and order. Rapid and universal implementation is a task worthy of the concerted efforts of national institutions and non-governmental organizations alike. Full implementation of the Convention will also facilitate the implementation of other UN instruments. Children of future generations, raised under conditions where their rights are fully protected, will be better able to take advantage of their rights and to fulfill their responsibilities towards others. Protection of their fundamental rights will be a major step toward equipping them to build a society in which all human rights are respected, and in which the collective aspirations expressed in numerous United Nations declarations and instruments become a reality.

Within the Convention, certain articles deserve special consideration. Among these are Articles 28 and 29, which address rights and responsibilities related to education. Education is a powerful social force that both transmits and shapes culture and beliefs. Properly conceived and implemented, education reveals and develops the potentialities inherent in each individual and prepares those individuals to contribute to the well-being of themselves, their families, their communities, and to humankind as a whole. Indeed, it is only through a well-conceived education that the child can find a proper balance between his/her own self and society around him/her. The individual and his environment are profoundly interconnected. The human relationships, cultural norms and values, the social structures and processes which compose the child's environment all influence and shape the individual, but the individual, whether child or adult, in turn moulds and influences that environment. The two act upon one another, and every abiding change in the life of humankind is the result of their mutual interactions. The healthy and full development of the child depends on the nature of this interaction and on the reciprocal relationship between the child and society around him/her. Without effort and activity on behalf of others, the individual is unable to develop fully virtues and talents, but likewise, without individual transformation, lasting social change is impossible.

Given the complex interactions affecting the relationship between the individual and society, it is inconceivable that a harmonious and healthy relationship can be achieved without addressing the

need to develop the spiritual potentials of the child. Although essential, scholastic education alone, devoid of the aims defined in Article 29 of the Convention and the basic human values such as love, humility, kindness, tolerance, and justice, is incapable of ridding the world of hatred, prejudice, greed and oppression. Education devoid of these essential concepts and human values in fact creates in the child greater potential for violence and destructive behavior.

Educational programs that foster the development of moral qualities and capabilities are one of the strongest forces both to protect children from destructive behavior and to help create a just and harmonious society in which the rights of all are upheld. Moral qualities, sometimes referred to as spiritual qualities or human values, are the building blocks of human personality. They are the endowments of every human being and the adornments of the human spirit. The full power of these fundamental qualities can be released, however, only when they are acquired in the context of an understanding of the oneness of humanity and with attention to their application in action for the betterment of society as a whole. Indeed, unless applied universally and in action, these qualities can easily become little more than slogans, at times degenerating even to become excuses for prejudice and injustice. However, when learned and applied in conjunction with the development of skills and abilities, concepts and attitudes, they empower the individual (child) to transform both himself/herself and society. Rather than merely longing for a more harmonious society, the child can become a builder of unity. Rather than being bound by the unjust and often violent patterns of behavior learned in a dysfunctional family, the future adult can help to create a loving, harmonious and just family life. Rejecting violence, the child can become a facilitator of non-violent conflict resolution and a proponent of true consultation. He or she can become a bringer of joy and an empowerer of others.

Moral education centered on an understanding of the essential oneness of humankind and applied on a universal basis constitutes an indispensable foundation for the universal respect for human rights. Development of these essentially human qualities and capabilities must be integrated into all aspects of formal and non-formal education. Existing school curricula from kindergarten through secondary and post-secondary education must be revised so that all elements therein contribute to the moral development of the child, and so that the moral implications of personal and social choices are fully recognized. In addition, training programs for parents, educators, counsellors and others who serve as role models and mentors for children and youth would also be essential. These programs would address both the process of assisting children and youth to build moral capabilities, and

the skills necessary for specific capabilities such as creating a non-violent and harmonious family, consultation, and building unity. They would build a practical understanding of the oneness of humankind, and equip participants with the skills necessary to promote and actualize that understanding.

Article 17 of the Convention, addressing the role of the media in enabling the child to fulfill its potential, also requires careful consideration. The media have a powerful influence on people's attitudes and perceptions, and that influence is magnified in the case of children. The media can identify, provide and encourage examples of high ideals and achievements worthy of human endeavor, and highlight conditions of injustice with the aim of educating humanity toward their rectification. Or, they can choose, instead, to focus on the many examples of conflict, to undermine faith in human capacity to change, and to reinforce values and patterns of behavior that lead to disunity, injustice, violence: in short, values and patterns which lead to violations of human rights and instability in society.

We believe that the mass media and incisive, educational and scholarly books are ideal vehicles for the cultivating values that will lead to the protection of human rights and the establishment of peace. They can provide models for children by exalting people who have implemented these values and by providing a forum for impartial examination of issues and solutions. We call on the media to take up this challenge, and to fulfill their role in promoting the "social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health" of the child. We also call for a broad-based discourse to examine how this role can most effectively be fulfilled.

In conclusion, we suggest that the Committee on the Rights of the Child pay concerted attention to the aims of education indicated in Article 29 of the Convention and to the role of the media and scholarly books as vehicles for moral education. Specialized agencies, particularly UNESCO and UNICEF have an important role to play in the promotion of these educational endeavors. We believe that this would serve greatly "the best interests of the child."

List of Co-Signatory NGOs

- 1) African Association of Education for Development (AFASED)
- 2) All India Women's Conference
- 3) American Association of Jurists
- 4) Defence for Children International
- 5) Federation Internationale des Femmes de Carrieres Juridiques
- 6) Fondation France-Liberte
- 7) Human Rights Advocates Inc.
- 8) Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC)
- 9) International Abolitionist Federation

- IO) International Alliance of Women
- 11) International Association of Democratic Lawyers (!AOL)
- 12) International Association of Educators for World Peace
- 13) International Association for Religious Freedom
- 14) International Council of Jewish Women
- 15) International Council of Women
- 16) International Educational Development, Inc.
- 17) International Federation of Social Workers
- 18) International Federation of University Women (IFUW)
- 19) International Movement ATD Fourth World
- 20) International Movement Against all Forms of Discrimination and Racism
- 21) International Movement for Fraternal Union Among Races and Peoples
- 22) International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education (OIDEL)
- 23) Liberation
- 24) National Council of German Women's Organizations
- 25) Susela Dharma International Association
- 26) Women's International League For Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
- 27) Women's World Summit Foundation
- 28) World Association for the School as an Instrument of Peace
- 29) World Federalist Movement
- 30) World Federation of Methodist Women
- 31) World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)
- 32) World Movement of Mothers
- 33) World Vision International
- 34) Zonta International

This report, submitted by the Baha'i International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women in April 1996, appears in *The Emerging Role of NGOs in African Sustainable Development*, published by the United Nations for the Mid-Term Review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990 's (UN-NADAF). New York, 20 June 1996.

Two Baha'i International Community Projects:

#### CAMEROON & ZAMBIA

The Baha'i International Community has 44 national affiliates in Africa with over 5,000 grassroots communities. Baha'is are committed to improving the collective life of everyone on the planet. Within this framework, there are both collective (institutional) and individual responsibilities. As Baha'i institutions, the national and local Baha'i councils are responsible for the wellbeing of the entire community, not just the Baha'is. As individuals, Baha'is see work done in the spirit of service to the community as a form of worship. This framework of institutional and individual

responsibility is buttressed by certain principles, e.g., equality of men and women, necessity of independent investigation of truth, high station of education, and the importance of agriculture for society. The Baha'i approach to social and economic development has at least three major components, which you will see manifested in both projects presented in this paper: 1) the practice of the art of consultation; 2) rectitude of conduct individually and collectively; and 3) the solution of problems through the application of spiritual principles. The effort of putting these principles into practice, the

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Baha'i writings state, leads to self-sufficiency and self-reliance and the enhancement of individual and community honor and dignity.

The Baha'i International Community will demonstrate the effectiveness of its approach to development by describing two projects and sharing lessons learned. The first project, in Cameroon, promotes changes in community values by teaching participants to use analytic tools like focus groups, interview techniques, and community surveys to identify problems; consultation as a means to analyze them; and traditional media presentations as a non-threatening way to generate dialogue within the entire community which can lead to solutions. The second project is the Masetlha Foundation in Zambia which combines spiritual enrichment with training in primary health care, literacy and agriculture, and which has recently added a secondary school for rural girls which emphasizes science and agriculture. Both projects emphasize the development of individual human resources and the capacity of institutions to sustain the development work. Although both projects capitalize on the institutional infrastructure and commitment of the Baha'i community, they are open to all and serve the community at large.

