

*Excerpts from pamphlets, statements, and information presented by the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations during 1973 and 1974 as a contribution to the work of that world organization.*

## Cooperation of the Bahá'í International Community with the United Nations in the field of human rights

For over one hundred years Bahá'ís have striven for the elimination of all prejudice and discrimination and have sought to bring about the unity of mankind, world peace, and world order.

As part of this commitment the Bahá'í International Community, in its consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and its affiliation with the Office of Public Information, has cooperated wholeheartedly with the United Nations programs in the field of human rights. The Bahá'í world community has promoted awareness and understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the numerous instruments which the United Nations has brought into existence for the protection of the rights of all peoples.

Annual worldwide observances of Human Rights Day; human rights conferences, seminars, and awards; programs and publications for special anniversaries of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — all are expressions of Bahá'í cooperation. In addition the Bahá'í International Community works closely with the UN Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and has taken part in varied United Nations seminars on human rights.

(From "Divine Law: Source of Human Rights — A Bahá'í View," a pamphlet-statement prepared by the Bahá'í International Community in observance of the 25th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1973.)

## On a new standard of justice

The cornerstone of human rights — justice — is a central concern of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'í communities around the world live by the conviction that justice is the expression of love and unity in the life of society; and Bahá'ís have accepted Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of their faith, as the standard of justice for our age and the source of divine law.

A new world could only be built, Bahá'u'lláh taught, by a new race of men and women; a world order and a world civilization could only be established by people whose actions reflected values of love, unity, and justice that applied equally to all races, creeds, nationalities, and classes.

The world is ready for this new oneness — for the obligations and rights that will make it possible; and Bahá'u'lláh has provided the source of power for this total and lasting unity of all peoples on earth.

Although humanity is only beginning its planetary stage of evolution, Bahá'í communities can today be found in 335 countries and significant territories — 141 of which are independent nations. More than 1,600 tribes and ethnic groups are represented in such communities. In this unity in diversity the Bahá'í world already offers evidence of the change that is taking place in human beings who find their standards for obligation and rights in the Bahá'í writings and laws.

(From "Divine Law: Source of Human Rights — A Bahá'í View.")

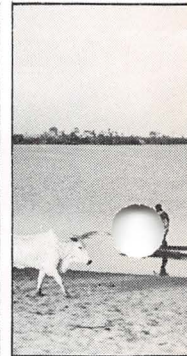
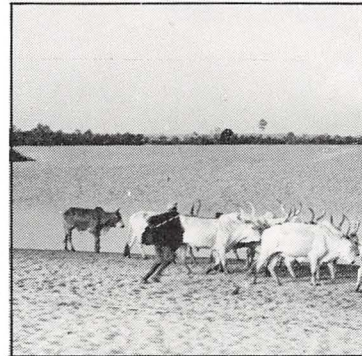


Photo courtesy Bahá'í World Center Audio Visual Department





# Patterns for justice

## On the elimination of the crime of genocide

It is the conviction of the Bahá'í International Community that national and international laws and conventions are indeed essential and necessary for the protection of the world community, and that the implementation of these instruments has a certain effect on the actions of men and nations. However, if the crime of genocide is to be eliminated entirely as a threat to mankind's peace and security — and the diversity of humanity is to be protected and preserved — then a more fundamental change is required in the attitudes, feelings and understanding of the diverse peoples of the world toward each other, so that differences of race, religion and nationality will cease to cause separation, and a climate of loving friendship and fellowship can be established.

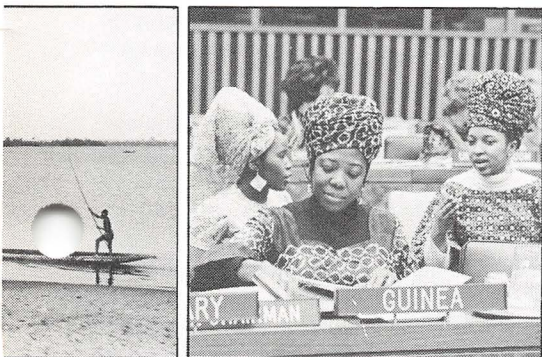
In the view of the Bahá'í International Community, this universal change in human behavior involves the control of the physical or material side of human beings (characterized by the desire for self gratification) by the higher or spiritual nature of man, which, when properly nurtured and educated, is capable of developing qualities of compassion, understanding, justice, fair-mindedness, kindness, courtesy, etc., and has the potential for self-sacrifice in the interest of all mankind. When individual human beings come to understand that this power of spiritual growth is an endowment given to every member of the human race and that they are called upon to respond to a divine summons to train this aspect of the self, a consciousness of oneness will supersede the emphasis formerly placed on differences of race, religion and nationality which have so long divided mankind. Under the guidance of divine teachings, which reestablish and expand the truth of past religious experiences to the present needs of humanity, mankind — which has already traversed the stages of family unity, tribal solidarity, unity of the city-state and, more recently, national

unity — will enter a new phase, the culmination of its development on the planet, in which the oneness and wholeness of the human race will be realized.

