

A BAHAI DECLARATION OF HUMAN OBLIGATION

Exported from Holy-Writings.com on 2026-06-20 — 1 clipping

A BAHAI DECLARATION OF HUMAN OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS
Presented to the first session of the United Nations Commission on Human
Rights.

Lake Success, NY, USA

February 1947

** I

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 human existence.

Human rights can be established in terms of social status when members of the community realize that the gift of life and conscious being obligates them to meet responsibilities owed to God, to society and to self. Mutual recognition by members of the community of the truth that their lives emanate from one and the same universal Source enables them to maintain ordered relationships in a common social body.

The social body does not create essential human rights. Its office is that of trustee under appointment to act for the community in the preservation of the relationships which represent the moral achievement of the members, and to cherish and protect that unity of spirit which is their highest mutual obligation.

No social body, whatever its form, has power to maintain essential human rights for persons who have repudiated their moral obligation and abandoned the divine endowment distinguishing man from beast. Civil definitions of political and economic status, if devoid of moral value and influence, are not equivalent to essential human rights but express the expedients of partisan policy. An ordered society can only be maintained by moral beings.

** II

Man's divine endowment binds the individual to an evolving and maturing humanity. The human race is subject to a principle of progressive development operating beyond human will. No age repeats the conditions of any former time.

The evolution evident in civilization results from the spiritual evolution acting through mankind. As new qualities unfold a larger area of ordered relationships can be established, requiring changes in the social structure.

The modern national state came into existence as a unifier of diverse races and peoples. It has been a social truce observed by or enforced upon communities

previously separate, independent and hostile. Historically the nation represented a great moral victory, a definite and important stage in human progress. It has raised the condition of the masses of people, substituted constitutional law for the arbitrary authority of the tribe, extended education and knowledge, mitigated the effect of sectarian disputes, and enlarged the social world of the average man. It provided conditions under which natural science could develop, inventions be put into operation, and industrialization give man mastery over nature.

The new powers and resources made possible by the nation could not be confined within the national boundary but produced an internationalism of cause and effect in social relationships which no nation could control. The national state has reached the limits of its development as an independent, self-directed social body. A world science, a world economy and a world consciousness, riding the wave of a new and universal movement of spiritual evolution, lay the foundations of world order. Conceived of as an end in itself, the national state has come to be a denial of the oneness of mankind, the source of general disruption opposed to the true interests of its people. From the depths of man's divine endowment stirs response to the affirmation of oneness which gives this age its central impetus and direction. Society is undergoing transformation, to effect a new order based on the wholeness of human relationships.

** III

Conceptions of elementary human rights have been adopted in the past by different peoples under varied social conditions: the right to citizenship, when the nation became the people and not the dynasty, the right to a code of law, when written constitutions replaced custom and tradition; the right to security of person and property, when the state could enforce peace upon warring factions; the right to select occupation and residence, when the individual was no longer bound to one landed estate. A history of rights would record the most significant moral gains of the race in its incessant struggle to form a lasting society.

But a right is only valid and effective when upheld by an independent sovereignty. Our inherited scheme of rights has become jeopardized through the loss of real sovereignty by the national state. To reevaluate the elementary rights of the past, and establish essential new rights in keeping with our own age, a world sovereignty is required. The whole conception of right has undergone change. A right formerly was a defense against an invasion; a right today is a sharing of social status among mankind. Moral and social law can for the first time in human experience blend and unify when humanity as a whole becomes subject to the same law. Everything universal is divine truth; everything limited and partisan is human opinion.

The obligation and right to live in a moral society has become crucial, a test of our will to survive. The modern struggle which employs nations as its

instruments is not a war of peoples nor of dynasties: it is a war of values. The dispute about values resolves itself into a struggle between those human beings who would and must unite in a common humanity and a common social body, and those who would and must remain separate, diverse and autonomous. The national state is itself torn and divided in a struggle which involves primarily the conscious attitudes of individual human beings. But to the degree that the national state can act as a united body, it is unable to avoid participation in the decision. No person and no social body is immune from destiny.

The true destiny of the national state is to build the bridge from local autonomy to world unity. It can preserve its moral heritage and function only as it contributes to the establishment of a sovereign world. Both state and people are needed to serve as the strong pillar supporting the new institutions reflecting the full and final expression of human relationships in an ordered society. In delaying to fulfill the historic mandate given the peoples and nations of our age to unite, we give opportunity and encouragement to subversive forces whose weapon is confusion and whose aim is chaos.

** IV

The purpose of this statement is not to catalog every desirable human right but to suggest an approach by which the nature of essential rights can be determined. As here defined, a human right is an expression of man's divine endowment given social status by a moral and sovereign body. A right attains social status only after it has become a moral value asserted and maintained as a necessary quality of human relationships by the members of the community.

Among the essential human rights characterizing the new world era are those concerned with: (1) the individual; (2) the family; (3) race; (4) work and wealth; (5) education; (6) worship; (7) social order.