### Traditional Media as Change Agent, Cameroon

Goal: The goal of the "Traditional Media as Change Agent" project was to raise the status of women in selected communities through strategies designed to involve men. Instead of ignoring men altogether or assuming that men could not or would not change, this project boldly advanced the premise set forth in the Baha'i writings that improving the status of women benefits everyone. Project designers, therefore, set out to effect a shift in community values (1) by involving men in partnership with women in identifying community problems associated with women's low status and (2) by stimulating community discussion of those problems by using traditional media. The project was designed by the Baha'i International Community and implemented in countries on three continents with funds from UNIFEM.

Activities: Working through elected local Baha'i governing councils in self-selected communities in Cameroon, trainers facilitated the following process:

- Gathering the facts: Project participants were taught how to use

## two PROJECTS: CAMEROON & ZAMBIA

tools like focus groups, interview techniques, and community surveys to gather data on the status of women and identify problems in their own communities related to women's status.

- Analyzing the data: Using consultation as a basis, participants analyzed the data in light of certain principles such as the equality of men and women, the power of example, unity of purpose, commitment, and service to the community.
- Stimulating community-wide discussion: The analysis and recommendations were shared with the community as a whole through such traditional media as theater, songs, and dance. Messages communicated in this way are taken very seriously in non-literate communities, and they provide a non-threatening opening for dialogue with the whole community.
- Impact on local development: Because the project initially sought only to increase awareness and develop capacity of local institutions, the results exceeded expectations.
- Information produced: Participants identified the following as the primary problems faced by women: lack of education; domination by men; uneven distribution of workload between women and men; and poor management of household finances by men (who did not consult their wives). These findings were the same in every project village in Cameroon (in Malaysia and Bolivia, as well, where this project was also implemented).
- Interaction with beneficiaries: Qualitative evaluation data showed increases in husband-wife consultation such that men made more money available to the family and spent less on themselves; alcohol abuse and domestic violence decreased drastically; in most project areas the enrollment of girls in schools increased from 6-7% at the start of the project to near 100%; and evidence of significant shifts in labor patterns emerged as men began to take on some of the work women had been handling, both in the home and in the field.
- Capacity-building: Local communities were able to use skills of planning, consultation, implementation and evaluation for activities other than the women's program, showing that these skills are general and can be extended to other issues and sectors.
- Follow-up: Attempts to quantify the results are in process. Data has been gathered on behavior patterns in three project villages and three non-project villages. Project participants themselves interviewed 50 couples in each village, men interviewing men, women interviewing women. The data gathered is now being analyzed.

Some lessons learned:

- The concept of a project with no immediate material benefits may be difficult to grasp at first. However, the initial bewilderment can be overcome if the project leaders stress the benefits of core skills training and provide consistent support, including regular visits.
- Communities can be--indeed must be--proactive partners in change, not just recipients of "aid." The process at the heart of this project was inherently participatory and collective--the rethinking of community values, not just modifying activities or behaviors. Re-examining traditional values together as a community allowed the community to accept and slowly integrate new values as the norm into their social life.
- New values require a new vision. When communities--especially men--begin to see that their happiness and welfare depends on their women's happiness and welfare, real community development can take place. Stated another way, when social norms shift, change becomes sustainable.
- Participation by women in decision-making increases much more rapidly when men are involved. The 1995 United Nations Development Report identifies 30% participation by women as the critical minimum level for women's participation in decisionmaking. At this level there seems to be a fundamental change in any organization, but the report also mentions that this level is rarely attained. This project demonstrated that this threshold is reached more quickly when men are included as partners in unity to achieve gender equity, than when they are excluded or ignored.
- Change is difficult for everyone, so anticipate resistance from both women and men. Talk of partnership is fashionable, but many women have no real interest in working with men, and many men do not really believe in equality.
- Social norms are more powerful than individual values. Both projects (Cameroon and Zambia) identified social norms and the power of group culture as the critical variable in attitudinal and behavioral change. Both projects noted that changing gender

#### ~o PROJECTS: CAMEROON & ZAMBIA

roles and perceptions at the household level can be extremely difficult; however, when institutional values favor gender equity, both women and men are able to practice new behaviors that eventually lead to attitude and behavior change observable in other settings. Community institutions/organizations (educational, religious, and legal) which actively promote gender equity may thus be the key to sustainable behavioral and attitudinal change.

- Development of institutional capacity is critical to sustaining development efforts. It is our expectation that the institutional capacity within the Cameroon community will progress through the establishment of a training institute (recently finalized) and the evolution of the development committee, so that, like the

Masetlha Foundation, it will engage over time in action and reflection on a wide variety of initiatives that will support the integration of diverse initiatives for the progress of individuals and villages in the country. Thus both projects illustrate the elements for sustained activity in the future: human resource development and institutional capacity development, both designed to give local people the capacity to participate in and guide their own development.

William Mmutle Masetlha Foundation, Zambia

Goal: The William Mmutle Masetlha Foundation is a non-profit charitable organization located in central Zambia. Its purpose is to support a spiritual approach to social and economic development which stirs people to develop themselves and achieve self-sufficiency. The Masetlha Foundation was created in 1995 by the Baha'i governing council of Zambia to oversee the William Mmutle Masetlha Institute (founded October 1983) and the Banani Secondary School for rural girls (opened in January 1993). The foundation is the latest stage in a sustained development process which was initiated at the grassroots, nurtured at the national level, and funded both by government agencies and organizations of civil society.

The William Mmutle Maset/ha Institute: The Institute combines spiritual education with practical training for volunteers in a wide variety of skills, including agriculture, health education, children's education, literacy, and numeracy. Spiritual education, which helps to develop qualities such as enthusiasm, dedication, creativity and

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service, along with the practical skills, leads to self-sufficiency. The active involvement of women is an important focus in all training and field work. The Institute offers a wide variety of courses. For example, one course offered since 1985 is a four-month-long spiritual development and agricultural training program that includes four hours of daily lectures and practical work in the villages. Two of the institute's special projects are the Baha'i Literacy Project and the Zambia Baha'i Primary Health Care Project.

The Baha'i Literacy Project aims to assist the Baha'is of Zambia to achieve universal literacy and to strengthen Baha'i communities by (1) developing a Baha'i approach to literacy education which achieves both functional literacy and spiritual empowerment; and by (2) training volunteer literacy tutors from both the Baha'i community and the community at large to offer classes in their villages, where illiteracy may be as high as 60%. The methodology used is conspicuously participatory, as it de-emphasizes the role of facilitators and empowers people with little education to study in groups and develop independent thinking.

Zambia Baha'i Primary Health Care Project, launched in August 1993, is intended to help the Zambian Government achieve Health

for All by the Year 2000 through primary health care education by (1) identifying and training a cadre of volunteer Community Health Educators (CHEs); (2) assisting CHEs to promote communitybased primary health activities and educate their communities about basic hygiene, nutrition, and disease prevention (emphasizing AIDS and malaria); (3) increasing the level of immunization coverage; and (4) integrating primary health care into a broad range of development-related training programs. The project also provides training for CHE trainers, holds Village Health Committee workshops, and provides refresher courses for Community Health Educators. The Institute has also been training Community Health Care Workers (CHWs) since 1987.

The Banani International Secondary School: The Banani International Secondary School in the Chisamba district, is a residential school for young women in grades 8 to 12 with an emphasis on science and agriculture. Established by the Masetlha Institute to serve rural girls, the school has adopted the University of Cambridge

~o PRO TECTS : CAMEROON & ZAMBIA

Examinations Syndicate curriculum, which provides students with an International General Certificate of Secondary Education at the end of grade 12. The University of Cambridge courses currently offered by the school are English as a second language, French, mathematics, geography, history, English Literature, agriculture, biology, chemistry, and physics. Two courses supplement the Cambridge curriculum: world religions and character development. A key element in the moral training offered by the school is a community service program. The school has an eleven-member academic staff drawn from six countries. Scholarships for deserving students were offered for the first time in 1993.

Impact on local development:

- Information produced. The literacy project has adapted a participatory methodology developed in Colombia. Materials are being developed and translated into local languages, and one booklet has been published. Another kind of information is produced by volunteers in the field. For the health project, despite very little opportunity for follow-up visits (problems of distance and accessibility), some 75% of trainees are reporting on their activities. This is evidence of the development of individual capacity being able to carry out activities out of one's own volition, without someone else needing to push.
- Volunteers trained. Armies of volunteers have been raised up and trained, many of whom are women. The literacy project has trained 41 tutors from Care International and DAPP, who are conducting classes for approximately 20 students each, reaching around 800 learners; and some 40 Baha'i tutors who have conducted classes, sponsored by local Baha'i communities, for

another 800 people. Baha'is encourage youth to offer a year of service; from two "youth year of service" training sessions, 50 youth from Southern Africa have arisen to serve throughout Zambia and the region. More than 150 volunteer primary Health Care Workers and 93 volunteer Community Health Educators (CHEs) have been trained; 78 percent of the CHEs have reported conducting health education activities in their communities.