It is a Bahá'í belief that we are now engaged in the struggle to attain this new order which will free mankind from its present state of conflict and dissension in which prejudices of race, religion and nation play a major role, and usher in a new era of peace and human solidarity based on divine justice in which the rights and well-being of all members of the human race are protected. Bahá'ís feel that the attainment of world unity is inevitable because "man can withstand anything except that which is divinely intended and indicated for the age and its requirements." The vision of world unity which Bahá'ís are striving to implement is based on the social and spiritual principles found in the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Who over a hundred years ago revealed the spiritual laws which Bahá'ís recognize as the foundation of a new era of peace and brotherhood prophesied and promised in all of the world's revealed religions.

As may be seen, the Bahá'í International Community seeks to do its share in eliminating the crime of genocide by building communities which are based on the principles of the oneness of mankind, the oneness of religion, loyalty to government, the abolition of war and the creation of a world civilization. The gradual realization of these principles throughout the planet, the Bahá'í International Community maintains, will bring about the moral and spiritual transformation necessary for the full development of the earth's human and natural resources, when the "world will be seen as a new world, and all men will live as brothers." Only then, in the Bahá'í view, will the world be finally freed from the crime of genocide as a threat to the survival of the human race.

(From information submitted by the Bahá'í International Community to a "Study on the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," undertaken by the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.)



Photos courtesy United Nations/M. Tzavaras



## On the rights of minorities

The Bahá'í International Community . . . is multi-racial, multi-national, and multi-lingual. Over 1,600 tribes and ethnic groups, for instance, are included in the Bahá'í world community. . . . Bahá'ís regard all people as invaluable members of society whose talents and unique contributions, as individuals and/or groups — whether in the minority or the majority — are equally important factors in building a new world.

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.

The Bahá'í teachings extol the uniqueness and variety of race, culture, and language that exists in the family of man and regard this diversity as its manifest beauty — not unlike a flower garden where, though all are flowers, the individual characteristics of shape and color combine to produce harmony and beauty. . . . Bahá'ís regard their individual culture, heritage, and mother-tongue with pride and admiration, but at the same time are conscious of their existence in a pluralistic and diversified world in which other peoples, cultures, languages and heritages coexist.

(From a statement presented by the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations Seminar on "The Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of National, Ethnic and Other Minorities," Ohrid, Yugoslavia, June 25-July 25, 1974)

Since the Bahá'í world community has brought together most of the minority elements which are to be found today, such as those of race, nationality, religion, and class, some observations on the attitudes and practices existing within this community are, we feel, appropriate. . . .

It is the attitude of Bahá'ís that religion is intended to bring harmony and unity

among people and that religious prejudice, along with economic and national prejudices, have been the cause of war and strife, destroying the structure of world order. Bahá'ís are admonished to associate with all people in a spirit of love and fellowship, are warned that religion must not become the cause of dissension. Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, forbids His followers even to argue about religion, placing emphasis on the acquisition of virtuous deeds and the use of a "kindly tongue" in attracting people to the true religious spirit which has been expressed by the founders of all the religions of the world. In regard to religion, Bahá'ís themselves do not proselytize and they offer no special inducements, such as material rewards, in order to attract people to their Faith. They observe the principle of the right and responsibility of each person to an unfettered search for truth, membership being granted only as the individual attains conviction and makes personal declaration of his faith.

Differences in national background do not become in the Bahá'í community a source of antagonism or separation. Loyalty to family, tribe and nation is recognized as important, but does not become an obstacle to an allegiance to the whole of mankind. World citizenship is natural to Bahá'ís, and is possible within the Bahá'í community itself because of the dedication of its members to the principle that humanity is an organic whole — that all parts are essential and play a vital role in enriching the beauty of the whole. The concept of the progressive nature of religion and the gradual unfoldment of a divine plan destined to bring about a world commonwealth and world civilization enables Bahá'ís to strive to abolish prejudices in themselves and in their communities which might threaten or delay the achievement of this goal.