- The human person is a spiritual being as well as a member of society. His spiritual nature has expression in the maintenance of moral human relationships throughout the whole range of the community, and withers in a state of retirement and isolation in self, in family, in race or in class. The duty of the individual is to serve the needs of a progressive society. Whenever the community makes demands upon the individual which contravene the prevalent moral standard, or suffers such demands to be imposed upon him by private agencies, the community is in danger of disruption, for the moral law has application to institutions and communities large and small.

An equal standard of human rights must be upheld, and individuals given equal opportunities. Variety and not uniformity is the principle of organic society. Since lack of opportunity, repression and degrading conditions have created masses of people unable to exercise the functions of citizenship, such persons are a moral trust laid upon the conscience of the rest, to educate the ignorant, train the immature and heal the sick.

- The human person is the spiritual entity of mankind, but the family is the

inviolable and divinely created social entity. The right of the individual to survive is identified with the right of the family to maintain itself under conditions favorable to body, mind and spirit. While the mature individual is the political unit, the family constitutes the economic unit, and income operates on the basis of family living and welfare.

The equality of men and women in the modern community gives the family a new and more powerful connection with the forces making for moral evolution.

- The membership of the national community in many countries is composed of racial groups in different stages of development. The conditions which in the past made for exclusive racial unity and characteristics are weakening. The rights and needs of the modern community are superior to the rights of race. Exclusive race rights can only be surrendered when exchanged for race equality in participation of the superior rights and privileges possessed by a multi-racial society.

- The work done by the individual in trade, craft, art or profession is the core of his life and not merely the source of his living. Work performed in the spirit of service can today be accounted as an act of worship. The obligation to work is essentially a moral obligation and one not discharged by possession of wealth. The community owes nothing to those who can work but refuse to do so.

The right to a living is established by work. In addition, the worker has right to share in the profits of the enterprise.

Wealth results from the co-ordination of a variety of efforts directed upon the equipment and material. A sound economy deals with the whole process in its variety of human relationships and does not seek to center the process around the point of any group advantage, whether ownership, direction, technical knowledge, manual skill or consumption. Wealth in part is the right of the individual and in part the right of the community. Under conditions of international competition desperate social emergencies arise when no just distinction between private and public wealth can be made. True justice and social philosophy await the formation of world institutions and the predominance of the world view.

The repudiation of national right and power to make war represents the first step toward mutual wealth and sound economy. Short of a world economy mankind will not achieve the fruits of civilization.

- The roots of education lie in man's divine endowment, and the prophets have been the universal educators of mankind.

The purpose of education is to give the individual mastery over himself, a creative relationship with society and understanding of his place in the universe. Education deals with the whole man: his mind, his emotions and his will. Distinctions now existing between the education of culture, the education of science and technic, the education of citizenship and the education of faith produce incomplete and unbalanced personalities. Miseducated individuals experience every major social crisis in terms of different aspects each

justifying a partisan approach.

Education is continuous with life. Ignorance about matters confronting adults is more harmful though less perceptible than ignorance on the part of the child. The human right to education is the right to enter into the larger evolutionary processes of civilization. Systems producing rigidly molded attitudes and emotional fixations can no longer claim to be educational.

- The human right signified by freedom of worship or liberty of conscience remains only a legal sanction accorded to diverse religious communities to practice and promulgate their special systems of belief until the individual is granted sufficient spiritual knowledge to arrive at his own adult and independent decision concerning the nature of faith.

Since it has been demonstrated that the instinct to worship is universal and has been associated with an infinite number of more or less temporary devotional practices, moral systems and social forms, there is no inherent reason why this instinct may not be reaffirmed in terms of loyalty to mankind and devotion to the cause of world unity on all levels. The God of humanity can no longer be expressed as a racial dominance nor as a national will to survive at all costs nor as a denominational gift of personal salvation. The pure revelation of God has been given humanity from age to age through His prophets and messengers. Secondary and limited formulas of religion prolong the moral crisis which blinds individuals to the assurance of a world era.

World order is nothing else than the administrative aspect of brotherhood, and man's right to social order can not be dissociated from his right to a world faith.

- Every age has its particular mission. The formation of world order is an obligation laid upon humanity today.

World order has become legally possible, socially imperative, and divinely ordained. The principle of federation has already united previously independent communities diverse in race, language, religion and size of population. The nations can find just expression for their legitimate rights and needs through proportionate representation in a supranational body. Until world citizenship is guaranteed as a social status, the human rights and privileges developed in the past are undermined by the disruption of modern society.

Pending the creation of a supranational order, the existing governments have right to the loyalty and obedience of their citizens in all matters of government action and decision short of interference in the individual's faith in God and His prophets.

The order herein affirmed implies the establishment of a world commonwealth uniting all nations, races, creeds and classes and safeguarding the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them. The commonwealth would consist of a world legislature functioning as trustees of the whole of mankind and enacting the laws required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. Its world executive, backed by an international Force, would

carry out the laws and decisions decreed by the world legislature, and safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. Its world tribunal would adjudicate and render final and compulsory verdict in any and all disputes arising between the various elements constituting the universal system.

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." -- Baha'u'llah (1869)

* * * * *

— A BAHAI DECLARATION OF HUMAN OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS