

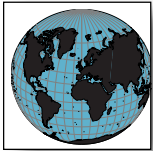


ONE COUNTRY

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens" – Bahá'u'lláh

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Newsletter of the Bahá'í
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Values and education are seen as key to action on sustainable development

Looking ahead to the upcoming World Summit for Sustainable Development, the International Environment Forum sees "soft" topics of "knowledge, values and education" as the means to create the commitment necessary to implement the sustainable development agenda.

HLUBOKA NAD VLTAVOU, Czech Republic — Much of the preparatory work for next year's World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) has focused on the political, technical, and financial details of bringing the world into better compliance with the vision of environmentally sound economic prosperity outlined at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

With widespread agreement that the goals set in 1992 have not been met, the discussion now at the United Nations and among its various partners is mainly about things like "time-bound actions," "tangible results," and "concrete measures" as they zero in on specific issues like debt relief, trade, technology transfer, freshwater resources, nuclear energy, climate change, desertification, consumption patterns and poverty eradication.

In October, however, a small group of environmental specialists took a decidedly different tack in analyzing how to help humanity change its unsustainable ways. Their emphasis was on how the rather more "soft" topics of "knowledge, values and education" relate to creating the commitment and action necessary to implement the sustainable development agenda at local, national and global levels.

The group, the International Environment Forum, is a non-governmental organization composed mainly of Bahá'ís from around the world who have a special expertise or interest in sustainable development. Founded five years ago, the IEF explores not only the technical and scientific solutions to environmental problems but also the potential benefits of new social, cultural and spiritual insights.

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Members of the International Environment Forum, at their fifth annual conference held November 2001.



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Belief and Tolerance: Lights Amidst the Darkness

[Editor's note: The following is adapted from a statement, entitled "Belief and Tolerance: Lights Amidst the Darkness," presented by the Bahá'í International Community at the International Consultative Conference on School Education in relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-discrimination, held in Madrid 23-25 November 2001.]

The human spirit must be free to know. Apprehending who we are, for what purpose we exist, and how we should live our lives, is a basic impulse of human consciousness. This quest for self-understanding and meaning is the essence of life itself. The innate and fundamental aspiration to investigate reality is thus a right and an obligation of every human being.

To search for truth—to see with one's "own eyes and not through the eyes of others"—is to undertake a process of spiritual discovery with a keen sense of justice and openness. It is by its very nature a process that is creative and transformative; if pursued with sincerity and fairness, it can bestow upon the seeker of knowledge "a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind." The rational soul is thereby awakened to the capacities of kindness, forbearance, and compassion that lie within it. Clearly, the human yearning for truth is a power that cannot be shackled, for without the freedom to know, human nature remains the prisoner of instinct, ignorance and desire.

In the midst of an age convulsed by moral crisis and social disintegration, the need for understanding about who we are as human beings is vital to the achievement of lasting peace and well-being. Historically, such insight about human existence and behavior has been provided by religion. Its indispensable function in addressing the universal inclination towards transcendence, and its essential role in civilizing human character throughout the ages, have been central to defining human identity as well as promoting social order. Through its cultivation of humanity's spiritual nature, religion has ennobled the lives of peoples everywhere and has engendered co-

hesion and unity of purpose within and across societies. Religion, in a very real sense, provides the warp and woof of the social fabric — the shared beliefs and moral vision that unite people into communities and that give tangible direction and meaning to individual and collective life. The right to exercise freedom of conscience in matters of religion and belief is therefore crucial not only to satisfying the spiritual promptings of the aspiring soul, but also to the enterprise of building harmonious and equitable patterns of living.

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and belief now codified in international human rights instruments directly finds its roots in the scriptures of the world's religions. This fact should assure each of us that truth need not be feared, as it has many facets and shelters all of our diverse expressions of faith. If, after all, people of religious faith believe that the Creator is eternal and the center of all existence, then they must also believe that the unfettered and genuine search for truth will lead to truth.

The elimination of all barriers to the free exploration, acceptance and expression of religious belief is critical to the objective of creating a universal culture of human rights. However, to clear the way for a constructive dialogue about the role of religion in establishing social justice, an historical accounting must be taken. That religion has been responsible for immense suffering cannot be denied. Much darkness and confusion can be attributed to those who have appropriated the symbols and instruments of religion for their own selfish purposes. Fanaticism and conflict poison the wells of tolerance and represent corrupt expressions of true religious values. Consequently, vigilance is necessary in safeguarding the transformative power of religion from the forces of extreme orthodoxy on one hand, and irresponsible freedom on the other.

"The purpose of religion," Bahá'u'lláh states "...is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife." In unity — a unity that embraces and honors

the full diversity of humankind — all problems can be solved. The building of a global society based on cooperation, reciprocity, and genuine concern for others is the ultimate expression of unified action. In short, the core spiritual values held in common by the world's religions contain within them the principal means for the reconciliation and advancement of the earth's peoples.

In order to play its part in overcoming the prejudices and suspicions now afflicting the world's faith communities, religious leadership must devote attention to these commonly shared spiritual precepts rather than doctrinal differences or claims of exclusivity. Let each religion demonstrate its capacity to guide the world's inhabitants to peaceful coexistence, moral rectitude and mutual understanding, rather than spreading enmity, fear and intolerance.

For the global Bahá'í community, the protection of human freedoms is part of a larger spiritual undertaking of fostering a set of attitudes and practices that truly release human potential. Genuine social progress, it believes, can flow only from spiritual awareness and the inculcation of virtue. From this perspective, the task of creating a universal ethos of tolerance is intimately bound up with a process of moral and spiritual development.

Education, then, emerges as an indispensable tool — a tool of active moral learning. There is no other way to raise up positive social actors who are builders of amity and agents of service and probity. "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value," Bahá'u'lláh urges, "Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom." These "treasures" must be consciously developed because even though nobility, goodness and beauty are innate aspects of our nature, human beings can fall prey to inclinations that corrupt the inner self and quench the light of love.

Educational curricula cannot therefore be solely concerned with the knowledge of physical and social phenomena, but must also be directed toward the goal of moral and spiritual empowerment. As a consequence of the deep connection between individual and social well-being, programs of education need to instill in every child a twofold moral purpose. The first relates to the process of personal transformation — of intellectual, material and spiritual growth. The second concerns the complex challenge of transforming the structures and processes

of society itself. To pursue this dual purpose of individual and collective transformation, specific moral capabilities must be developed. The capabilities of a moral person encompass the concepts, values, attitudes and skills that enable the person to make appropriate moral choices and to promote creative and cooperative patterns of human interaction. Underpinning all such capabilities is a commitment to discover and apply truth in every domain of human endeavor.

An integral feature of any educational initiative having a moral and spiritual focus must be the notion of the oneness and interdependence of the human race. Oneness and diversity are complementary and inseparable. That human consciousness necessarily operates through an infinite diversity of individual minds and motivations detracts in no way from its essential unity. Indeed, it is precisely an inhering diversity that distinguishes unity from homogeneity or uniformity. Hence, acceptance of the concept of unity in diversity implies the development of a global consciousness, a sense of world citizenship, and a love for all of humanity.

The rich religious heritage of humankind can also be viewed through the lens of unity. Bahá'u'lláh states: "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 world's religions can thus be seen to be one in their nature and purpose with each being a well-spring of knowledge, energy and inspiration. They each have served to unlock a wider range of capacities within human consciousness and society — a process that has impelled the human race toward moral and spiritual maturity.

Accordingly, curricula exploring the history and teachings of religion may wish to highlight the complementary aims and functions of the world's faith systems as well as the theological and moral threads that link them. In this regard, the right to investigate religion and the spiritual roots of human motivation can be understood to be a vital element of an integrating framework of collaboration and conciliation.

It is unfortunately the case that religious prejudice is a particularly virulent influence that continues to block human progress. Overcoming its corrosive effects will require deliberate and sustained effort. Toward this end, innovative and substantive programs of education are essential.*

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and belief now codified in international human rights instruments directly finds its roots in the scriptures of the world's religions. This fact should assure each of us that truth need not be feared, as it has many facets and shelters all of our diverse expressions of faith.

In India, the world's largest school succeeds by focusing on globalism and morality

Jagdish Gandhi and Bharti Gandhi, founders of the City Montessori School in Lucknow, India, standing in front of the main building of Gomti Nagar branch of the School, one of 20 branches in Lucknow. A quote from Bahá'u'lláh, "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens," is on the awning behind them.



With an enrollment of 22,612 students in 1999, City Montessori School won a place in the year 2000 Guinness Book of World Records as the world's largest school. It now has over 25,000 students, in grade levels ranging from pre-primary to college.

LUCKNOW, India — Fresh out of college and newly married, Jagdish Gandhi knew some 42 years ago that his main goal in life was to serve humanity. And he felt educating children would be a good way to do that.

So he borrowed 300 rupees (the equivalent of less than \$10), rented a couple of rooms, and founded City Montessori School in this historic provincial capital in northern India. The school's first class consisted of five students.

Little did Mr. Gandhi imagine that it would one day become the largest private school in the world — or that it would also become widely known for its distinctive emphasis on teaching students the value of world citizenship and religious tolerance.

"There are hundreds of other well-established schools here," said Mr. Gandhi, 66, who founded the school with his wife Bharti Gandhi in 1959. "So we never realized we were going to be the biggest school in the world — or that we would be so focused on imparting educational globalism."

With an enrolment of 22,612 students

in 1999, CMS, as the school is commonly known, won a place in the year 2000 Guinness Book of World Records as the world's largest school by enrollment. It now has over 25,000 students, in grade levels ranging from pre-primary to college.

According to parents and faculty here, the high enrollment statistic is not a fluke or the anomalous reflection of something like exceedingly low tuition fees or a high achieving sports team. Rather, they said, CMS has been successful at attracting students largely for two reasons: its reputation for academic excellence, and its distinctive program of moral education.

In terms of academics, CMS students consistently earn top rankings in government examinations and places in prestigious colleges and universities throughout India. For the 2000-2001 school year, for example, out of 1,192 CMS students taking the national standardized Indian school certificate examination, 1,179 passed and 1,099 of those passed in the "first division," with aggregate marks over 60 percent, which is considered to be "honors." Some 79 students

secured 90 percent marks and above.

Beyond academics, however, parents say they also choose to send their children to CMS because of its singular effort to provide students with the intellectual, moral and spiritual tools for success in an increasingly globalized world — a world in which the ability to get along in harmony with people from all religions, ethnic groups and nationalities will be of supreme importance.

“Exposure to globalism”

The school’s emphasis on this mission is clearly apparent. Its prospectus advertises “international interaction and exposure to globalism,” while banners and posters at CMS’s various school buildings proclaim slogans like: “Every child is potentially the light of the world.” Other banners emphasize principles of interfaith harmony and acceptance.

“Why do so many parents send their children here? The reason, I feel, is that parents want their children to be good,” said Mr. Gandhi. “Yes, they want them to have a good education. They want good results. And we give that. But they also want them to have good morals. And we strive to give that, too.

“Parents also know that their children will be exposed to an international atmosphere,” Mr. Gandhi added, noting that one distinct feature of the school is its hosting of various international conferences, on topics ranging from music and culture to computers and robotics, which bring many visitors from overseas.

“The children here are inhaling a vision — a vision of globalism,” continued Mr. Gandhi. “So that they can take up a position where they can change the world. I want our graduates to be self-motivating agents of social change, serving the best interests of the community and the world as a whole.”

Technically speaking, CMS is not so much a school as a school district, with some 20 branches spread throughout Lucknow. Each branch is a small, self-contained campus, usually with a main school building and several auxiliary structures. On the average, each branch hosts about 1,250 students.

Some of its campuses were built specifically for CMS, and the school’s infrastructure is among the most modern of the many private schools in Lucknow, if not India. Further, in their quality of construction and overall design and layout, the many campuses here might more accurately be compared to those of a small college or university rather than a combined elementary and

secondary school.

The curriculum covers all the traditional subjects required by students to pass India’s state examinations, but with an additional emphasis on moral education. And at CMS, moral education is very much equated with the concept of world citizenship and inter-religious harmony.

The source of moral values

The moral values promoted at CMS are drawn directly from the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith. In their early life together, Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi were greatly influenced by the humanitarian ideas of Mahatma Gandhi — an influence that, in part, led Mr. Gandhi to found CMS. In 1974, both Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi became Bahá’ís. Since that time they have increasingly introduced the Faith’s spiritual and social principles into the moral and spiritual curriculum at CMS.

This is not to say, however, that the school imposes the Bahá’í Faith on its students. Indeed, if anything, the school seeks to uphold the values taught by all religions and to respect the beliefs of all students and their parents, who reflect the religious diversity of Lucknow itself, which is roughly 70 percent Hindu, 25 percent Muslim, and 5 percent Christian and Sikh.

“We respect every religion in our schools,” said Bonita Joel, principal at CMS’s Indira Nagar branch, who is herself a Christian. “No one religion is taught in our school. It is a secular school. But we teach our children to respect every religion.”

Ms. Joel and others at CMS see this emphasis on religious pluralism as strongly linked to the school’s emphasis on globalism.

“We basically believe — the school

“The children here are inhaling a vision — a vision of globalism – so that they can take up a position where they can change the world. I want our graduates to be self-motivating agents of social change, serving the best interests of the community and the world as a whole.”

– Jagdish Gandhi

With more than 22,000 students, City Montessori School is listed by the 2000 Guinness Book of World Records as the world’s largest school by enrollment. Shown here is morning assembly at the Gomti Nagar branch of the school.





At City Montessori School, the arts are emphasized, as are moral themes that stress globalism and interfaith harmony. Shown here is a group of primary school students in a dance class at the Gomti Nagar branch.

professes — to break down narrow domestic walls and to reach out to other nations and cultures,” said Ms. Joel. “We feel with globalization taking place, the students can no longer be confined in their thinking to just their neighborhood or culture or their nations. They must reach out to the broader world.”

Ms. Sadhna Chooramani, the principal of the CMS Chowk branch, believes that emphasis on globalism and religious tolerance very much helps to prepare its students for success in the modern world.

“Our students have no inhibitions about going out and working with others, whatever their religion or background,” said Ms. Chooramani, who is 38 and a Hindu. “They accept people as they are. The feeling of being one with the human race is deep-rooted.”

Effect on communal harmony

Ms. Chooramani believes that CMS’s long-standing promotion of tolerance and oneness has contributed to the overall sense of communal harmony in Lucknow. In 1992, when riots broke out in many urban centres after fundamentalists destroyed the Babri Mosque in the city of Ayodhya, Lucknow escaped serious disturbances, and it is widely acknowledged as a peaceful city.

With such a large student body and its high level of parental involvement, CMS is almost certainly a contributor to that sense of harmony in Lucknow, Ms. Chooramani said.

“The people of Lucknow have started feeling that this concept of the oneness of mankind is the only way by which we can

have progress toward harmony and peace and a better way of living,” she said.

Ms. Chooramani organized a neighborhood meeting in 1992 during the Ayodhya crisis and made an appeal for calm. “I said that there is no religion that teaches this kind of violence,” she said.

Other branches of CMS likewise held similar meetings or activities during that period, and the school as a whole organized a general peace march. “We had hundreds of children marching, with a banner saying ‘God is one and all mankind is one,’” said Mrs. Bharti Gandhi, who serves as the Director of the CMS system. “And at that time, there were no casualties in Lucknow, even though in other places Hindus were killing Muslims and Muslims were killing Hindus.”

The school seeks to reinforce its ideal of internationalism not only through its curriculum but, as noted by Mr. Gandhi, by sponsoring various international conferences. On several of its larger campuses, hostel-type dormitories and food service facilities make hosting such events possible at a relatively low cost.

Each year now, the school hosts a variety of international events, including “Macfair International,” a mathematics and computer fair; “Celesta International,” an international music and culture festival; the “International Astronomy Olympiad”; a “Science Olympiad” on math, computers and robotics; an “International School-to-School Experience Exchange”; and a “Children’s International Summer Village Camp.” In 2000, CMS organized and/or hosted nine such events; 11 were sponsored in 2001.

The school also strives for educational innovation. It has adopted various management practices, such as Quality Circles, that encourage the generation and refinement of new ideas. It also has its own “innovation wing,” a 25-employee unit dedicated entirely to researching, developing and bringing into the CMS system new teaching methods. In that effort, the researchers draw on ideas both from around India and abroad.

For their part, parents are pleased with the direction the school has taken. The school’s enrolment continues to climb, reaching 25,172 this year.

“There are a number of schools that give a good education, but this one goes beyond, giving all of the best features: personal development, good academics and moral values,” said



Manoj Agrawal, a 35-year-old electrical engineer, who has two children at CMS.

"They bring out the best in the child," added Deepa Agrawal, his wife. "They are given opportunities and the right encouragement."

The Agrawals and other parents also praised the school's emphasis on strong relations between parents and teachers. Teachers are required to make periodic home visits and parents are invited to regular functions at the school. "It develops kind of rapport between the teacher and the parent," said Mrs. Agrawal.

Om Prakesh Patel, a 32-year-old landowner and farmer from the Kaimur District

some 390 kilometers away in Bihar State, felt so strongly about enrolling his son in CMS that he moved in with his wife's parents here in Lucknow — something that goes completely against tradition.

He and his wife, Sunita, decided on CMS because of its academic reputation, the high level of parent-teacher interaction and its emphasis on moral education.

"The moral emphasis is a plus point," said Mr. Patel, whose nine-year-old son Harsh has been attending CMS for five years. "We are a secular country and communalism is rising in India. So we feel we need a more religiously tolerant society. And moral ethics in this materialistic age are very important."*

ADCAM receives major grant to expand vocational training in the Amazon

MANAUAS, Brazil — As part of a government program to reduce unemployment, a Bahá'í-inspired development organization in the Amazon basin has received a major grant from the Brazilian Ministry of Education to expand its vocational education program here, with the goal of offering courses to more than 4,000 students per year by 2006.

The grant, equivalent to some US\$850,000, will allow the Associação para o Desenvolvimento Coesivo da Amazonia (ADCAM) [Association for the Cohesive Development of the Amazon] to build and equip a three-story technical education building on its 12-acre property in the Sao Jose suburb of Manaus. Construction is scheduled to begin in December, leading to completion of the building in July 2002.

"This is a major expansion of vocational training opportunities in the region, which is greatly needed because of the high level of unemployment in the Amazon basin, especially among young people," said Ferial Sami Farzin, general director of ADCAM. "Our goal is to strive to improve the quality of life and release the potential of the rural population so that they become leaders in the vanguard in support of their own development."

Under the terms of the grant contract, 50 percent of the money will be used for construction and the other 50 percent will be used to fit the building with equipment — such as computers, chairs, tables, instruments and blackboards. ADCAM will shoulder all operating costs, relying on tuition fees and voluntary contributions for its funding.

Under the terms of the contract, as well, at least 50 percent of the students will receive full scholarships.

The new building will be known as the Masrour Technology Institute. Current plans call for the building to include the following laboratories: design, computer, air-conditioning, language, music, ceramic, textile, chemical, environmental, electronic and esthetic. The building will have a total floor space of 2,800 square meters.

Initially, courses will be offered in business management, social development facilitation, and environmental technology. By 2003, courses in design, nutrition and air-conditioning technology will be added, as the teaching staff is expanded. A number of shorter, basic-level modular courses, in similar subjects, will also be offered.

By offering courses in the morning, afternoon and evening, the Institute hopes to make maximum use of the facility, offering as many sessions as possible. By 2006, the Institute expects to have a full complement of staff, with the capacity to serve approximately 640 students per year in the main subjects, and another 4,350 per year in the shorter, basic-level courses.

"ADCAM serves disadvantaged people who, for the most part, would be without any aid, education or social services if this development project did not exist," said Ms. Farzin. "It is located in the midst of one of the poorest neighborhoods in Manaus, serving people who would have no other opportunity to develop their innate capacities."*

Dr. Faramarz Ettehadieh, in his office at the headquarters of Imperial Finance Group in Linz, Austria.



Focusing on service, one man builds a financial empire on spiritual principle

LINZ, Austria — He wasn't penniless, but neither was Faramarz Ettehadieh wealthy by any stretch of the imagination when he founded Imperial Finance Group in the early 1970s — a company that grew during the 1980s and 1990s into a multi-faceted enterprise that has managed more than US\$1.1 billion in investments over the last 30 years.

His main capital was an idea. The young Iranian immigrant had figured out a way to create a new kind of investment for Austrians, allowing ordinary people to invest jointly in real estate without endless paperwork.

In other countries, this arrangement is known as a real estate trust. But in Austria, the concept was unknown — and thought to be impossible because of the country's complicated system of property laws.

Dr. Ettehadieh ignored those who said his goals were unattainable. "My whole life, whatever I've tried to do, people have always said it will not function, because of this or that objection," said Dr. Ettehadieh. "They think it is impossible to do something because they cannot visualize it. You must have a vision if you want to realize something and you must have the ability to trans-

fer this vision to others."

With money in hand from multiple small investors, along with some \$2,500 that he himself had earned selling insurance, Dr. Ettehadieh's first project was to purchase and develop a vacant parcel of land, bombed-out and undeveloped since World War II, in the heart of this northern Austrian city on the Donau River.

On that land in 1974, he built an eight-story office building. Today, it is the headquarters of Imperial Finance Group. And from that headquarters, Dr. Ettehadieh oversees an extensive financial and real estate investment company that manages the money of some 50,000 investors, operates eight posh hotels in Austria and Italy, and manages more than 70 small shopping centers in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Spain.

"He's very innovative and very dynamic," said Peter Muzik, editor-in-chief of *Wirtschaftsblatt*, which is today the only daily financial newspaper in Austria — and which was co-founded in 1995 by Dr. Ettehadieh. "He is financially very competent and he has found lots of new fields to work in."

For his part, Dr. Ettehadieh attributes his success to the straightforward adherence to

Faramarz Ettehadieh attributes his success at building a billion dollar investment company to the straightforward adherence to some simple rules of conduct — rules which he has derived from the spiritual principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

some simple rules of conduct — rules which he has derived from the spiritual principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

“At the end of the day, when you have thought everything through, there are some basic spiritual principles that, if you obey them, you will have long term success,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “And if you don't obey them, then in the long term you will not be successful.”

According to Dr. Ettehadieh, these principles boil down to the simple virtues that have been taught in every religion and that are today especially emphasized in the Bahá'í teachings. They include the importance of honesty in all dealings, a stress on absolute trustworthiness and an ideal of service over self-interest in all endeavors. The understanding of human oneness and the concept of justice as expressed in the Bahá'í teachings have also been guiding elements in virtually all his undertakings, he said.

For example, his initial ideas about putting together a real estate trust came partly from his understanding of the principles of equity and justice — leading him to think hard about how to create stable and yet profitable investments for ordinary men and women.

“For the poor or even the middle class, there is almost no possibility to purchase land or another type of real estate development,” he continued. “But in the type of real estate developments that we are doing, they can put aside every month a little bit of their income and so, over 20 or 30 years, have a substantial amount set aside in a solid investment.”

Dr. Ettehadieh has also sought to ensure that those investments will give the best return by focusing on another spiritual principle in the operation and management of those properties: service.

“With many companies, they think profits are the main goal,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “And that sometimes works well in the short term. But our approach has also been to make service to our customers as the main goal. And then to use profitability as an indicator that you are serving people well.”

Imperial's system of time-sharing hotels, which operate under the name of Club Cordial, is a good example of how a focus on service can lead to success, said Dr. Ettehadieh.

Traditional time-sharing programs require people to buy a specific time, usually in week-long increments, at a specific resort area. Marketed as both an investment and a way to hold down holiday costs, such programs have also been criticized because

they sometimes lock customers into a situation where they must go to the same place, at the same time of year, especially for low-priced programs.

Club Cordial allows customers to purchase and accumulate “points” in the system, instead of a owning a “deed” to a particular unit at a specific time and place. In this way, the customer/investor is more like a shareholder in the hotel's operation.

“In Europe, this system is absolutely unique,” said Dr. Ettehadieh, explaining that the idea emerged from a desire to put the customer first. “With other time-sharing systems, for example, you can buy points, but you don't accumulate real ownership shares. This all comes out of the principle of service.”

Entrepreneurship in a carpet shop

Dr. Ettehadieh was born in 1948 in Teheran, Iran, into a family whose adherence to the Bahá'í Faith goes back five generations on both sides. His father, a chemistry professor at the University of Teheran, died in an accident in 1951. In 1957, his mother brought him and his two siblings out of Iran.

Settling in Linz, Dr. Ettehadieh's mother established a small carpet shop, using the pension from her husband. “If you want to know where my sense of entrepreneurship came, it is probably from her,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “What I learned in my mother's carpet shop was to be persistent — not to give up. And to rely on God and to pray —

“With many companies, they think profits are the main goal. And that sometimes works well in the short term. But our approach has also been to make service to our customers as the main goal. And then to use profitability as an indicator that you are serving people well.”

– Faramarz Ettehadieh



Dr. Ettehadieh in front of the first building he developed, using innovative concepts for shared real estate ownership. He and his company, Imperial Finance Group, have gone on to build or purchase more than 70 shopping centers and eight hotels.

then a solution to every problem will come.”

At the time of his graduation from Kepler University in Linz in 1972 with a master's degree in economics, Austrian law placed restrictions on non-citizens that effectively prevented Dr. Ettehadieh from getting a job in banking. So he instead set up his own financial institution, built around the concept of real estate shares. And then he put the idea into practice, while pursuing a doctoral degree at Kepler, by putting together a group of shareholders to buy the land for his first building in Linz.

“I had found this land to buy, in the heart of town, but it belonged to many people, and everyone said it was not possible to bring everyone together to develop it,” Dr. Ettehadieh said. “Many of the owners had small quarrels with each other or other concerns. But in my mind, the principle was to promote unity. And so I brought them all together and got them to sign, in the presence of a notary, the required papers. This was the beginning of Imperial.”

His next step was to put together a group of small investors to finance the land's development — and to create a trust where shareholders can buy in or cash out as they please, at a fair price. “I knew from the Bahá'í writings that everything must be based on justice and equity, or it would not function,” said Dr. Ettehadieh.

The first project served as a model for others, and Dr. Ettehadieh gradually developed these concepts in endeavors like Club Cordial and in the construction of more than 70 small shopping centers around Austria, which are themselves distinctive for their placement outside urban centers.

“At first, no one wanted to finance these projects,” he said of the shopping centers. “People said no one wanted to get into a car to go shopping. But over time, the idea has been highly successful.”

The storms of success

As is often the case with successful people — and especially those with innovative ideas — Dr. Ettehadieh has faced more than his share of criticism and attacks.

At one point in the early 1990s, for example, the Austrian tax authority questioned whether Imperial's hotels were entitled to certain tax exemptions as a business. A national magazine, owned by a competing banking group, got wind of the issue and unfairly accused Dr. Ettehadieh and his company of tax evasion.

Subsequent audits and the tax courts both upheld Imperial's position, however, and other Austrian magazines and newspapers rallied around Dr. Ettehadieh, publishing a series of positive articles that vindicated his name and projects.

“There was nothing true in the original article,” said Alex Kaefer, who recently retired as an economic editor at the Austrian News Agency (APA) and has been a long-time friend of Dr. Ettehadieh. “And I can confirm that the principles of honesty and trustworthiness are two key words for him. He is well known in Austrian business and economic circles, and he is recognized and appreciated for those qualities.”

Partly motivated by his unhappy experience with negative press, Dr. Ettehadieh moved to start up a new daily financial newspaper, *Wirtschaftsblatt*, in 1995, in which he today retains a 6 percent ownership interest. “The whole line in founding *Wirtschaftsblatt* was to be constructive, not negative,” Dr. Ettehadieh. “We wanted to deliver information that is useful to the reader. We didn't want to deliver news that is not useful, like gossip.”

Dr. Ettehadieh's outlook for the future and direction remain distinctly positive.

Imperial has steadily expanded into other European countries, including Eastern Europe, aiming to offer higher levels of financial security to small investors. In 1992, Imperial founded Partner Bank to handle its growing work in portfolio management and private banking. Partner Bank is today legally and economically separate from Imperial and is owned entirely by an Ettehadieh family foundation, which itself was formed primarily for the purpose of promoting social and economic development in the global South.

In the mid-1990s, Dr. Ettehadieh founded the Two Wings Network, a non-governmental organization that seeks to establish North-South partnerships aimed at raising the capacity of women. [See page 11]

Married for more than 23 years, Dr. Ettehadieh also treasures the close relationship he has with his wife and their children. “My wife, Bahia, is trained in architecture and, in addition to consulting generally about my work, she has been involved in the interior design of our hotels,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “We have a life of real partnership in terms of supporting and encouraging each other to develop our capacities to the utmost, to have a harmonious family life, and to live with a spirit of service to society.”*

Two Wings Network – a development effort that combines financial acumen with service to humanity

LINZ, Austria — Among the endeavors that financier Faramarz Ettehadieh is perhaps most proud of is the Two Wings Network, a non-governmental organization aimed at supporting development projects that focus on the education and empowerment of women in the Global South.

Founded by Dr. Ettehadieh in 1996, the Network is composed of a board of directors representing individuals in both the North and the South, with the goal of increasing the sense of partnership between the developed and the developing world.

“In contrast to many development agencies, where the North tells the South what is good for it, we finance only projects where men and women from the South have also been consulted,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “That is the essence of the idea of having a board composed of members from both regions of the world.”

The name for the Network comes from a quote in the Bahá’í writings that compares men and women to the “two wings” of a bird and says that until both wings are equal, the “full flight” of human development will be impossible.