- Interaction with beneficiaries. Approximately one half of all trainees are women-no small achievement-many from the community

at large. Women have proven effective in the role of Community Health Educators and Workers, earning the respect of their community.

- Capacity-building. Health facilities lack personnel; therefore, NGO-trained community volunteers have proven to be an important resource in both preventive and curative medical care. A number of CHEs have attached themselves to their local clinics, some as volunteers, others as paid employees, and they are reported to work very well. The girls' school opened in January 1993 with 58 students; in 1994, more than 90 students were enrolled.

- Relations with development partners. There has been good collaboration with the Zambian Ministries of Health and of Community Development, who have seconded staff to the Institute. The training provided at the Institute has been commended by a number of Ministry of Health, and of Community Development officials, and recognized by several other NGOs. Ministry people have said that the "Baha'i" CHEs and Health Instructors are excellent workers who are extremely conscientious.

- Financial flows. Baha'i development programs tend to have extremely low overheads as compared to other organizations, even government. Everyone in the field works voluntarily, and Institute-based staff work with modest salaries. Because of the emphasis and value placed on personal integrity, everyone handling money takes care of it, regardless of its source. Institute programs reach almost every province of Zambia through the network of Baha'i communities; without this network, the projects would have to be limited in geographical scope. The network makes it possible to select and invite trainees, without high investments of time and money on the part of the Institute. Letters are mailed to local Baha'i governing councils who select those who go for training.

Some lessons learned:

- Promoting full participation of women requires patience and persistence. Regular, focused discussions with health educators and literacy instructors about improving gender equity are needed because both men and women find that when they

## two PROJECTS: CAMEROON & ZAMBIA

return to the village, very strong and persistent habits hold them back and push them to adopt traditional roles.

- Training women as health educators raises their status in the community.

Having been selected by the community for training, and then becoming known as a "Community Health Educator," gives many women the confidence and respect to be able to participate in general community events and to begin making changes in other areas. But it is slow, and not enough women are empowered in this way.

- Social norms are extremely powerful. We observe that more progress toward equality is made in the Institute setting than at home in the village. More needs to be done in the village. Many women are able to become more confident to speak in public and participate as equals during the training sessions, and the men seem willing to practice a more equitable culture in the Institute setting. One important reason to have people leave the village for training is that it is possible to create a temporary new culture at the Institute.
- A service ethic produces superior workers. The willingness of Baha'is to volunteer and the high quality of Baha'i community health educators (CHEs) is not surprising, as the training and the whole of Baha'i community life encourages work and selfless service.
- The interface with donors has been difficult at times. The flow of money is often irregular, and going through Baha'i institutions not used to handling grant money is difficult. The Canadian Public Health Association, which is an NGO funded by CIDA to give grants and assist management of some 30 health/immunization projects, is doing a reasonable job of this NGO partnership arrangement. They are holding their annual partners' workshop on the very topic of partnership. It does pool together a certain amount of expertise and learning, while retaining the small and flexible NGO arrangements.
- Consultation with a wide range of people and organizations at all phases of project development and implementation is essential. There has been a great deal of consultation guiding all the projects. The notion of human resource development as spiritual empowerment came out of consultations involving international,

## THE BAHAI'f WORLD

national and local organizations and people from all over Zambia. The Core Group for that permanent institute consults regularly with the Foundation's Board of Directors, and the Baha'i national governing council. Baha'i national conventions, involving elected delegates from villages all over Zambia, have always included consultations about the Institute's programs and how

to improve them.

## Notes

1 The following quotes from the Baha'i writings have profoundly shaped both projects: "The world of humanity has two wings-one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are fully developed can the bird fly ... " ('Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu 'l-Bahti, p. 302) and "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." ('Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 133.)

2. The agencies that have supported William Mmutle Masetlha Foundation to date: the Department of Agriculture in Zambia, Zambian Baha'i National Teaching Committee, Sweden's International Development Agency (SIDA), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, CARE, CUSA, Swedish Baha' i Community, Baha'i International Health Agency (BIHA), Canadian Baha'i International Development Service (CBIDS), Ettehadieh Foundation, Beit Trust, and the World Community Foundation. The Ministries of Health and of Community Development in Zambia have provided staff.

## INFORMATION

### REsOURcEs

### OBITUARIES

#### Abbas Afnan

On 10 May 1996, in the United Kingdom. Raised in Shiraz, Iran, Abbas Afnan came from an illustrious Baha'i family: both his father and Asmother were descendants of uncles of the Bab. He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Tehran in 1949, following which he pursued postgraduate medical studies in both Switzerland and France. He married Shomais Ala'i in the early 1950s. Dr. Afnan's early services to the Baha'i community included Newfound assisting the development and invig- oration of the Baha'i community of Yazd, which was under pressure from fanatical elements. In March 1954, Dr. Afnan joined his wife at their pioneer post in Ethiopia, where he worked in several hospitals, training medical students in a United the Afnans went to England in order for Dr. Afnan to study preventive medicine and public health. At the request of the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles they remained in England as "homefront" pioneers, moving to Burnley in 1960 and later to Norfolk. He served as a member of the National Assembly of the British Isles, and later of the United Kingdom, for 12 years. In 1975, the Afnans moved to Canada, settling in Grand Falls, land, but returned to England in 1988, and then moved to Ljubljana, in the former Yugoslavia. Eventually, Dr. Afnan was invited to lecture on the Baha'i Faith for the comparative religion course in the University of Ljubljana. After some time, a decline in his health necessitated their

return

Nations' project in Gondar. In 1958, to England, where he passed away.

## THE BAHAI WORLD

Hushang Ahdieh

Iran in 1936, living in various towns

On 6 February 1997 in Canada. Born in the provinces until 1952. During in Ramadan, Iran, into a Baha'i family that time he attained a position as

Director-General of that country's sugar factories and donated a school to one of the towns . He spent 1952 in France, pursuing another diploma, and returned to Iran in 1953, where he worked as an Advisory Engineer for France and bought and installed a sugar factory in the south. By 1954 he was back in France, where in 1958 he was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of France at its inaugural convention. He married Arlette Barbanson that same year.

He moved to the Central African Republic, where they lived for many years. He was elected as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Asmara from 1956 through the 1960s, and he also served for many years on the Regional Spiritual Assembly of North East Africa. In 1978, the Ahdiehs moved to the Central African Republic. Mr. 'Ala'i served on that National Assembly for many years. He was He was appointed a member of the the director of the House of Iran in Auxiliary Board in 1968 and served Paris from 1966 to 1980 and in 1975 in that capacity until 1973, when he he was given the medal of the

was appointed to the Continental Board of Counsellors in Central and East Africa, and later to the Board of Mrs. 'Ala'i raised one daughter.

Counsellors in Africa, serving as the Sergio Resende Couto

trustee of its funds for over 20 years. On 26 July 1996 in Brazil. Born in Aracaju, Sergipe, Brazil, on 8 May 1942, Mr. Couto became a Baha'i at the age of 15. In February 1962, he and another Baha'i youth took the Baha' i teachings to the Indian vilhages in the northeast of Brazil for the first time. He married Ann Brew

Chahabedine 'Ala 'i

in 1970 and they moved to Rio de

On 4 November 1996 in France.

Janeiro, where they participated in

Born in 1911 in Tehran, Iran, Mr. 'Ala'i was raised in a Baha'i family. He received his diploma from the School of Agriculture in Tehran in 1930, and that same year he moved to France to continue his studies and to promote the development of the Baha'i Faith. Mr. 'Ala'i returned to

Brazil's first efforts to teach the Baha'i Faith to large numbers of people. Mr. Couto served as a member of the Auxiliary Board and in 1975 moved to the Baha'i institute in Bahia, where he coordinated highly successful large-scale efforts to teach others about the Baha'i Faith,

## OBITUARIES

while also translating Baha'i literature into Portuguese and developing new materials to help others gain a deeper knowledge of the Baha'i teachings. His efforts earned him renown as the "father" of Brazil's Dentraining institutes. Mr. Couto was a psychotherapist by profession, dedicating his life to helping those dependent on drugs or with family or marital problems. He and his wife raised one daughter.

a very active career as a painter, mural designer, decorator, and art teacher. She was the first woman to become a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Pakistan. After returning to mark, she served on the National Spiritual Assembly and on various committees and started evening courses for adults on comparative religion, moving with her family 18 times to different places to serve

Tove Deleuran needs of the Danish Baha'i community. Mrs. Deleuran passed away in On 16 December 1996, in France. France, where she and her husband The only child of Protestant parents, had eventually moved due to health Tove Larsen was born and raised in considerations.