Although there is a great cultural diversity in Bahá'í communities, the commitment of Bahá'ís to "unity in diversity" and the education which Bahá'ís experience in close association with each other in the Bahá'í administrative order — where this diversity is always present — lead to an appreciation for the contributions which the variety of backgrounds can make, and which strengthen and enhance the beauty of the whole community.

A few quotations from the Bahá'í Writings will serve to illustrate the Bahá'í view on racial minorities:

Close your eyes to racial differences,

and welcome all with the light of oneness.

God is no respecter of persons on account of either color or race. All colors are acceptable to Him, be they white, black or yellow.

Color is not important: the heart is all-important.

To discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority, is a flagrant violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, has written quite explicitly on the relationship of minorities within the Bahá'í community. He urged that

every organized community, enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh, should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.

As people having a common language also often see themselves as belonging to a separate group, and the Sub-Commission is concerned with the problems of linguistic minorities, the point should be made that the Bahá'í teachings emphasize the importance of a universal, auxiliary language to be learned in addition to one's mother tongue in order to promote understanding and harmony among people. Although Bahá'ís do not promote any one universal language, they teach this principle, and in the future expect to see it realized.

In the Bahá'í view, the entire question of minorities is one of gradually approaching the consciousness of world unity. It involves a spiritual awakening of the peoples of the world to the realization that, first of all, the attainment of even their own happiness is dependent upon the realization of a like condition for all others in the human family. Beyond this change in attitude, and fundamentally underlying it, there must be a conscious recognition of our human dependence upon one God and a desire to become educated to values and teachings which today can alone rescue man from his pursuit of selfish interests and the oppression of his fellow man.

Limited unity, such as that of lineage, of color, of language, of partisan political factions, and of nationality, can have no universal outcome in an age which demands the solving of human problems on a



global scale. The Bahá'í world community, oriented to new standards of life in every aspect, is attempting to put into practice the Teachings and Principles of Bahá'u'lláh, which it recognizes as the source of spiritual education for humanity and the guidance for the well-being and happiness of all members of the human race.

From information submitted by the Bahá'í International Community to a "Study on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities," undertaken by the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.)

## On the rights of indigenous populations

### Fundamental policy

Indigenous people in many countries and territories have become a part of the Bahá'í community, sometimes in great numbers. Their attraction to the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings would indicate, in itself, their desire to enter the mainstream of life in association with people of very different backgrounds. . . . Because of the Bahá'í belief in the unity of mankind, all people are recognized as valued members of society and play an equally important part in building world order. The talents and unique contribution of every individual and group is welcomed. . . . Our experience in making contact with indigenous people has confirmed the fact that they are often, as a group, quite cut off from the non-indigenous population. In many countries physical obstacles such as lack of roads and means of transportation as well as poor climatic conditions make access to indigenous people difficult. Because of their belief in the organic unity of mankind and that all members of the human family have the right to learn of their Faith, and to become, if they so choose, a part of this world community, Bahá'ís make every effort possible to overcome the difficulties that stand in the way of contact with all people. The welcome given and warm response of the indigenous people in many places has confirmed the fact that they are desirous of close

association with others who accept and express loving concern for them.

### Education

Bahá'ís believe that the recognition that all people have an important contribution to make and that men must be educated to the appreciation of the special and unique qualities of every human being in every group is vital if progress is to be made in this area [of education]. We also believe that the emphasis on the spiritual worth of the human being must become the foundation for the appreciation of the creative expression of each individual. In the Bahá'í view, the lack of understanding of the nature of man, the spiritual goals of life, and the resulting concern only with material production has created in many people a sense of inequality. There is, at the same time, a lack of appreciation of the contribution of indigenous and other disadvantaged peoples in the world. The attitudes taught in the Bahá'í Faith correct the perspective on the nature of man and result in constructive understanding of the true value and worth of all human beings.

The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, as they change the attitudes and beliefs of people create the desire for an understanding of the dominant culture of a country by indigenous peoples as well as an appreciation by indigenous people of their own potentialities. Bahá'ís, believing in all revealed religious truth of past ages as an unfoldment of one divine plan, have respect for the customs and traditions relating to these religions and cultures. They desire to preserve the cultural elements that contribute to the well-being of man. An effort is made to acquaint people with their own history and its importance in the overall pattern of man's history on earth.

### Information on educational establishments and institutions

In some countries where indigenous people have become Bahá'ís and especially in rural areas where an entire village or town may become Bahá'í, schools have been established. . . . and literacy as well as more inclusive and general educational programs have been developed. . . . Bahá'í schools in any area of the world are open to all, regardless of religious, racial or national background, on a first-come, first-served basis. In some communities, the school would be the result not of plans formulated outside the local group, but the natural outcome of new attitudes toward learning and the desire to progress in all ways. Often these schools represent the cooperation of many Bahá'ís representing

both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and include the contribution of peoples of totally unlike cultures.

