

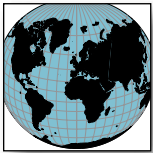


# ONE COUNTRY

“The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens” — *Bahá’u’lláh*

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International Community  
October-December 2008  
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## In The Hague, religious leaders pledge support for universal human rights

At an international interfaith conference on “Faith in Human Rights,” religious leaders pledge to uphold the Universal Declaration and freedom of religion or belief



*Representatives and leaders from the Bahá’í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, indigenous religions, Islam, and Taoism, along with the Netherlands’ Queen Beatrix gathered in The Hague.*

**T**HE HAGUE, Netherlands — As the seat of the International Court of Justice, the Permanent Court of Arbitration and several other institutions devoted to the nonviolent resolution of conflict, the Peace Palace here stands as more than a majestic building — for many it also symbolizes the ideal that it is possible to build a world without war.

In that light, the Palace seems an appropriate place for the signing of a ground-breaking statement on human rights and religious freedom by a group of religious leaders representing every major independent world religion.

Gathered for the signing were representatives of the Bahá’í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, indigenous religions, Islam, and Taoism. Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands was also present on 10 December 2008, a date which intentionally coincided with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The resulting 2008 Faith in Human Rights statement represents the first time such a diverse and high level group of religious representatives has explicitly endorsed the UDHR, and specifically stressed the importance of the freedom of religion or belief.

“We consider the freedom to have, to retain and to adopt a religion or belief of one’s personal choice, without coercion or inducement, to be an undeniable right,” says the statement.

The statement also emphasizes the universality of human rights.

“The rights, freedoms and obligations laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are recognized all over the world,” says the statement. “Nevertheless, they are not fully accepted everywhere. We observe tensions with regard to a number of specific rights, such as the

*Hague Conference, continued on page 13*

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## Redefining the challenge of climate change

*[Editor's note: The following Perspective editorial is adapted from a working paper of the Bahá'í International Community titled, "Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the Challenge of Climate Change," which was presented at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held 1-12 December 2008 in Poznan, Poland. The full paper can be read at <http://bic.org/statements-and-reports/bic-statements/08-1201.htm>]*

Decades of research, advocacy and policy-making have provided a strong scientific basis for action on climate change, have raised public awareness, and have provided norms and principles to guide decision-making. Building on this foundation, the governments of the world have embarked on a major negotiating effort aimed at charting the course of cooperative action on climate change. The negotiations focus on a shared vision for long-term cooperative action as well as a long-term global goal for emission reductions, which is to be met through mitigation of climate change, adaptation to its impacts and the mobilization of technological and financial resources.

Yet, in the face of the destructive impacts of climate change — exacerbated by the extremes of wealth and poverty — a need for new approaches centered on the principles of justice and equity is apparent. The challenge before the world community is not only a technical one but a moral one, which calls for the transformation of thoughts and behaviors so as to allow our economic and social structures to extend the benefits of development to all people.

We assert that the principle of the oneness of humankind must become the ruling principle of international life. This principle does not seek to undermine national autonomy or suppress cultural or intellectual diversity. Rather, it makes it possible to view the climate change challenge through a new lens — one that perceives humanity as a unified whole, not unlike the cells of the human

body, infinitely differentiated in form and function yet united in a common purpose which exceeds that of its component parts. This principle constitutes more than a call for cooperation; it seeks to remold anachronistic and unjust patterns of human interaction in a manner that reflects the relationships that bind us as members of one human race.

A response to climate change will require profound changes at the level of the individual, the community, and the nations of the world. To complement the processes of change already underway, we consider the concrete ways in which the principle of the oneness of humanity could be operationalized at these levels in facing the challenges of climate change.

**The Individual Level: Engaging children and youth.** A fundamental component of resolving the climate change challenge will be the cultivation of values, attitudes and skills that give rise to just and sustainable patterns of human interaction with the environment. The engagement of children and youth will be particularly important as this population will be called upon to exercise leadership and address the dramatic and complex challenges of climate change in the decades to come. It is at a young age that new mindsets and habits can be most effectively cultivated.

In practical terms, this means that girls and boys must be afforded access to the same curricula, with priority given to the girl child who will one day assume the role of educating future generations. The curriculum itself must seek to develop in children the capacity to think in terms of systems, processes and relationships rather than in terms of isolated disciplines. Students must also be given the concrete skills to translate their awareness into action. This can be accomplished, in part, through incorporating an element of public service into curricula, thereby helping students to develop the ability to initiate projects, to inspire action, to engage in collective decision-making, and to cultivate their sense of dignity and self-worth.

**The Community Level: Advancing gender equality and engaging religious communities.** On the community rests the challenge of providing the setting in which decision-making can occur peacefully and individual capabilities can be channeled through collective action. One of the most pervasive social challenges besetting communities around the world is the marginalization of girls and women — a condition further exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. Around the world, women are largely responsible for securing food, water, and energy for cooking and heating. Scarcity of resources arising from climate change intensifies the woman's burden and leaves less time to earn an income, attend school or care for the family. Moreover, natural disasters exact a heavier toll on women given their lack of access to information and resources, and, in some cases, their inability to swim, drive or even leave the house alone. It would be a mistake, however, to cast women as the victims or simply as under-resourced members of society; they represent perhaps the greatest source of untapped potential in the global effort to overcome the challenges of climate change. Their responsibilities in families, in communities, as farmers, and as stewards of natural resources make them uniquely positioned to develop strategies for adapting to changing environmental conditions. Women's distinct knowledge and needs complement those of men, and must be duly considered in all arenas of community decision-making. In light of this reality, the United Nations must give more attention to the gender dimensions of climate change.

As well, religious communities and their leaders bear an inescapable and weighty role in the climate change arena, especially given their tremendous capacity to mobilize public opinion and their extensive reach in the most remote communities around the world. By many measures, increasing numbers of religious communities are consistently lending their voice and resources to efforts to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change — they are educating their constituencies, providing a scriptural basis for ethical action, and leading or participating in efforts at the national and international levels. This role, however, must now unfold in the context of an emerging conversation — a rapprochement — between the discourses of science and religion. The time has come for the entrenched dichotomy between these two systems of knowledge to be earnestly re-

examined. Both are needed to mobilize and direct human energies to the resolution of the problem at hand: methods of science facilitate a more objective and systematic approach to problem solving while religion concerns itself with those moral inclinations that motivate action for the common good.

**The National and International Levels: Building foundations for cooperative action.** At a basic level, governments bear the responsibility of adhering to stated commitments and abiding by the rule of law. This level of commitment is essential for the cultivation of trust and relationship-building among nations, particularly as governments embark on the negotiation of a new global climate change agreement.

While it is acknowledged that any effective climate change policy needs to be rooted in a global perspective, even this enlargement of the sphere of responsibility has not sufficiently moved governments to act. This perspective must now evolve to reflect the essential connectedness and common fate of a humanity that for too long has struggled against a worldview that emphasized sovereignty, ascendancy, and competition. Efforts to reconceptualize sovereignty, from an absolute right to a responsibility, signal that a shift in consciousness towards greater degrees of global solidarity is already underway. The solution to climate change exceeds the capacities and resources of any one nation and requires the full cooperation of all nations, each according to their means.

Governments now need to forge an agreement commensurate with the problem at hand and one that meets the needs of societies most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The agreement needs to put in place the requisite institutional frameworks as well as establish international mechanisms capable of mobilizing financial resources and accelerating innovation needed to transition to a low carbon society. The more economically developed nations need to display leadership consistent with their historic responsibility and economic capacity and commit to significant emission reductions. Developing nations, in a manner consistent with their capacities and development aspirations, must contribute through efforts to transition to cleaner development pathways. This is the time for leaders from all spheres of human endeavor to exercise their influence to identify solutions, which makes it possible for mankind to address this challenge and, in so doing, chart a sustainable course to global prosperity.\*

**A response to climate change will require profound changes at the level of the individual, the community, and the nations of the world. To complement the processes of change already underway, we consider the concrete ways in which the principle of the oneness of humanity could be operationalized at these levels in facing the challenges of climate change.**



## Ethics, economic transformation stressed at UN conference on climate change

Participants in a panel discussion on the “Moral and ethical issues that must be faced in implementing the Bali roadmap.” The discussion was a side event during the UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan, Poland, in December 2008. Left to right are: Dane Scott, Petra Tschakert, Peter Adriaance, and Brendan Mackey.



**“There is no contradiction between economic growth and ambitious climate policies. On the contrary, the policies needed to address climate change are the very policies that can help to rebalance and revitalize our economies.”**

— Anders Fogh Rasmussen,  
Prime Minister of Denmark

POZNAN, Poland — The idea that the global response to climate change could offer a tool for social and economic transformation emerged as a significant theme at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held here in December.

“Managing the global financial crisis requires massive global stimulus,” said UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in an address on 12 December 2008, the last day of the conference. “A big part of that spending should be an investment—an investment in a green future. An investment that fights climate change, creates millions of green jobs and spurs green growth.”

Government ministers and other top officials from nearly 200 nations gathered here for negotiations aimed at reaching an ambitious global climate change deal next year. The two-week event marked the halfway point in efforts to reach agreement on a successor pact to the Kyoto Protocol, the legally binding regime for reducing greenhouse gas emissions whose first commitment period ends in 2012.

Many at the event expressed concern that the global economic crisis could upstage the issue of climate change. “I am fearful that

the movement to address climate change is losing momentum as a consequence of the economic crisis that is engulfing the world,” said President Bharrat Jagdeo of Guyana.

Others, like Mr. Ban, suggested the economic crisis should be considered a transformational opportunity.

“There is no contradiction between economic growth and ambitious climate policies,” said Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Prime Minister of Denmark. “On the contrary, the policies needed to address climate change are the very policies that can help to rebalance and revitalize our economies.”

Government ministers at a high-level round table similarly agreed that the “right to development — to sustainable development — also presents an opportunity to transform the global economy, decoupling economic growth from emissions growth, strengthening climate resilience, diversifying economies and reducing vulnerability.”

The conference drew over 9,250 participants, including almost 4,000 government officials; 4,500 representatives of UN bodies and agencies, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations; and more than 800 accredited members of

the media, according to the Earth Negotiations Bulletin.

In its contributions to the Conference, the Bahá'í International Community stressed the importance of addressing the ethical and moral issues that surround global warming and its impact on the world's peoples.

"In the face of the destructive impacts of climate change — exacerbated by the extremes of wealth and poverty — a need for new approaches centered on the principles of justice and equity is apparent," the BIC said in a working paper issued at the Conference.

The paper, "Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the Challenge of Climate Change," also suggested that the threat of climate change offers the possibility for the transformation of global economics. [See page 2]

"It is the opportunity to take the next step in the transition from a state-centered mode of interacting on the world stage to one rooted in the unity which connects us as the inhabitants of one biosphere, the citizens of one world and the members of one human civilization."

Representatives of the BIC also partici-

pated in two side events at the Conference. Both were organized by the Collaborative Program on the Ethical Dimension of Climate Change at the Rock Ethics Institute at Penn State University, and both carried the title "Moral and ethical issues that must be faced in implementing the Bali roadmap."

On Monday, 8 December, Bahá'í representative Peter Adriance spoke at the first such side event on the topic "Summoning the courage: Arising to the ethical challenge of climate change."

In his remarks, Mr. Adriance stressed the importance of embracing the concept of the oneness of humanity as the overriding ethical and moral principle in addressing climate change.

"There is a great opportunity for the world to make the transition from operating only from a national perspective to a global perspective," said Mr. Adriance.

On Tuesday, 9 December, Bahá'í representatives participated in a day-long seminar, the second side event organized by the Collaborative Program on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change.\*

**"There is a great opportunity for the world to make the transition from operating only from a national perspective to a global perspective."**

**— Peter Adriance,  
Bahá'í International  
Community**

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## UN General Assembly expresses "deep concern" about human rights in Iran

UNITED NATIONS — For the 21st time since 1985, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted a resolution expressing "deep concern at serious human rights violations" in Iran.

The resolution, approved on 18 December 2008 by a vote of 69 to 54, specifically criticized Iran's use of torture, the high incidence of executions, the "violent repression" of women, and "increasing discrimination" against Bahá'ís, Christians, Jews, Sufis, Sunni Muslims, and other minorities.

The resolution was put forward by Canada and co-sponsored by more than 40 other countries. It specifically takes note of the report by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, issued in October, which also expressed concern about human rights in Iran, and the resolution calls on Iran to address the "substantive concerns" voiced in Mr. Ban's report.

In his report, Mr. Ban said "there are a number of serious impediments to the full protection of human rights" in Iran. It likewise expressed concerns over torture, executions, the abuse of women's rights, and discrimination against minorities.

The resolution asks the secretary general to prepare an update on Iran's progress over the coming year.

It further calls on Iran to "end the harassment, intimidation and persecution of political opponents and human rights defenders, including by releasing persons imprisoned arbitrarily or on the basis of their political views" and to "uphold due process of law rights and to end impunity for human rights violations."