Denmark. She graduated from an academy of fine arts and began her career in the film industry as the first woman in Denmark to do animated drawing. Later she worked for a fashion designer. In 1944 she married his Jean Pierre Louis Deleuran and together they raised one daughter. and

After the Deleurans became Baha'is, he Mrs. Deleuran started the first Danish Baha'i children's class. They participated in the formation of the first Local Assembly in Denmark in

David M. Earl  
On 23 August 1996, in the United States. Born in 1911 in Missouri, in the United States, David Earl spent his youth in Punjab, India, where father was employed. He graduated from college in the United States married Joy Hill in 1933. In 1938, enrolled in the Baha'i Faith and actively served on Local Assemblies and regional committees. The Earls pioneered to Japan in 1952,

assisting

1949. In December 1953 they pioneered to Majorca in the Balearic Islands and were designated Knights of Baha'u'llah for their efforts. They assisted in the formation of the first Local Assembly of Majorca in 1956. Mrs. Deleuran was among the first Auxiliary Board members appointed in Europe and traveled all over Spain and Portugal in the path of her service. In 1957 the Deleurans moved to Dhaka (Bangladesh) in what was then Pakistan to promote the Baha'i Faith, and Mrs. Deleuran engaged in

#### THE BAHAI WORLD

Korea, he was able to travel and serve in Asia, Europe, and North America. In 1965, due to Mrs. Earl's particuill health, the family returned to she traveled

Michigan in the United States, where Dr. Earl served on Local Assemblies and was appointed to other committees. Five years after that

Joy Earl's death in 1972, Dr. Earl responded to an appeal for pioneers to the Pacific islands and set out for Palau, in the Caroline Islands. He was elected to the new National Spiritual Assembly of the Caroline Islands in 1978 and moved to Guam in 1979, where he served on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Mariana Islands from 1980 until his appointment to the Auxiliary Board Californin 1982. In June 1986 Dr. Earl returned to the United States due to Elena Hernandez Tartabu his weakened health.

On 22 July 1996 in Venezuela. Born

Wanita George

On 22 March 1997 m the United States. Edith Wanita Montgomery

with some of the early translations

Baha' i texts into Japanese. From 1958 to 1964 he was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Northeast Asia. Dr. Earl served on the faculties of two universities in Japan while pursuing his doctorate in Far Eastern Studies, which he earned in 1957. From 1963 to 1965 the Earls pioneered to Korea where Dr. Earl was a member of the National Assembly for a year. Through his position as head of the University of Maryland's program in

center for community activity in the city. Mrs. George had a special love for the Indians of Honduras, larly the Jicaque tribe, and

indefatigably, often by horse or mule, to the most remote comers of the country to teach the people the Baha' i Faith. In spite of the fact

her health was permanently impaired from injuries she received during an airplane crash while en route to the International Baba' i Convention in 1968, and her family ' s urging that she live a more comfortable life in California, Mrs. George returned to Honduras in 1969, where she continued to serve the community to the extent of her strength. In 1986 ill health forced her to return to nia, where she passed away.

17 February 1928, Elena Hernandez

became a Baha'i in 1961, earning distinction as the first Baha'i of

her

was born 30 June 1906 in Kansas, U.S.A. She married Lynn Craig others

George in 1930. Professionally, she earned a master's degree in child psychology and worked as a school teacher in Redondo Beach, California, for some twenty years. The Georges divorced before she became a Baha' i in 1957. In 1959 she left her teaching job and pioneered to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, with her daughter Maralynn, where she worked for many years at the American school. She was a member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of Honduras, serving on that body for a number of years. Together with Maralynn, she held weekly Baha'i meetings in her home, providing a

native Margarita Island. Her efforts to share the Baha' i Faith with

have born the fruit of several Local Spiritual Assemblies on the Island.

Hector Alexander (Lex) Meerburg On 9 July 1996 in the Netherlands.

Lex Meerburg became a Baha'i in 1954, two years after his wife, Elly.

The Meerburgs were designated Knights of Baha'u'llah for pioneering to Dutch New Guinea (now a province of Indonesia), where they lived for several years. After their return to the Netherlands they both served as members of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Amsterdam before settling in Zaanstad. The Meerburgs raised one daughter.

## OBITUARIES

Jeffrey Mondschein as a

On 8 December 1996 in Israel. Jeffrey Mondschein was born in the United States on 9 February 1952. He graduated with honors from Amherst College in 1974 and in 1977 earned his master's degree in business administration with distinction at New York University. In 1982, he married Pamela Mathers. Over the years, Mr. Mondschein life

held various financial management positions and also served as a Trustee of the Wilmette Housing Commission. He was elected to the Ger-

Local Spiritual Assemblies of Westport, Connecticut, and Wilmette, Illinois. Placing his expertise at the disposal of the Baha'i community, he served as a financial consultant for the National Assembly of the

services as a translator and served

member of the National Spiritual assembly of Transkei from 1980 until 1992, when the Transkei area was placed under the jurisdiction of the National Assembly of South Africa.

Fritz Semle

On 2 May 1996 in Switzerland. Born 27 October 1896 in Niirnberg, Germany, Friedrich Semle trained as a pastry chef in his youth, but his

was changed by the outbreak of World War I. Though the Semle family was living in Switzerland at that time, Mr. Semle was still a

man citizen and was conscripted into the German army at the age of 19. His experience of the brutality of combat and four years as a prisoner of war convinced him of the need for universal peace. Around 1920 he

United States from 1987 to 1992, and as the Chief Financial Officer at the Baha'i World Centre from 1992 until his death. At the time of his passing he was also an Alumni Admissions Advisor for Amherst

a College and a member of the Union League Club of Chicago, Illinois. The Mondscheins have two children. Julia Nodada

On 2 September 1996 in South Africa. Born in Dangwane, Transkei, South Africa, Mrs. Nodada became a Baha'i in the late 1960s. Despite her isolation and the difficulties she faced in learning more about the Baha'i Faith because there were no Baha'is living near her, she remained steadfast in her belief. Eventually, through her efforts, a Local Assembly was formed in Dangwane, after which the Baha'i message was taken to other communities nearby. She rendered

his parents when he was 9 years old, and his eldest sister raised him as a Baha'i. As a young man he served as a "homefront" pioneer in Abadan, conespacially focusing on promoting Board

Baha'i youth activities. He studied execuchemical engineering at university Cause of

and began working in a petroleum company after his graduation. In 1960, the Shaikhzadeh family moved Brazil as pioneers, settling in the state of Sao Paulo, where Mr. Shaikhzadeh lived for the rest of his life. In 1961 the Shaikhzadehs moved from Sao Caetano do Sul to Santo Andre, where Mr. Shaikhzadeh was elected to the first Local Spiritual

Assembly, serving on that institution On 7 September 1996 in the United until his death. He also served for

discovered the Baha'i Faith while on a visit to Germany and enrolled almost immediately, becoming upon his return to Switzerland the first Baha'i living in the German-speaking region of that country. He took

job as the manager of a toy factory and in 1924 married Ella Itin, who also became a Baha'i. By 1943 there was a small group of Baha'is in

Switzerland. He was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy and Switzerland upon its formation in 1953 and to that of Switzerland when it was first elected in 1962.

The Semles had two children and also raised a foster daughter. Mrs. Semle passed away in 1967 and Mr. Semle married Lotti Habig in 1970. Mohamad Shaikhzadeh

On 31 October 1996 in Brazil. Born in Zavareh, Iran, on 23 March 1931, Muhammad Shaikhzadeh lost both

of the United States in 1961, she served on both institutions until 1964, when she resigned from the National Spiritual Assembly to tinue serving as an Auxiliary

member. Named in 1967 as tive assistant to Hand of the

God Dhikru 'llah Khadem, Mrs. Sherrill was appointed a member of the Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas in 1973, a position she held until 1985. During the last 10 years of her life she was an enthusiastic supporter of the St. Louis Dialogue Group of the World's Religions and Philosophies.