### Language

Bahá'ís are translating, as quickly as possible, the Bahá'í literature into the many languages. There are over 1,600 tribes and ethnic groups represented in the Bahá'í community, and Bahá'í literature has already been translated into 571 different languages, many of which are languages and dialects of indigenous people. One principle in the Bahá'í teachings relates to the adoption of a universal auxiliary language; that is, in the future, one language will be chosen by the peoples of the world and taught to all people as an auxiliary to their mother tongue in order to further promote unity and understanding.

### Culture and cultural, social and legal institutions

There is no restriction on marriage in Bahá'í communities between indigenous and non-indigenous people. Race, nationality, former religion, class, etc., are not considered a basis for determining marriage, and "mixed" unions are considered natural. Prejudice against marriages between indigenous and non-indigenous people or against their offspring is not acceptable according to the Bahá'í Teachings. . . . The education which Bahá'ís recognize as essential in the elimination of prejudice is spiritual in nature; for it is the recognition of divine law, and obedience to it, that gradually roots out prejudice in the human mind.

### Religious rights and practices

Bahá'ís are forbidden to proselytize, or to offer material reward, to induce people to change their religious belief. The principle of the independent search for truth — the fact that each man is responsible for his own choices in this regard — prevents the conversion of people against their own will. Bahá'ís attempt to teach their Faith through deeds and words. If others are attracted and interested, Bahá'ís continue their efforts to teach. The principle of the oneness and unity of all revealed religions found in the Bahá'í writings makes divisiveness because of religion impossible, for it is the Bahá'í belief that religion is intended to create unity and understanding between people. It is the lack of understanding of this principle that has created division and intolerance and caused people to become alienated from each other.

(From information submitted by the Bahá'í International Community for a "Study of the Problem of



## On the rights of the family

As to the role of the family in a rapidly changing world, we must realize that the great forces of change are impelling us towards a single world society; it is in this context that the importance of the family must be considered. . . . Among the rights of children, in addition to the admirable amenities provided by many countries according to their capacity, including normal education, we feel the most imperative is instruction in human and spiritual virtues, with realization of and respect for the latent divine nature of man, so that free from all prejudice, they may grow up in turn to form their own families in the service of each other and of mankind. . . . Equality of rights, status and opportunities for women and men is recognized in the Bahá'í Faith as a divine law, but the education of girls and future mothers and therefore first educators of mankind is even more important. . . . Their obligations as parents constitute the first and foremost duty for husband and wife, equally binding on both. Parents must promote the oneness of mankind through example and develop in their children the growing consciousness that "the world is but one country and mankind its citizens."

(From a statement presented by the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations Inter-Regional Seminar on "The Family in a Changing Society: Problems and Responsibilities of its Members," London, England, July 18-31, 1973.)

## On the rights of women

The devotion of women to the industrial and agricultural sciences, for example, in a spirit of service to the greatest needs of mankind at the present time, will demonstrate their capability and ensure the recognition of equality in the social and economic areas of life. The promotion of the rights of women by means of demonstration by pressure groups may result in divisiveness; while constructive contributions will be recognized and appreciated. It is mentioned in the Bahá'í writings that "when the actions of women show their power there will be no need to proclaim it by words," and that when men recognize the equality of women "there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights."

The principle of equality in rights does not necessarily imply that men and women should, or must, exercise the same functions. There are differences between men and women in qualities and powers: mental alertness, intuition and the spiritual qualities of love and service are qualities in which women are strong. There is need for greater emphasis on these qualities and a better balance between spiritual and material powers if humanity is to progress. However, "the fact that there is not equality in functions between the sexes should not infer that either sex is inherently superior or inferior to the other, or that they are unequal in their rights."

Because women by nature are more inclined to peace, and find it more difficult than men to sanction war, as they participate in human affairs, gaining the right to vote and exercise this right, their voice will naturally influence humanity towards peace. The Bahá'í writings make clear that "when all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it."

Every person should be educated to the

realization of the organic oneness of mankind. Since it is a Bahá'í conviction that the good of any part is dependent upon the good of the whole, as long as women are held in an inferior position and do not attain equality with men, men too will be unable to "achieve the greatness which might be theirs." This principle operates in all areas, whether in relationship to race, class, or national differences in the world. As is true of the family — in which all the rights and prerogatives of each and every member must be preserved, while at the same time sustaining the unity of the family — the well-being of humanity is dependent on an equitable and just relationship between nations and the orientation of national governments towards the whole of mankind.