The resolution takes particular note of attacks on Bahá'ís, noting "increasing evidence of efforts by the State to identify and monitor Bahá'ís, preventing members of the Bahá'í Faith from attending university and from sustaining themselves economically, and the arrest and detention of seven Bahá'í leaders without charge or access to legal representation."

Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, said "Iran should reflect upon and glean from this vote that, sadly, countries from Finland to Fiji are more concerned about the rights of ordinary Iranian citizens than the Iranian government itself."\*

## Lives of service: Profiles of seven Bahá'í leaders imprisoned in Iran

In early February 2009, reports emerged from Iran that the government was planning to put on trial seven Bahá'í leaders, held in Tehran's notorious Evin prison since May 2008.

They are to be accused of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic republic," according to a report in Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency on 11 February 2009.

The Bahá'í International Community, which has all along decried their arrest and imprisonment as unjust, immediately stated that such accusations are false, reiterating that the seven were being held solely because of their religious beliefs.

The news stirred an international outcry, with protests coming from governments, human rights groups, and others. The European Union, for example, issued a strong statement expressing "deep concern" over a possible trial and the US Department of State called the charges against the Bahá'ís "baseless."

Amnesty International, among other organizations, issued an "urgent action" appeal on behalf of the seven, calling for their "immediate and unconditional release." Hundreds of newspapers and other media outlets around the world carried the story.

During the more than ten months the seven have been held in prison, no evidence against them has been brought to light. Further, at no time during their incarceration have the accused been given access to their legal counsel, Mrs. Shirin Ebadi. Mrs. Ebadi has herself been threatened, intimidated, and vilified in the news media since taking on their case and has not been given access to their case files.

As of press time, no trial date had as yet been set by the government, nor had further information emerged about the possible charges against them.

All have served both Iranian society and the Bahá'í community extensively. As

well, like most Iranian Bahá'ís, they have all experienced varying degrees of persecution since the Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979.

Their ongoing imprisonment — and pending trial — is particularly alarming because of their leadership position as members of a national-level coordinating group known as the "Friends in Iran." Some 25 years ago, other Bahá'í leaders were executed after being rounded up in a manner similar to the way in which these seven were arrested last year. Moreover, the government is well aware that the charges against the seven are false. After all Bahá'í elected and appointed institutions were banned in the early 1980s, the "Friends" was formed with the full knowledge of the government. Since then, the group has served as an ad hoc coordinating body for the 300,000 Bahá'ís in that country, and the various governments in power in Iran have dealt routinely with its members. The seven people arrested last spring constitute the entire current membership of the Friends, which is one reason their sweeping arrests are so alarming.

In these profiles, there are a number of references to the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE). The BIHE was established by Bahá'ís in the late 1980s as an alternative institution of higher education after Bahá'í youth were banned from public and private universities in Iran in the early 1980s. Accordingly, many of the Friends or their family members received education from the BIHE or its adjunct, the Advanced Bahá'í Studies Institute (ABSI), or they have contributed to its work as lecturers or instructors.

In recounting the voluntary service these individuals rendered to the Bahá'í community, there are also references to various institutions, such as national or local governing councils, known as Spiritual Assemblies, various committees, or the Auxiliary Board, a group of individuals appointed to inspire,

**Their ongoing imprisonment and pending trial on false charges of "espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic republic" is particularly alarming because of their leadership position and the fact that 25 years ago other Bahá'í leaders were rounded up and executed in a similar manner.**

encourage, and promote learning. Most of these institutions have since been banned or dissolved in Iran because of government persecution.

### **Fariba Kamalabadi – arrested 14 May 2008 at her home in Tehran**

A developmental psychologist and mother of three, Fariba Kamalabadi was denied the chance to study at a public university as a youth because of her Bahá'í belief. Because of her volunteer work for the Bahá'í community, she was arrested twice in recent years and held for periods of one and two months respectively before her arrest and imprisonment last May.

Mrs. Kamalabadi, 46, was born in Tehran on 12 September 1962. An excellent student, she graduated from high school with honors but was nevertheless barred from attending university. Instead, in her mid-30s, she embarked on an eight-year period of informal study and ultimately received an advanced degree in developmental psychology from the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), an alternative institution established by the Bahá'í community of Iran to provide higher education for its young people.

Mrs. Kamalabadi married fellow Bahá'í Ruhollah Taefi in 1982. They have three children. Varqa Taefi, about 24, received a doctoral degree in political science and international relations in the United Kingdom and is currently continuing his research in China. Alhan Taefi, 23, has studied psychology at the Advanced Bahá'í Studies Institute (ABSI). Taraneh Taefi, 14, is a junior high school student in Tehran.

Mrs. Kamalabadi's experience with persecution extends beyond her immediate situation. Her father was fired from his job as physician in the government health service in the 1980s because he was a Bahá'í, and he was later imprisoned and tortured.

### **Jamaloddin Khanjani – arrested 14 May 2008 at his home in Tehran**

A once successful factory owner who lost his business after the 1979 Islamic revolu-

tion because of his belief in the Bahá'í Faith, Jamaloddin Khanjani spent most of the 1980s under the threat of death from Iranian authorities.

Now 75, Mr. Khanjani was born 27 July 1933 in the city of Sangsar. He grew up on a dairy farm in Semnan province and never obtained more than a high school education. Yet his dynamic personality soon led to a successful career in industrial production — and as a Bahá'í leader.

In his professional career, he has worked as an employee of the Pepsi Cola Company in Iran, where he was a purchasing supervisor. He later left Pepsi Cola and started a charcoal production business. Later he established a brick-making factory, which was the first automated such factory in Iran, ultimately employing several hundred people.

In the early 1980s, he was forced to shut down that factory and abandon it, putting most of his employees out of work, because of the persecution he faced as a Bahá'í. The government later confiscated the factory. Mr.



Khanjani was later able to establish a mechanized farm on properties owned by his family.

In his career of voluntary service to his religious community, Mr. Khanjani was at various points a member of the local Spiritual Assembly of Isfahan, a regional level Auxiliary Board member, and, in the early 1980s, a member of the so-called “third” National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran — a group that in 1984 saw four of its nine members executed by the government. Eight members of the so-called “second” National Spiritual Assembly were executed in December 1981, while nine members of the “first” National Spiritual Assembly were apparently kidnapped in August 1980 and are presumed dead.

Mr. Khanjani married Ashraf Sobhani in the mid-1950s. They have four children. Farida Khanjani, 51, is a chiropractor working in China. Maria Khanjani, about 49, an artist, is married with two children and resides in Tehran. Alaeddin Khanjani, about 48, an optometrist residing in Tehran, is married with two children. And Emilia Khanjani, about 45, is married with two children and

### **Summary statistics on the number of Bahá'í arrests and imprisonments in Iran since August 2004**

- 235 Bahá'ís have been arrested since August 2004.
- 34 Bahá'ís are currently imprisoned in Iran.
- 87 Bahá'ís have been arrested and released on bail and are awaiting trial.
- 9 Bahá'ís have been arrested and released without bail.
- 85 Bahá'ís have been tried and sentenced and are free pending appeal or summons to begin serving their sentences.
- 10 Bahá'ís have been tried and sentenced and have completed their prison terms.
- 8 Bahá'ís have had charges cleared in their original trials or have had their verdicts overturned on appeal.
- 3 Bahá'ís have served their prison sentences and have begun their terms of exile.



**During the more than ten months the seven have been held in prison, no evidence against them has been brought to light. Further, at no time during their incarceration have the accused been given access to their legal counsel, Mrs. Shirin Ebadi. Mrs. Ebadi has herself been threatened, intimidated, and vilified in the news media since taking on their case and has not been given access to their case files.**

resides in Tehran.

Mr. Khanjani was arrested and imprisoned at least three times before his current incarceration.

### **Afif Naemi – arrested 14 May 2008 at his home in Tehran**

An industrialist who was unable to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor because as a Bahá'í he was denied access to a university education, Afif Naemi diverted his attention to business, one of the few avenues of work open to Bahá'ís, taking over his father-in-law's blanket and textile factory.



He is 47 and was born on 6 September 1961 in Yazd. His father died when he was three and he was raised in part by his uncles. While still in elementary school, he was sent to live with relatives in Jordan and, although he started with no knowledge of Arabic, he soon rose to the top of his class.

He has long been active in volunteer Bahá'í service. He has taught Bahá'í children's classes, conducted classes for adults, taught at the BIHE, and been a member of the Auxiliary Board.

He married Shohreh Khallokhí in the early 1980s. They have two sons, Fareed Naimi, 27, who is married and a graduate of the ABSI, and Sina Naimi, 22, who has studied music.