Richard T. Suhm

States. Born 17 April 1926 in the periods of time on the National United States, Richard Suhm was Assembly of Brazil and its committee five years old when his parents died. In 1984, with the establishment accepted the Baha'i Faith; his was of the Soltanieh Baha'i Educational Center, one of the first Baha'i families in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He attended distinguished services in fostering its the University of Wisconsin for a growth, organization, and in coordination but was then inducted into the nursing programs.

army, serving as a medical technician in the Philippines and in Korea.

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Velma L. Sherrill<br/>On 17 May 1996 in the United States. Born in Wallace County, Kansas, in the United States, on 27 June 1911, Velma Sherrill graduated from high school at the age of 15. She moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where she embraced the Baha'i Faith around 1935. From 1953 to 1963 Mrs. Sherrill served as secretary of the National Teaching Committee. She and her husband, Lloyd, helped form the first Spiritual Assembly in Webster Groves, Missouri in 1957. Appointed to the Auxiliary Board in 1957 and elected to the National Spiritual Assembly</p> | <p>He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1951 with a degree in economics and finance, after which he obtained a job with the Standard Register Company. In 1952, Mr. Suhm married Mary Louise Kelsey and the two moved to Whitefish Bay when they learned that two more Baha'is were needed there in order to form a Local Spiritual Assembly. In 1954, the Suhms pioneered to Tangier, Morocco, arriving shortly before Riqyan with their three-month-old son. Mr. and Mrs. Suhm thus became Knights of Baha'u'llah and with seven other pioneers were</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## OBITUARIES

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>able to form the first Local Spiritual Assembly in the country. After some time, Mrs. Suhm contracted polio and the family returned to the United States in 1956, settling in Hackensack, New Jersey, where they were to form a Local Assembly. Later they moved to the town of Ramapo, New York, where, after many years of patient effort, a Local Assembly was formed in that town as well. Mr. Suhm moved to Texas in the 1970s and eventually settled in</p> | <p>islands and island groups in the Pacific, including Fiji, the Mariana Islands, Samoa, Tonga, and the Solomon Islands. At the request of Hand of the Cause of God Collis Featherstone, he relocated to Sydney, Australia, in 1967, but in 1969 he developed a respiratory illness and had to return to California. In 1979, Mr. Towers and his wife, Florence, moved to the United States Virgin Islands; he served on that National Spiritual Assembly for 13</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Dallas. From 1992 to 1996 he served on the Board of Directors of the Dallas Chapter of the United Nations Association, which created a Baha'i On 13 May 1996 in Chile. Born in Canada on 4 December 1906, Wilhelmina Hird was still a child when she arrived with her parents in Punta Arenas, Chile, where she lived for most of her life. She pursued studies in the arts in England as a young woman, married, and bore three children, whom she was left to raise alone upon her husband's early death. She became a Baha'i in 1945, and over the years her home was open for Baha'i meetings and was a constant center of activity. One of the first Baha'is in Punta Arenas, Mrs. Willems labored unceasingly to ensure that the Local Spiritual Assembly in that community never lapsed, even though, as a port community, its residents were often only living there temporarily. In 1992 she moved to Santiago to be with her son, and from 1993 to 1996 she lived in Guayaquil, Ecuador, to be near her grandchildren, but in early 1996 she returned to Chile where she passed away.

## STATISTICS

### General Statistics

|                                                                       |                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Worldwide Baha'i population                                           | More than 5 million              |
| Countries/dependent territories where the Baha'i Faith is established | 190 countries/<br>45 territories |
| Continental Counsellors                                               | 81                               |
| Auxiliary Board members serving throughout the world                  |                                  |
| National/Regional Spiritual Assemblies                                | 174                              |
| Local Spiritual Assemblies                                            | 15,798                           |
| Localities where Baha'is reside                                       | 126,904                          |
| Tribes, races and ethnic groups                                       |                                  |

2,112

represented in the Baha'i community

Languages into which Baha'u'llah's

writings have been translated

Baha'i Publishing Trusts

30

Geographic distribution of Local Spiritual Assemblies

by continent

.Am.ericas 4,050

--- Europe 998

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Australasia 952

Growth in the number of localities where Baha' is reside

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195.J. 1960 1965 1975 1980 1985 1990 1995

## STATISTICS

Growth in the number of National and

Regional Spiritual Assemblies

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1936 1946 1956 1966 1976 1986 ]CJC)()

## Social and Economic Development

Bahii 'i development activities are initiated either by Bahii 'i administrative institutions or by individuals or groups. Together, these activities contribute to a global process of learning about a Bahii 'i approach to social and economic development. They presently fall into three general categories.

### Activities of Fixed Duration

Most Baha'i social and economic development efforts are fairly simple activities of fixed duration in which Baha' is in villages and towns around the world address the problems and challenges faced by their localities through the application of spiritual principles. These activities either originate in the Baha'i communities themselves or are a response to the invitation of other

organizations. It is estimated that in 1996-97 there were some 1,450 endeavors of this kind, including tree-planting and cleanup projects, health camps, workshops and seminars on such themes as race unity and the advancement of women, and short-term training courses.

## THE BAHAI WORLD

### Sustained Projects

The second category of Baha'i social and economic development consists of approximately 225 ongoing projects. The vast majority are academic schools, while others focus on areas such as literacy, basic health care, immunization, substance abuse, child care, agriculture, the environment, or 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 Baha'i development efforts have achieved the stature of 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 31 such organizations, which are located in all continents of the globe.

## DIRECTORY

|                                                      |                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Association for Baha'i<br>Studies                    | BRAZIL<br>Caixa Postal No. 11019<br>80.421 Curitiba-Parani<br>Brazil |
| ARGENTINA<br>Otamendi 215<br>1405 Buenos Aires, C.F. | CAMEROON<br>c/o Mr. Enoch Tanyi<br>B.P.4230-Yaounde<br>Cameroon      |

### CHILE

### AUSTRALIA

c/o Casilla 3731  
c/o Colin Dibdin, secretary  
Santiago 1  
P.O. Box 319  
Chile  
Rosebery, NSW 2018

Australia E-mail: uninet@chilepac.net

E-mail: abs@bahai.org.au

## COLOMBIA

BERMUDA c/o Asamblea Espiritual Nacional de

46 Cut Road los Baha'is de Colombia

"Channel View" Apartado Aereo 51387

St. George 's G. E. 04 Santa Fe de Bogota 12

Bermuda Colombia

E-mail: bahaicol@colombianet.net

## THE BAHAI WORLD

EAST, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN HAWAII

AFRICA c/o Robert McClelland

c/o C. Rouhani, secretary 1414 Komo Mai Drive

P.O. Box 82549 Pearl City

Mombasa Hawaii 96782-2244

Kenya U.S. A.

ECUADOR INDIA

Asamblea Espiritual Nacional C-12, Vidyanagari

de los Baha'is de! Ecuador Mumbai University

P.O. Box 869-A Santacruz (east)

Quito Mumbai - 400 098

Ecuador India

ENGLISH-SPEAKING EUROPE ITALY

Roger Kingdon, secretary c/o Assemelea Spirituale Nazionale

c/o 27 Rutland Gate dei Baha'i d'Italia

London Via della Fontanella 4

SW7 IPD 1-00187 Rome

England Italy

E-mail: roger.kingdon@aeat.co.uk

## JAPAN

FRANCOPHONE EUROPE c/o Tokyo Baha'i Center

c/o Centre Baha' i 7-2-13 Shinjuku

24 route de Malagnou Shinjuku-ku

CH-1208 Geneva Tokyo 160

Switzerland Japan

Email: dalai@geneva.bic E-mail: sfotos@gol.com

GERMANY MALAYSIA

Wirichsbongardstr. 40 c/o The Spiritual Assembly of

D-52062 Aachen the Baha' is of Malaysia

Germany 4 Lorong Titiwangsa 5

E-mail : mediger@xprgr. Setapak

physik.rwth-aachen.de 53000 Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia

## GHANA



E-mail: hfarabi@carib-link.net      Haifa Offices:

• Office of the Secretary-General

VENEZUELA

c/o Donald R. Witzel

Apartado 934

Barquisimeto, Edo. Lara

3001-A

Venezuela

E-mail: dwitzel@sa.omnes.net

• Office of Public Information

P.O. Box 155

31 001 Haifa

Israel

E-mail: opi@bwc.org

## THE BAHAI WORLD

Baha'i International Community,

New York Offices:

• United Nations Office

• Office for the Advancement of

Women

• Office of the Environment

866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120

New York, NY 10017-1822

U.S.A.