“Our focus is on projects that have a long term impact,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “And when someone gets a good education, especially a woman, it gives her the power to change her life and the life of her family.”

The Network also makes use of some innovative financial instruments to help raise funds for development projects in the South, in cooperation with Partner Bank, a private bank established by Dr. Ettehadieh in 1992.

Specifically, Partner Bank offers a specialized “Two Wings stock basket” to its investors. The stock basket offers investors an opportunity to automatically donate their stock dividends to the Two Wings Network, for the purpose of funding development projects in the South.

In 2001, the readers of *risControl* magazine, a publication for insurance and financial service professionals, chose the Two Wings stock basket as its product of the year.

The Two Wings stock basket is built around a collection of high quality stocks, from global companies with long records of security and steady growth, said Dr. Ettehadieh.

“For the Two Wings basket, we try to select companies that have long track records of continuous development, with a global strategy that enables them to outperform other companies,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “We also avoid companies that are involved primarily in military production or with poor environmental records.”

So far, about 1,000 investors have purchased shares in the Two Wings stock basket. Of those, about 25 percent have decided to donate their dividends to the Network. Over the last six years, this has raised some US\$300,000 for the Network.

That money has been disbursed to a dozen projects

around the world. Specifically, projects in Bolivia, Chad, China, Colombia, India, Indonesia and Zambia have received money.

“Of special significance is the fund’s sustainability and growth rate,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “Because the dividends are paid quarterly, the development partners in the South can count on sustainable support over the next decade and so can embark on long term projects. And the growth rate is double-digit because of the growth of the investment and the growing numbers of the investors.”

Partner Bank also offers other stock baskets built around specific moral themes, so that investors can target the kinds of companies and activities that they care about. It offers, for example, a Health Care basket and a Lifestyle basket. In each case, investors can donate the “dividends for development,” which is a Partner Bank slogan.

“Over the last thirty years I have visited 75 countries and traveled to remote areas and villages,” said Dr. Ettehadieh, reflecting on his long time concern with studying and promoting social and economic development in the Global South. “Based on my observations I realized that many development projects lack a consultative manner with the people they want to serve and tend to impose Western solutions.

“I feel education is the main key for development,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “This is why we supported the development of schools in Africa, especially, that target girls who lack access to education.

“Observing the great need of education and the limited resources they have in the South, we developed the idea of bringing together people with the intention to support development in the southern hemisphere,” said Dr. Ettehadieh. “By applying our capability of networking in the financial services business we try to multiply our resources.”*



Dr. Ettehadieh and his wife, Bahia, with school children in Colombia.

Values and education are seen as key to action on sustainable development

IEF, continued from page one

"...it is clear that the governments and peoples of the world have not shown sufficient commitment to make firm steps on the path to sustainability. This situation calls for serious reflection on the reasons for this lack of commitment, going beneath the standard answers of lack of resources, of faulty incentive structures, etc., to explore the fundamentals of human society."

– Arthur Dahl

The event was the IEF's fifth international conference, held 19-21 October 2001 at the Townshend International School here in South Bohemia. Some 20 IEF members gathered here and dozens of others participated via the Internet. The theme of the conference was "Knowledge, Values and Education for Sustainable Development."

"While much progress has been made to implement the Rio agreements and Agenda 21, at least in some regions, it is clear that the governments and peoples of the world have not shown sufficient commitment to make firm steps on the path to sustainability," said Arthur Dahl, president of the IEF. "This situation calls for serious reflection on the reasons for this lack of commitment, going beneath the standard answers of lack of resources, of faulty incentive structures, etc., to explore the fundamentals of human society."

The three-day program included a speech by Professor Bedrich Moldan of Charles University, who is the former Czech Minister of Environment, along with various talks by IEF members and much interaction among participants on the points presented.

In the end, participants concluded that the softer issues of values and education are in fact wholly complementary with the kind of technical and scientific issues most often related to sustainable development — and more: they are essential.

"Global moral minimum"

In a keynote address entitled "Knowledge and Indicators for Sustainable Development," Prof. Moldan raised the idea of promoting or establishing a kind of "global moral minimum" system of values for the environment.

"Sustainable development is many things to many people and that is the problem," said Prof. Moldan, who chaired the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development last spring. "One way to overcome this difficulty is to extract some ideas which could be shared by all peoples, whether they are bankers from Switzerland or islanders

from Tonga, etc."

Dr. Dahl, in a talk entitled "Values as the Foundation for Sustainable Behavior," developed this idea further, saying that the weakness in efforts to achieve sustainable development is in the implementation, something that can best be addressed by understanding the role of values as determinates of behavior.

"There has been a lack of political will at a governmental level, lack of incentives in the private sector, and lack of sufficient willingness to change individual behavior," said Dr. Dahl, who is director of the coral reef unit of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). "Since motivation is intimately linked to values, it is worth examining what role values can play in achieving more sustainability."

To achieve sustainability, Dr. Dahl said, several types of values need to be considered: values with respect to fellow human beings; the value attached to material things and consumption; the importance given to the environment; and the purpose of life.

He said for example that if the purpose of life is defined as the fulfillment of individual material needs, the resulting value set will be very different from one that sets higher humanistic goals or that defines the real purpose of life as the acquisition of spiritual qualities.

Values the missing ingredient

"Values, or the application of spiritual principles, have been the missing ingredient in most past approaches to sustainable development," Dr. Dahl said. "Grand declarations and detailed action plans, even when approved by all the governments, do not go far if people are not motivated to implement them in their own lives, and if institutions are not made responsible to carry them out."

"The exciting thing about addressing sustainability at the level of values is the potential to create self-generating human systems building a more sustainable and thus ever-advancing civilization," Dr. Dahl said. "The World Summit on Sustainable

The official website of the International Environment Forum is: www.bcca.org/ief/



International Environment Forum (IEF) members Irma Allen of Swaziland, left, and Arthur Dahl of Switzerland. An environmental education specialist, Dr. Allen received a "Global 500" award for environmental achievement in 1988 from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Dr. Dahl, who is president of the IEF, works as director of UNEP's coral reef unit.

Development should include this dimension in its agenda."