He married Shohreh Khallokhí in the early 1980s. They have two sons, Fareed Naimi, 27, who is married and a graduate of the ABSI, and Sina Naimi, 22, who has studied music.

### **Saeid Rezaie – arrested 14 May 2008 at his home in Tehran**

A 47-year-old agricultural engineer who has run a successful farming equipment business in Fars Province for more than 20 years, Saeid Rezaie is also known for his extensive scholarship on Bahá'í topics, and is the author of several books.

Born in Abadan on 27 September 1957, Mr. Rezaie spent his childhood in Shiraz, where he completed high school with distinction. He then obtained a degree in agricultural engineering from Pahlavi University in Shiraz, attending with the help of a scholarship funded from outside the country.

In 1981, he married Shaheen Rowhanian. They have three children, two daughters and

a son. Martha, 24, is studying library science. Ma'man, 21, is studying architecture. Payvand, 12, is in his second year of middle school.

Mr. Rezaie has actively served the Bahá'í community since he was a young man. He taught Bahá'í children's classes for many years, and served the Bahá'í Education and Bahá'í Life Institutes. He was also a member of the National Education Institute.

During the early 1980s, when persecution of Bahá'ís was particularly intense and widespread, Mr. Rezaie moved to northern Iran and worked as a farming manager for a time. Later he moved to Kerman and worked as a carpenter and at other odd jobs in part because of the difficulties Bahá'ís faced in finding formal employment or operating businesses.

In 1985, he opened an agricultural equipment company with a Bahá'í friend in Fars Province. That company prospered and won wide respect among farmers in the region.



He has experienced various forms of persecution for his Bahá'í belief, including an arrest and detention in 2006 that led to 40 days in solitary confinement.

His two daughters were among 54 Bahá'í youth who were arrested in Shiraz in May 2006 while engaged in a humanitarian project aimed at helping underprivileged young people. They were later released but three of their colleagues were sentenced to four years in prison on false charges and are currently incarcerated in Shiraz.

### **Mahvash Sabet – arrested in Mashhad on 5 March 2008**

Mahvash Sabet, 55, is a teacher and school principal who was dismissed from public education for being a Bahá'í. For the last 15 years, she has been director of the BIHE. She also served as secretary to the Friends.

Born Mahvash Shahriyari on 4 February 1953 in Ardestan, Mrs. Sabet moved to Tehran when she was in the fifth grade. In university, she studied psychology, obtaining a bachelor's degree.

She began her professional career as a teacher and also worked as a principal at several schools. In her professional role, she also collaborated with the National Literacy Com-



mittee of Iran. After the Islamic revolution, however, like thousands of other Iranian Bahá'í educators, she was fired from her job and blocked from working in public education.



It was after this that she became director of the BIHE, where she also has taught psychology and management.

She married Siyvash Sabet on 21 May 1973. They have a son, Foroud Sabet, 33, and a daughter, Negar Sabet, 24,

both born in Hamadan.

While all of the other Friends were arrested at their homes in Tehran on 14 May 2008, Mrs. Sabet was arrested in Mashhad on 5 March 2008. Although she resides in Tehran, she had been summoned to Mashhad by the Ministry of Intelligence, ostensibly on the grounds that she was required to answer questions related to the burial of an individual in the Bahá'í cemetery in that city.

### Behrouz Tavakkoli – arrested 14 May 2008 at his home in Tehran

Behrouz Tavakkoli, 57, is a former social worker who lost his government job in the early 1980s because of his Bahá'í belief. Prior to his current imprisonment, he has also experienced intermittent detainment and harassment and, three years ago, he was jailed for four months without charge, spending most of the time in solitary confinement.



Born 1 June 1951 in Mashhad, Mr. Tavakkoli studied psychology in university and then completed two years of service in the army, where he was a lieutenant. He later took additional training and then specialized in the care

of the physically and mentally handicapped, working in a government position until his firing in 1981 or 1982.

Mr. Tavakkoli married Tahereh Fakhri

Tuski at the age of 23. They have two sons, Naeim and Nabil. Naeim, 31, currently lives with his wife in Canada where he works as a civil engineer. Nabil, 24, is currently studying architecture at the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education.

Mr. Tavakkoli was elected to the local Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly in Mashhad in the late 1960s or early 1970s while a student at the university there, and he later served on another local Spiritual Assembly in Sari before such institutions were banned in the early 1980s.