E-Mail: bic-nyc@bic.org

c/o George Starcher, secretary

Baha'i International Community,

Geneva Office:

• United Nations Office

Route des Morillons 15

CH-1218 Grand-Saconnex, Geneva

Switzerland

E-Mail: bic@geneva.bic.org

London

Baha'i International Community,

Paris Office:

• Office of Public Information

45 rue Pergolese

F-75116 Paris

France

E-Mail: opiparis@club-intemet.fr

USA

Baha'i International Health

Agency

P.O. Box 510

Westmount, Quebec H3Z 2T6

Canada

Middle Road, Tsim Sha Tsui

Baha'i Justice Society

c/o The National Spiritual Assembly

of the Baha'is of the United States.

Baha'i Office of the Environment

for Taiwan

149-13 Hsin Sheng South Road

Section 1

Taipei 10626

Taiwan

ROC

E-mail: tranboet@asiaonline.net.tw

European Baha'i Business Forum

35 avenue Jean-Jaures

F-73000 Chambéry

France

E-mail: GS 1 2@calva.net

European Baha'i Youth Council

27 Hampstead Hill Gardens

NW3 2PJ

United Kingdom

E-mail: ebyc@dawn.joensuu.fi

Health for Humanity

467 Jackson Street

Glencoe, IL 60022

E-mail: health@USBNC.org

Hong Kong Baha'i Professional

Society

C-6, 11th Floor, Hankow Centre

Kowloon

Hong Kong

536 Sheridan Road  
Wilmette, IL 60091  
U.S.A.  
c/o Baha'i Publishing Trust  
Baha'i Medical Association of  
Canada  
931 Beaufort Ave  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3H 3X8  
Canada  
E-mail: joanne.langley@dal.ca

International Association of  
Baha'i Publishers and  
Distributors  
6 Mount Pleasant  
Oakham  
Leicestershire  
LE15 6HU  
United Kingdom

## DIRECTORY

Landegg Academy  
CH-9405 Wienacht/AR  
Switzerland  
E-mail: info@landegg.org  
E-mail: dean@landegg.org  
E-mail: nsabr@bahai.org.br  
Mottahedeh Development  
Services

**BRAZIL**  
Editora Baha'i do Brasil  
Rua Conego Eugenio Leite, 350  
05414 - Sao Paulo - SP  
Brazil

**CAMEROON**  
Baha'i Publishing Agency of  
Cameroon  
P.O. Box 2032  
Douala  
Cameroon  
E-mail: mdssed@msn.com  
E-Mail: bushrui@cyberkoki.net  
World Community Foundation

750 Hammond Drive, Bldg. 12,  
Suite 300  
Atlanta, Georgia 30328  
USA

**COTED 'IVOIRE**  
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Editorial Baha'i Indolatino-  
americana  
Otamendi 215  
1405 Buenos Aires, C.F.  
Argentina  
E-mail: bahaiargentina@  
ciudad.com.ar

**Baha'i Publishing Trust**  
P.O. Box 2007  
Government Buildings  
Suva  
Fiji Islands

**GERMANY**  
Baha'i-Verlag  
D-65719 Hofheim  
Germany  
E-mail: nsagermany@aol.com

**AUSTRALIA**  
Baha'i Publications Australia  
P.O. Box 285

Mona Vale NSW 2103

Australia

HONGKONG

E-mail: bahaipub1@peg.apc.org Baha'i Publishing Trust

C-6, 11th Floor, Hankow Centre

BELGIUM

Middle Road, Tsimshatsui

Maison d'Editions Baha'ies

Kowloon

205 rue du Trone

Hong Kong

B-1050 Brussels

E-mail: bahaihk@asiaonline.net

Belgium

E-Mail : centre.bahai@skynet.be

INDIA

NETHERLANDS

Baha'i Publishing Trust

Stichting Baha'i Literatuur

P.O. Box 19

Riouwstraat 27

New Delhi 110 001

2585 GR The Hague

India

Netherlands

E-mail: nsaindia@

E-mail: nsaneth@tref.nl

giasdlo1.vsnl.net.in

NIGERIA

ITALY

Baha'i Publishing Trust

Casa Editrice Baha' i

P.O. Box 2029

Via Filippo Turati, 9

Marina-Lagos

1-00040 Ariccia (Rome)

Nigeria

Italy

E-mail: FMottahed@aol.com

E-Mail: ceb.italia@pcg.it

NORWAY

JAPAN

Baha'i Forlag

Baha' i Publishing Trust

Drammensveien 110 A

7-2-13 Shinjuku

N-0273 Oslo

Shinjuku-ku

Norway

Tokyo 160

E-mail: nsanor@bahai.no

Japan

E-mail: PXQ01044@

PAKISTAN\*

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PHILIPPINES

KENYA

Baha' i Publishing Trust

Baha'i Publishing Agency

P.O. Box 4323

P.O. Box 47562

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Nairobi

Philippines

Kenya

E-mail: nsaphil@misa.irf.ph.net

E-mail: wbahai@users.AfricaOn-

POLAND

line.co.ke

Baha'i Publishing Trust

KOREA

ul. Nowogrodzka 18A/4

Baha' i Publishing Trust

P0-00-511 Warsaw

C.P.O. Box 991

Poland

Seoul 100-609 E-mail: bahainsa@medianet.com.pl

Korea

PORTUGAL

E-mail: nsakorea@nuri .net

Editora Baha'i de Portugal

LEBANON\* Avenida Ventura Terra, No. 1

1600 Lisbon

MALA YSIA\* Portugal

E-mail: aenbahaipo@mail. telepac. pt

\* Address communications to Baha'i World Centre, P.O. Box 155, 31 001  
Haifa, Israel.

DIRECTORY

ROMANIA

TAIWAN

Casa de Editura si Tipografia Baha'i Publishing Trust

Baha'i Ta Hsueh Road, Lane 18, No. 26

C.P. 124 O.P. 1 Tainan, 701

3400 Cluj-Napoca Taiwan R.O.C.

Romania E-mail: bahaiptt@pristine.com.tw

E-mail: bahai@mail.soroscj.ro

UGANDA

RUSSIAN FEDERATION Baha'i Publishing Trust

Unity Baha'i Publishing Trust P.O. Box 2662

Bolshaya Morskaya Str. 53-17 Kampala

St. Petersburg Uganda

Russia E-mail: bahai@starcom.co.ug

E-mail: unity@glas.apc.org E-mail : olinga@starcom.co.ug

SPAIN

UNITED KINGDOM

Editorial Baha'i de Espana Baha'i Publishing Trust

Bonaventura Castellet 17 6 Mount Pleasant

ES-08222 Terrassa Oakham

Spain Leicestershire

E-mail: edibahai@arrakis.es LEIS 6HU

United Kingdom

SWEDEN E-mail: sales@bahaibooks.co.uk

Baha'i FORlaget AB

Box 468 UNITED STATES

S-194 04 Upplands Vasby Baha'i Publishing Trust

Sweden 415 Linden Avenue

Wilmette, IL 60091

U.S. A.

E-mail: bpt@usbnc.org

Selected NEW

PUBLICATIONS

Baha'u'llah's Teachings on Spiritual Reality

Compiled by Paul Lample. Florida, U.S.A: Palabra Publications, 1996. 256 pp.  
Second in a planned series of books for those investigating the Baha'i Faith,  
this  
volume explores Baha'u 'llah's teachings on topics such as the quest for  
spirituality, the spiritual life, material and spiritual reality, the progress  
of the soul in this  
world and the next, and humanity's spiritual education.

#### A Basic Baha'i Chronology

Glenn Cameron with Wendi Momen. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1996.  
560 pp.

A companion volume to A Basic Baha 'i Dictionary, this comprehensive guide to  
Baha ' i history is helpful for use in classes to study the Baha'i Faith, talks  
for summer school, media interviews, or simply to satisfy individual curiosity.  
Thousands  
of facts about the Babi and Baha ' i Faiths are presented and are illustrated  
with over  
300 photographs.

#### Crystallizations: 20 Works by Baha'i Artists

Edited by Ross Woodman. Ottawa: Association for Baha'i Studies, 1996. 301 pp.  
Twenty works by Baha'i artists- including poems, short stories, calligraphy,  
and  
paintings-are presented in a volume published under the auspices of the  
Association for Baha'i Studies.

#### THE BAHAI WORLD

##### The Eco Principle---Ecology and Economics in Symbiosis

Arthur Lyon Dahl. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1996. 192 pp.

The teachings of Baha' u'llah and scientific thought are brought together to  
produce an analysis of the world situation .