(From a statement submitted by the Bahá'í International Community to the Twenty-Fifth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, on "Suggestions and Proposals for International Women's Year," January 11, 1974.)

## On the rights of youth

In the Bahá'í view the source of human rights is Divine Law. Human rights are God-given rights and youth have the same, if not more, responsibility as all members of the human race to contribute towards the erection of the banner of human rights and the construction of a world where

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.

The first step in this direction is the arousal of the consciousness of youth to the oneness of mankind. Before unity and agreement are firmly established among the peoples of the world, we are convinced, nothing can be widely nor thoroughly affected. Thus youth must, through a process of self-enlightenment, instill themselves with a new global perspective and a new set of values—a set of values permeated by love, truthfulness, kindness, sincerity, and justice whose behavioral expression is the implementation of the principles of human rights. Such a new world can only be built by a new race of men and women.

(From a statement presented by the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations Seminar on "Youth and Human Rights," San Remo, Italy, August 28 - September 10, 1973.)

## On social and economic justice for all peoples

From a Bahá'í perspective, the moral and spiritual standards needed today to resolve the interlocking economic and social problems of our planet can rest on one foundation only: the consciousness in each individual of the organic oneness of humanity. We are not only citizens of our native land, but beyond that, of the whole world. We are part of the ecosystem; but an ecosystem both inner and outer; and it is from the inner world that come the all-encompassing values and attitudes which provide us with understanding, will, and power to raise the spiritual and physical quality of life of all peoples.

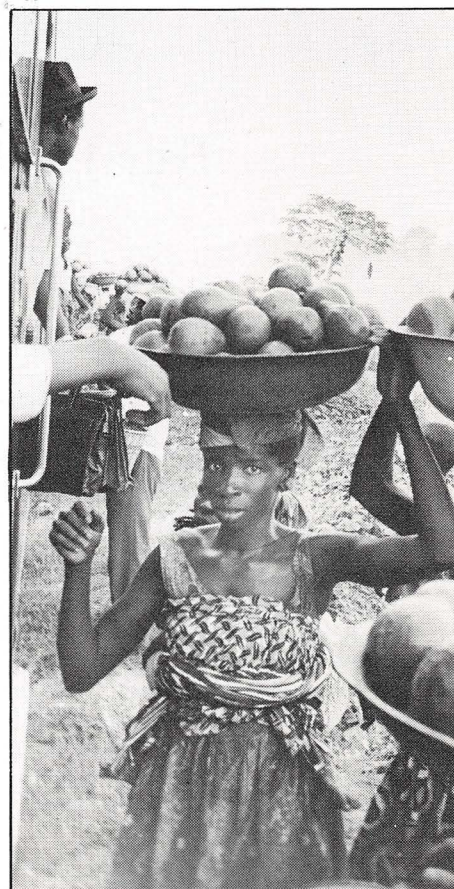
This conviction by the individual and society of the essential unity of the human race is the only viable standard today for social and economic justice. On it must depend the successful solution of the population problem — as of the problems of environment, poverty, disease, unemployment, etc. It means briefly

to consider the welfare of the community as one's own. . . . to regard humanity as a single individual, and one's own

self as a member of that corporeal form, and to know of a certainty that if pain or injury afflicts any member of that body, it must inevitably result in suffering for all the rest.

In this process, Bahá'í communities around the world are making a steady contribution. Comprising a cross-section of humanity distributed over 335 countries and territories, these communities live by the teachings, principles and laws of the Bahá'í Faith. Through the systematic abolition of all forms of prejudice; the adoption of equal opportunities, rights and privileges for men and women; an understanding of the essential unity and harmony of science and religion; an unfettered search for truth; the high regard for the mind and its formal training through universal compulsory education; the obligation to engage in a trade or a profession useful to society; and the understanding that work done in the spirit of service to one's fellowmen is, like prayer and meditation, worship — these Bahá'í communities and their members are constantly striving to effect changes in the individual and social consciousness that will hasten the coming of universal peace and the establishment of a world civilization.

(From the brochure, "One World, One People—A Bahá'í View," presented by the Bahá'í International Community to delegates attending the United Nations World Population Conference, Bucharest, Romania, August 19-30, 1974, and the United Nations World Food Conference, Rome Italy, November 5-16, 1974)



Photos courtesy United Nations/M. Tzovaras

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