To support himself and his family after he was fired from his government position, Mr. Tavakkoli established a small millwork carpentry shop in the city of Gonbad. There he also established a series of classes in Bahá'í studies for adults and young people.

He has been periodically detained by the authorities. Among the worst of these incidents was three years ago when he was held incommunicado for 10 days by intelligence agents, along with fellow Friends' member Fariba Kamalabadi. He was then held for four months and during that confinement developed serious kidney and orthotic problems.

### Vahid Tizfahm – arrested 14 May 2008 at his home in Tehran



A 35-year-old optometrist and owner of an optical shop in Tabriz, Vahid Tizfahm was born 16 May 1973 in the city of Urumiyeh. He spent his childhood and youth there and, after receiving his high school diploma in mathematics,

he went to Tabriz at the age of 18 to study to become an optician. He later also studied sociology at the Advanced Bahá'í Studies Institute (ABSI). In early 2008, he moved to Tehran.

At the age of 23, Mr. Tizfahm married Furuzandeh Nikumanesh. They have a son, Samim, 9, who is in the fourth grade.

Since his youth, Mr. Tizfahm has served the Bahá'í community in a variety of capacities. At one time he was a member of the Bahá'í National Youth Committee. Later, he was appointed to the Auxiliary Board. He has also taught local Bahá'í children's classes. \*

**After all Bahá'í elected and appointed institutions were banned in the early 1980s, the "Friends in Iran" was then formed with the full knowledge of the government. Since then, the group has served as an ad hoc coordinating body for the 300,000 Bahá'ís in that country, and the various governments in power in Iran have dealt routinely with its members.**

## In India, village-level private schools offer new opportunities



A classroom at the Nine Star School in Dasdoi, Uttar Pradesh, India. It is one of eight village-level private schools that have been started since 2001 by a group of young Bahá'ís working under the guidance of Foundation for the Advancement of Science (FAS), a Bahá'í-inspired NGO located in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

**A pilot project seeks to train and support educated rural youth in the processes and profession of primary education, with the goal of starting small, sustainable and effective private rural schools.**

**D**ASDOI, UTTAR PRADESH, India — In this small village known for its fine mango orchards and fertile wheat fields some 25 kilometers northwest of Lucknow, a quiet revolution is taking place.

Like many revolutions, the spark is coming from the school ground. Only instead of a university campus, the venue for action here is the village school. And the agents of change are a group of young and dedicated teachers with a fresh vision of education and its transformative role.

The school in Dasdoi has about 80 students. Named the Nine Star School, it is run by Ram Vilas Pal. It is one of eight village-level private schools that have been started since 2001 by a group of young Bahá'ís working under the guidance of Foundation for the Advancement of Science (FAS), a

Bahá'í-inspired NGO located in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

The schools are an integral part of a pilot project to train and support educated rural youth in the processes and profession of primary education, with the goal of starting small, sustainable, and effective private rural schools.

The owners of these schools, who are also their principals, come from unlikely backgrounds. Mr. Pal was trained in television repair. Another school founder dispensed medicine in his village as a local “doctor.” Another was a farmer.

And it is not always easy to guess — at first sight anyway — that what they are running are schools. For example, Mr. Pal's school in Dasdoi operates in a mud-brick building with a thatched roof. A wall down the middle divides the school from a cowshed. Many of

the schools began as a gathering under a tree or a simple thatched roof shelter.

What is common among all eight principals is their passion for social transformation and their conviction that school is the place for this to happen. Indeed, as the soft-spoken Mr. Pal says, “The community and the family depend on the school to create a responsible citizen out of the child. When a child is found misbehaving, people ask him, ‘Is this what your teacher teaches you in school?’”

### The growth of private schools

Once the preserve of the elite, private schools in India have undergone rapid growth in recent years, primarily to satisfy the educational aspirations of middle-class children and their parents. Although reliable statistics are difficult to come by, *The New York Times* recently said that “tens of thousands” of private schools have been started up across India in recent decades.

The trend extends to villages in rural areas, and poor families have increasingly expressed a willingness to pay at least a small percentage of their income to bolster the educational prospects for their children.

The schools operated by the Bahá'ís in the FAS pilot project are spread out in villages in the Kakori, Banthra, and Kharagpur blocks of Uttar Pradesh, a state in north India. All are within 60 kilometers of Lucknow, a city of some five million that is the state capital.