##### Healing Racism in America: A Prescription for the Disease

Nathan Rutstein. U.S.A.: Whitcomb Publishing, 1997. 184 pp.

The author focuses on the pathology of the disease of racism and how it has  
plagued Americans since the founding of their nation-infecting or affecting  
most

Americans along the way. Rutstein introduces the Institutes for the Healing of  
Racism and tells how this grassroots movement is spreading throughout the  
United  
States.

##### He Cometh With Clouds-A Baha'i View of Christ's Return

Gary L. Matthews. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1996. 416 pp.

Gary L. Matthews investigates the Bible's teachings about the Second Coming of  
Christ and explores the relationship between Christ and Baha' u'llah .

Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986: The Third  
Epoch of the Formative Age

Compiled by Geoffrey W. Marks. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1996. 815 pp.  
Composed of major communications from the Universal House of Justice covering the third epoch of the Formative Age of the Baha' i Faith.

The Ocean of His Words: A Reader's Guide to the Art of Baha'u'llah

John Hatcher. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1997. 388 pp.

John Hatcher presents a literary interpretation of the Writings of Baha' u ' llah.

The Origins of the Baha'i Community of Canada, 1898-1948

Will C. van den Hoonard. Waterloo, Ontario : Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996. 384 pp.

Using diaries, memoirs, official reports, private correspondence, newspapers, archives and interviews, Will C. van den Hoonard has created the first historical account of the Baha' is in Canada.

Le Plus Saint Livre

Baha'u'llah. Bruxelles: Maison d'Editions Baha'ies, 1996. 328 pp.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, is Baha' u ' llah's charter for a new world civilization. Written in Arabic in 1873, this is the volume ' s first authorized French translation .

Poems of the Passing

Rui)iyiyih Rabbani . Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1996. 136 pp.

The sudden passing in 1957 of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, occasioned this poetic expression of grief by his widow, Amatu ' l-Baha Ru~iyiyih Khanum, which is now published for the first time.

## NEW P UBLICATIO NS

A Short Introduction to the Baha'i Faith

Moojan Momen. Oxford: Oneworld, 1997. 150 pp.

This introduction covers subjects ranging from teachings on the spiritual development of the individual to the Baha'i belief in the oneness of all religions and the need for world peace. Chapters explore Baha' i teachings on the individual, family and society, laws, and spiritual issues, as well as history, organization, and community life.

The Twin Manifestations

The Ruhi Institute. Riviera Beach, Florida: Palabra Publications, 1996. 128 pp.

Fourth in the series of Ruhi books, this one presents the basic history of the Faith and prepares teachers to present it to others. Includes the courses "The Greatness of

this Day", "The Life of the Bab", and "The Life of Baha'u'llah".

Understanding Biblical Prophecy (Vol. 3 of the "Preparing for a Baha'i/Christian Dialogue" series)

Michael Sours. Oxford: Oneworld, 1997. 242 pp.

The final volume of a three-volume study program designed to help Baha'is familiarize themselves with the Bible and Christian beliefs.

Unveiling the Hidden Words (Baha'i Studies Volume II)

Diana Malouf. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1997. 230 pp.

This book is a study of Shoghi Effendi's translation of the Arabic verses of the

Hidden Words. Shoghi Effendi, designated the 'interpreter' of the Baha'i teachings,

was uniquely placed to render the words of Baha'u'llah, his

Great-Grandfather,

into English of outstanding beauty and charm.

William Henry Randall

Bahiyih Randall-Winckler/ M. R. Garis. Oxford: Oneworld, 1996. 276 pp.

Drawing on the previously unpublished daily diaries of two early pilgrimages (1919 and 1922), this book provides unique glimpses into the life of 'Abdu'l-Baha

and His family. It also offers an intimate portrait of the history of the Faith in

America and the challenges that faced the early Western Baha'is.

Women: Peacemakers, Reformers, Leaders

Wilma Ellis. Mona Vale, N.S.W.: Baha'i Publications Australia, 1997. 14 pp.

The emancipation of women is changing the social, economic, and moral structures of the nations of the world. In this essay Wilma Ellis points to a "revolution"

in values taking place around the world and explores some of the issues associated

with these changes.

A Basic BAHAI

READING List

The following list has been prepared to provide a sampling of works conveying the spiritual truths, social principles, and history of the Baha'i Faith. It is by no means exhaustive. For a more complete record of Baha'i literature, see Bibliography of English-language Works on the Babi and Baha'i Faiths, 1844-1985, compiled by William P. Collins (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990).

SELECTED WRITINGS OF BAHAI'U'LLAH

The Kitab-i-Aqdas

The Most Holy Book, Baha'u'llah's charter for a new world civilization.

Written

in Arabic in 1873, the volume's first authorized English translation was released in 1993.

The Kitab-i-iqan

The Book of Certitude was written prior to Baha'u'llah's declaration of His mission as an explanation of progressive revelation and a proof of the station of the Bab.

The Hidden Words of Bahli'u'llah

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 Bahli'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas

A compilation of tablets revealed between 1873 and 1892 which enunciate important principles of Baha'u'llah'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 Kitab-i-Aqdas.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahli'u'llah

A selection of Baha'u'llah's sacred writings translated and compiled by the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith to convey the spirit of Baha'u'llah's life and teachings.

## WRITINGS OF THE BAB

Selections from the Writings of the Bab

The first compilation of the Bab's writings to be translated into English.

## SELECTED WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHA

Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Baha in Paris in 1911-1912

Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Baha to a wide variety of audiences in Paris in 1911 - 1912, explaining the basic principles of the Baha'i 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-Bahli

A compilation of selected letters from 'Abdu'l-Baha '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-Baha's answers to a series of questions posed to Him

during interviews with Laura Clifford Barney between 1904 and 1906. The topics covered include the influence of the Prophets in the evolution of humanity, the Baha' i perspective on Christian doctrine, and the powers and conditions of the Manifestations of God.

## BAHA'I READING UST

### SELECTED WRITINGS OF SHOGHI EFFENDI

#### God Passes By

A detailed history of the first one hundred years of the Baha'i Faith.

#### The Promised Day Is Come

A commentary on Baha'u'llah's letters to the kings and rulers of the world.

#### The World Order of Bah:i'u'll:ih: Selected Letters

An exposition on the relation between the Baha'i community and the entire process of social evolution under the dispensation of Baha ' u' llah, in the form of

a series of letters from the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith to the Baha'is of the West between 1929 and 1936.

### INTRODUCTORY WORKS

#### Bah:i'u'll:ih

Baha ' i International Community, Office of Public Information, 1991.

A brief statement detailing Baha'u'llah's life and work issued on the occasion of the centenary of His passing.

#### Bah:i'u'll:ih and the New Era

John Esslemont. 5th rev. paper ed. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1990.

The first comprehensive account of the Baha'i Faith, written in 1923 and updated for subsequent editions.

#### The Baha'i Faith: The Emerging Global Religion

William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985.

Textbook providing an overview of Baha'i history, teachings, administrative structures, and community life.

#### All Things Made New

John Ferraby. 2d rev. ed. London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1987.

A comprehensive outline of the Baha'i Faith.

Most of the books listed above have been published by various Baha'i Publishing Trusts and are available in bookshops, libraries, or from the Trusts. Please see the Directory for addresses.

### GLOSSARY

'Abdu'l-Baha: (1844-1921) Son of Baha ' u ' llah, designated His

successor and authorized interpreter of His writings. Named 'Abbas after His grandfather, 'Abdu'l-Baha was known to the general public as ' Abbas Effendi. Baha'u ' llah gave Him such titles as "the Most Great Branch," "the Mystery of God," and "the Master." After Baha'u' llah' s passing, He chose the name 'Abdu 'l-Baha, meaning "Servant of Baha'u' llah."

**Administrative Order:** The system of administration as conceived by Baha ' u' llah, formally established by 'Abdu ' l-Baha, and realized during the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi. It consists, on the one hand, of a series of elected councils, universal, national and local, in which are invested legislative, executive, and judicial powers over the Baha'i community, and, on the other hand, of eminent and devoted Baha'is appointed for the specific purpose of propagation and protection of the Faith under the guidance of the Head of that Faith, the Universal House of Justice.

**Amatu'l-Baha RU.iiyyih Khanum:** Mary Sutherland Maxwell, an eminent North American Baha' i who became the wife of Shoghi

#### THE BAILA..f WORLD

Effendi Rabbani, Guardian of the Baha ' i Faith, in 1937, after which she became known as Ru~iyyih Khanum Rabbani. (Amatu ' l-Baha is a title meaning "Handmaiden of Baha'u' llah.") She served as the Guardian ' s secretary during his lifetime and was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God in 1952. She is the most prominent dignitary of the Baha'i community.