Victoria Thoresen, who has worked to develop curricula on sustainable development in Norway, gave a talk on "Education: A Constraint or a Catalyst to Sustainable Development." Her main point was that education has always been key in the transmission of societal values — and that any effort to promote a change towards more sustainable values will need to consider systems of education.

"Education occurs in modern society in several arenas," said Dr. Thoresen, an assistant professor at the University College of Hedmark in Norway and an IEF member. "No longer do families, churches, schools and politics have a monopoly on the socialization process. Commercial interests, mass media and private organizations have entered the fray with full force. They select values and nurture norms, present knowledge and stimulate behavior patterns and lifestyles in ways which are as effective, if not more so, than the socialization processes occurring in homes and schools."

Currently, Dr. Thoresen said, educational systems tend to be much more occupied with transmission of cultural heritage than preparing learners for functioning in the present and future. They also tend to present national and regional perspectives to the detriment of global perspectives; deal with abstractions and theory without sufficiently relating these to the learners' own everyday life experience; be highly subject-specific, thereby, to a great extent, ignoring the interrelatedness of processes, systems and information; and, lastly, encourage competition rather than cooperation.

As an alternative, Dr. Thoresen said, educators who have attempted to teach values-based education for sustainable development work with the following goals and guidelines: the recognition of new patterns of cognitive understanding and moral development amongst today's children; the awareness of children and youth's pressing need to clarify their own identity and purpose in life and to be motivated to achieve lofty, selfless goals; the importance of helping children and youth to gain insight into the processes and systems behind sustainable development; and the value of learning how to find, sort and apply information.

"Schools have the responsibility, together with parents and religious groups, to provide ways of stimulating reflection by the students on their identity and purpose in life," said Dr. Thoresen. "Schools face the challenge of teaching the concepts of world citizenship and encouraging attitudes that foster world unity. Are, for example, the lifestyles which are marketed viable, meaningful and morally consistent? Do they contribute to sustainable development? Empowering children and youth to become conscientious, environmentally aware consumers is to contribute to the 'humanizing' of development...[and] individual attainment must be subservient to mankind's collective needs." She suggested that the values and principles of the Bahá'í Faith, as well, could create such empowerment.

Virtual network

Much time during the conference was devoted to a general discussion of the themes as they were presented, with the idea that the

"Sustainable development is many things to many people and that is the problem. One way to overcome this difficulty is to extract some ideas which could be shared by all peoples, whether they are bankers from Switzerland or islanders from Tonga, etc."

– Bedrich Moldan,
chair, UN
Commission on
Sustainable
Development

“Change has always been initiated in small groups and spread to encompass others. In modern society, transparency and knowledge of decision-making processes and systems are as important as numbers when interest groups or lobbyists are trying to get their points across.”

– Victoria Thoresen

real strength of the IEF is its capacity for networking and the interchange of ideas.

“It was a comparatively small meeting, having only about 20 participants, but the presentations and contributions to discussions seemed to me on a pretty high level,” said Friedo Zoelzer, Academic Director of Townshend International School, where the conference was held.

Participants included researchers, teachers, students and professionals from a wide range of disciplines, and practitioners in the field of environment and sustainable development. Students and staff from the Townshend School sat in on some sessions. Evening programs, including music, a dance workshop and a drama on an environmental theme were provided by the School. The Townshend School was founded 1992 as a private initiative of individual Bahá’ís. Fully accredited, it offers classes from grade 8 through 13 and currently has an enrollment of about 125 students.

An electronic version of the conference was offered for those who could not come to the Czech Republic. Participants received by e-mail advance versions of the papers presented and summaries of the discussions, and were able to send in comments to be read at the conference.

Peter Adriance, an IEF board member who participated from afar, said the organization has been intentionally structured as a virtual international network. “This type of organization would have been impossible just a few years ago, but the advent of the

Internet is really what makes it possible,” said Mr. Adriance, who serves as NGO Liaison for the Bahá’ís of the United States, with an emphasis on issues of sustainable development. “At last year’s IEF annual conference, for example, there were 85 registered participants — but better than 60 of them were participating from some 30 countries via the Internet.

“The whole purpose of the IEF is to promote a discourse on how the Bahá’í teachings can be applied in addressing issues of environmental conservation and sustainable development,” said Mr. Adriance. “Many of us are involved professionally in the field, but others are not, yet we can all learn from each other and share our projects and programs. It is also a way to raise awareness of environmental issues in the Bahá’í community — and to stimulate environmental education in the community at large.”

Dr. Thoresen, an IEF member since 1999, believes that the group can have an impact on decision-making at the international level, as well. “Change has always been initiated in small groups and spread to encompass others,” said Dr. Thoresen. “In modern society, transparency and knowledge of decision-making processes and systems are as important as numbers when interest groups or lobbyists are trying to get their points across. IEF, though few in numbers, knows how to network and establish both cordial relations with central figures as well as how to maintain a certain grassroots contact.”*

Gianni Ballerio, longtime Bahá’í International Community representative to the United Nations, passes away



Gianni Ballerio, representing the Bahá’í International Community at a UN conference in 1982.

GENEVA, Switzerland – Giovanni (Gianni) Ballerio, 58, who represented the Bahá’í International Community at the United Nations here and in New York since 1981, lost his battle with cancer on 13 December 2001.

An Italian, born and raised in Asmara, Eritrea, Mr. Ballerio was a tireless champion of human rights, including the rights of women and girls. Since 1992 he represented the Bahá’í International Community’s Office for the Advancement of Women in Geneva and became well-known among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as one of a minority of men at UN conferences promoting the equality of women.

His warmth, vivacity and clear understanding of the issues earned him the re-

spect and admiration of his many contacts in United Nations agencies and among the NGO community. He was also responsible for initiating and developing working relations between the Bahá’í International Community and the World Health Organization and for establishing a permanent Bahá’í representation at the UN in Geneva.

The international governing body of the Bahá’í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, called Mr. Ballerio “a faithful, warm-hearted servant of Bahá’u’lláh whose cheerful spirit and sense of duty illumined his devoted services...”