**Arc:** An arc cut into Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel; along this pathway the international administrative buildings of the Baha ' i Faith are being built.

**Auxiliary Boards:** An institution created by Shoghi Effendi in 1954 to assist the Hands of the Cause of God. When the institution of the Continental Boards of Counsellors was established in 1968 by the Universal House of Justice, the Auxiliary Boards were placed under its direction.

**Bab, the:** The title, meaning "Gate," assumed by Siyyid 'Ali-Mu~ammad, the Prophet-Founder of the Babi Faith and the Forerunner of Baha ' u' llah. Born 20 October 1819, the Bab 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, Baha ' u ' llah. Because of these claims, the Bab was executed by order of Na~iri ' d-Din Shah on 9 July 1850.

**Baha'i Era:** The period of the Baha ' i calendar beginning with the Declaration of the Bab on 23 May 1844, and expected to last until the next appearance of a Manifestation (Prophet) of God after the

expiration of at least one thousand years.

**Baha'i International Community:** A name used generally in reference to the worldwide Baha 'i community and officially in that community' s external relations. In the latter context, the Baha'i 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 Baha'i World Centre, a United Nations Office in New York with a branch in Geneva, an Office of Public Information, an Office of the Environment, and an Office for the Advancement of Women.

## GLOSSARY

**Baha'i World Centre:** The spiritual and administrative center of the Baha'i Faith, located in the twin cities of Acre and Haifa, in Israel.

**Baha'u'llah:** Title assumed by Mirza I:Iusayn-'Ali, Founder of the Baha'i 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. Baha'u'llah's writings are considered by Baha'is to be direct revelation from God.

**Consultation:** A form of discussion between individuals and within groups which requires the subjugation of egotism so that all ideas can be shared and evaluated with frankness, courtesy, and openness of mind, and decisions arrived at can be wholeheartedly supported. Its guiding principles were elaborated by 'Abdu 'I-Baba.

**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 Baha'i 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 Baha'i community and for the purpose, respectively, of electing delegates to a National Convention, electing the members of a National Spiritual Assembly, or electing the members of the Universal House of Justice.

**German Templer Colony:** Group of houses with red-tiled roofs at the foot of Mount Carmel that once housed members of the Society of

the Temple, founded in Germany in the mid-1800s. Templers foregathered in Haifa in 1863 to await the second coming of Christ.

## THE BAHAI WORLD

Hands of the Cause of God: Individuals appointed first by Baha'u'llah, and others named later by Shoghi Effendi, who were charged with the specific duties of protecting and propagating the Faith. With the passing of Shoghi Effendi there is no further possibility for appointing Hands of the Cause; hence, in order to extend into the future the important functions of propagation and protection, the Universal House of Justice in 1968 created Continental Boards of Counsellors and in 1973 established the International Teaching Centre which coordinates their work.

Holy Days: Eleven days commemorating significant Baha'i anniversaries, on nine of which work is suspended.

I;luququ'llah: Arabic for "the Right of God." As instituted in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, payment to "the Authority in the Cause to whom all must turn" (at present, the Universal House of Justice) of 19 percent of what remains to one's personal income after one's essential expenses have been covered. Funds generated by the payment of I;luququ'llah are used for the promotion of the Faith and for the welfare of society.

International Teaching Centre: An institution established in 1973 by the Universal House of Justice to bring to fruition the work of the Hands of the Cause of God in the Holy Land and to provide for its extension into the future. The duties of the International Teaching Centre include coordinating, stimulating, and directing the activities of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and acting as liaison between them and the Universal House of Justice. The membership of the Teaching Centre comprises all the surviving Hands of the Cause and also nine Counsellors appointed by the Universal House of Justice. The seat of the International Teaching Centre is located at the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

Knight of Baha'u'llah: Title initially given by Shoghi Effendi to those Baha'is who arose to open new territories to the Faith during the first year of the Ten Year Crusade (1953-1963) and subsequently applied to those who first reached those remaining unopened territories at a later date.

Lesser Peace: A political peace to be established by the nations of the

## GLOSSARY

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 Baha' u ' llah and signaling humanity' s coming of age.

**Local Spiritual Assembly:** The local administrative body in the Baha'i Faith, ordained in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. The nine members are directly elected by secret ballot each year at Ri<;lvan from among the adult believers in a community.

**Monument Gardens:** Beautifully landscaped gardens at the heart of the Arc on Mount Carmel where befitting monuments have been erected over the graves of the daughter, wife, and youngest son of Baha'u'llah, and also the wife of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

**Mount Carmel:** The mountain spoken of by Isaiah as the "mountain of the Lord. " Site of the Baha ' i World Centre including several Baha'i holy places, the most important of which are the Shrine of the Bab and the Monument Gardens.

**National Spiritual Assembly:** The national administrative body in the Baha ' i Faith, ordained in the Baha'i sacred writings, with authority over all activities and affairs of the Baha'i Faith throughout its area. Among its duties are to stimulate, unify, and coordinate the manifold activities of Local Spiritual Assemblies and of individual Baha'is within its jurisdiction. The members of National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world constitute the electoral college for the Universal House of Justice. At Ri<;tvan 1996, there were 174 National or Regional Spiritual Assemblies. See also Regional Spiritual Assembly.

**Nineteen Day Feast:** The principal gathering in each local Baha'i community, every Baha'i month, for the threefold purpose of worship, consultation, and fellowship .

**Pioneer:** Any Baha' i who arises and leaves his or her home to journey to another country for the purpose of teaching the Baha'i Faith. "Homefront pioneer" is used to describe those who move to areas within their own country that have yet to be exposed to the Baha'i Faith or where the Baha'i community needs strengthening.

## THE BAHAI'f WORLD

**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.

**Ric.Ivan:** Arabic for "Paradise." The twelve-day festival (from 21 April through 2 May) commemorating Baha'u'llah ' s declaration of His mission to His companions in 1863 in the Garden of Ric.Ivan in Baghdad.

**Shoghi Effendi Rabbani:** (1897-1957) The Guardian of the Baha'i

Faith after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha in 1921 , designated in His Will and Testament as His successor in interpreting the Baha 'i writings and as Head of the Faith.

Shrine of Baha'u'llah: The resting place of Baha'u'llah's mortal remains, located near the city of Acre, Israel. The Shrine is the holiest spot on earth to Baha'is and a place of pilgrimage.

Shrine of the Bab: The resting place of the Bab's mortal remains, located on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, a sacred site to Baha'is, and a place of pilgrimage.

Tablet: Divinely revealed scripture . In Baha'i scripture, the term is used to denote writings revealed by Baha ' u ' llah, the Bab, and 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Universal House of Justice: Head of the Baha ' i Faith after the passing of Shoghi Effendi, supreme administrative body ordained by Baha'u ' llah in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, His Book of Laws. The Universal House of Justice is elected every five years by the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies who gather at an International Convention. The House of Justice was elected for the first time in 1963 and occupied its permanent Seat on Mount Carmel in 1983.

Adapted from A Basic Baha 'i Dictionary, Wendi Momen, ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989).

## I N D E X

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## THE BAI-IA'f WORLD

1996-97

### 153 OF THE BAHAI' ERA

In just over one hundred years, the Baha'i Faith has grown from an obscure movement in the Middle East to the second-most widespread of the independent world religions. Embracing people from more than 2, 100 ethnic, racial, and tribal groups, it is quite likely the most diverse organized body of people on the planet today. Its unity challenges prevailing theory about human nature and the prospects for our common future.

The Faith's central message is that of unity. Its Founder, Baha'u'llah, teaches that there is only one God, that there is only one human race, and that all the world's religions have been stages in the revelation of God's purpose for humankind. Today, humanity has collectively come of age: "The earth is but one country," Baha'u'llah asserts, "and mankind its citizens." The emergence of the Baha'i community offers persuasive evidence that the human race, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as a single people in its planetary homeland.

The Baha'i World is the principal public record of the community's growth and development. The volumes reproduce major documents and provide statistical data and other detailed information on the Baha'i Faith's wide-ranging program of activities, which are illustrated by many photographs and charts. In-depth articles focus on major areas of Baha'i concern.

For the serious researcher and the general student alike, the dramatic growth of the Baha'i Faith raises new and interesting issues about the role of religion in social development. The Baha'i World series has been redesigned primarily to meet these needs.

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