He leaves behind his wife, Gail Madjzoub, and three children from a previous marriage: Leo, William and Marion Ballerio.*

Review: *A Woman's Place*

Review, continued from back page

church. "Throughout Christian history, both male and female Christians have argued that God's design for creation is egalitarian rather than hierarchical."

She quotes St. Paul in Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

In an essay on Islam, Souad Ibrahim Saleh likewise argues that although the treatment of women in Islam has been less than equal, it is possible to reinterpret the Quran and the traditional sayings of Muhammad to show that Muslim women must be treated at least as moral equals with Muslim men.

"Islam gives the duty of reforming the society on all believers, males and females alike," writes Ms. Saleh, a professor at the Women's College, Al-Azhar University, in Cairo. "Both of them are responsible and none is exempted because this duty is not based on gender, but rather on the fact that they are both part of humanity... In other words, Muslim women and men have an equal role to play in society."

The book's final essay, "Women, Social Action, and the Common Good" by Janet Khan, provides a Bahá'í viewpoint on women's role in public life. In many ways it stands in sharp contrast to the other essays inasmuch as there is little sense of apology or justification. That is because the Bahá'í Faith not only explicitly upholds the spiritual equality of women and men in its sacred scriptures but also unequivocally states that this equality must today be "expressed in both individual and social practice," as Dr. Khan puts it.

"Indeed, the promulgation and implementation of the principle of the equality of the sexes throughout the world is one of the primary aims of the Bahá'í Faith," writes Dr. Khan, who works in the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre.

The worldwide Bahá'í community has largely lived up to this principle in its practice, Dr. Khan writes, noting that women form a high percentage of the elected leadership of Bahá'í governing councils at the local and national levels, relative to society at large. "In 1997, it was found that 32 percent of the members of the 172 Bahá'í National Assemblies were women," she writes.

Worldwide, in national civil legislatures, the figure is 13 percent for women, she notes.

Dr. Khan further points out that the Bahá'í scriptures indicate that women have an essential role to play in the establishment of world peace. "In the Bahá'í view, the expression of the equality of men and women is a vital and indispensable component in the spiritual and social evolution of humanity," she writes.

Taken as a whole, *A Woman's Place* offers a powerful counterweight to those who might say that the historic oppression of women by male religious leaders cannot be reversed. Bahá'ís believe, of course, that humanity has entered a new era, one in which the equality of women and men has been fully revealed as a spiritual principle and in which its social practice will ultimately be fully realized. The essays in this book show how those religions that were revealed before humanity's entry into this new age can be reinterpreted so as to become congruent with the new reality.*

UN again expresses concern over continuing discrimination against Iran's Bahá'ís

UNITED NATIONS — For the 16th time in 17 years, the United Nations General Assembly has expressed "concern" over human rights violations in Iran, specifically noting the "still-existing discrimination" against the Bahá'í community of Iran.

By a vote of 72 to 49, with 46 abstentions, the Assembly passed a resolution on 19 December 2001 that calls on the Islamic Republic of Iran to "eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religious grounds" and, more specifically, asks the Iranian Government to fully implement previous United Nations recommendations that the Bahá'ís be granted complete freedom to practice their religion.

The resolution followed a report issued in August by the UN Human Rights Commission's special representative on Iran, Professor Maurice Copithorne, that indicated that the 300,000-member Iranian Bahá'í community continues to experience discrimination in the areas of education, employment, travel, housing and the practice of religious activities.

"Bahá'ís are still, in effect, prevented from participation in religious gatherings or educational activities," wrote Prof. Copithorne.*

"Indeed, the promulgation and implementation of the principle of the equality of the sexes throughout the world is one of the primary aims of the Bahá'í Faith."

— Janet Khan

Reinterpreting religion without reference to gender

A Woman's Place: Religious Women as Public Actors

Edited by Azza Karam

World Conference on Religion and Peace

New York

There is a famous Chinese saying that women hold up half of the sky. But such has not always been acknowledged by the leadership of most religions, which have traditionally been dominated by men.

A new book published by the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) seeks to in some ways to address this imbalance, by showcasing the contributions of women of faith in the public arena.

A Woman's Place: Religious Women as Public Actors is a compilation of 11 essays by women representing a wide variety of religious traditions, specifically: African traditional spirituality, the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Chinese traditional religion, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism.

Edited by Azza Karam, director of WCRP's Women's Program, the essays seek to document the achievements of ordinary women within their respective religious communities and also to demonstrate that religious women are "capable, articulate, active, aware, and totally committed."

The book succeeds in achieving these goals — and more. The essays vary greatly in their styles and approaches. Some put forward a largely historic overview of the role of women in their religious communities while others draw heavily on scripture, offering a reinterpretation that upholds a wider role for women. Taken all together, however, the compilation goes far to show that the underlying message in virtually all of the world's major religions can be understood without reference to gender.

In her essay on "Buddhist Attitudes Toward Women," Rita Gross observes first that "the core teachings of this 2,500-year-old tradition are gender-free and gender-neutral", but "this has not meant that women and men have been accorded the same status or expected to accomplish the same things throughout most of Buddhist history."

Ms. Gross says that Buddhism's emergence in a male-dominated culture led to religious practice that was often patriarchal if not outright misogynistic. Nevertheless, she writes, it is today possible to reinterpret Buddhism so that its practice is no longer driven by a "subtle or obvious pref-

erence for men and their interests."

This has been made possible, she writes, partly by the emergence of large groups of Buddhist lay people who define themselves as serious practitioners but who also participate in ordinary domestic and economic activities. Those lay activities, Ms. Gross writes, are more traditionally in the "women's sphere" — and have led to the development of a "large and strong core of women teachers who are well educated, well practiced, articulate and not male-identified."



Writing about Protestant Christianity, Nelia Beth Scovill argues that fundamentalist Christian doctrines that marginalize women are likewise based on a largely patriarchal interpretation of scripture — and are not necessarily directly supported by the Bible itself.

"While the theological tradition supporting women's subordination has dominated the history of Christian theology, it has not been the only tradition," writes the Rev. Scovill, a minister in the Disciples of Christ

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