### Highlight on values

What makes these Bahá'í-inspired schools distinctive is the relatively high quality of their instruction — compared to typical village schools — and their much welcomed stress on moral education, which is emphasized in the Bahá'í writings.

“These Bahá'í-inspired schools instill a strong sense of moral values,” said Sohail Mohajer, co-director of FAS, noting that they accomplish this without the harsh discipline methods that are common in many schools in India. “So even though there are many other schools, parents prefer to send their children to these ones.”

Brajesh Kumar, whose education is in public administration, started his Covenant Public School about three years ago in Banthra block. (Following British terminology, many private schools are called “public” schools in India.)

“Our whole reason for starting these schools was not just to provide better quality of the same thing that is available everywhere,

but also to give something new and much-needed in the form of moral education,” said Mr. Kumar, whose school currently has about 60 students.

In addition to teaching basic subjects like reading, writing, and arithmetic, all the schools use a curriculum of moral education for children and young adults that was developed by the international Bahá'í community.

This curriculum uses a series of workbooks that, through stories and interactive questions, guides students towards moral principles like trustworthiness, honesty, courtesy, and service.

The schools also stress equality, and the need for mutual respect is instilled from the earliest stages using various techniques, including incorporating the arts into the curriculum.

“We have found that the most effective way to teach these values to students is through the use of skits and songs,” said Vinod Kumar Yadav, who operates the Glory Public School in the village of Tutikhera in Banthra block.

The emphasis on equality is important in a region where discrimination against women and between castes remain challenging concerns.

C. Bhagwandin, a member of the village governing council of Dasdoi, said that caste differences initially posed a barrier to his sending his daughter to Mr. Pal's school.

“Since he was of a different caste, I was initially reluctant,” Mr. Bhagwandin said. “However, seeing that his students could

**“Our whole reason for starting these schools was not just to provide better quality of the same thing that is available everywhere but also to give something new and much-needed in the form of moral education.”**

**— Brajesh Kumar, school principal**

*Ram Vilas Pal is a TV technician by trade but now operates his own school in Dasdoi, the Nine Star School.*





*A mathematics class at New Ideal Academy in Kakori block near Lucknow meets in the open air, while students in another class gather at a table under the shelter. About 200 students attend the school, which offers classes in grades 1 to 8.*



really read and write, that they behaved well and since the only other option was to send her to a school in another village, I decided to overlook this fact. And I haven't regretted my decision."

**"We visit the homes of parents in the village and talk to them about the importance of sending their daughters and not just their sons to school. And after a period of patient counseling, they understand,"**

**— Ram Vilas Pal,  
Principal, Nine Star  
School**

### High ratio of girls

Discrimination against the girl child is dealt with through a proactive approach, given that these are areas where women traditionally do not leave the home, much less receive an education.

"We visit the homes of parents in the village and talk to them about the importance of sending their daughters and not just their sons to school. And after a period of patient counseling, they understand," said Mr. Pal, whose school in Dasdoi has a 50-50 ratio of girls to boys, which is unusually high in the region.

Most of the school principals could likely have found a job in the city. But they have consciously chosen to stay back and help mold the next generation.

"I could have done many other things that would give me more money and involved less effort," said Mr. Kumar. "But here I am doing something not for myself but for the village as a whole by bringing about moral, social, economic, and intellectual change."

Most of the principals set up their community schools by seeking the help of the villagers for land and basic furniture and by employing educated but unemployed rural

youth as teachers. In return, they promise to provide good overall education for a very modest fee. For a high school student, for example, the average fee might be 50 rupees, about US\$1 a month.

Right now, perhaps the most important challenge before these young innovators is to keep their schools profitable — which is the key to long-term sustainability. Problems include spiraling costs, regular defaulting in fee payment, and children being pulled out of school to be used for agricultural labor.

But the FAS is not a funding agency and, in fact, has adopted a policy of providing most of its support in the form of training and encouragement, although the foundation does occasionally provide salaries for one or two teachers when the going gets tough.

"Based on our experience, when participants in a development program are made to work hard and encouraged to invest their own time and money, they would continue the program no matter what the odds against them," said Dr. Mohajer. "Hence, we felt that in order to make the rural school project sustainable, dependence on external help must be minimized.

"Basically, the Foundation acts as a catalyst. We are just helping people use their potential to find a useful area of work — and to help them satisfy an important need in society," he said.\*

*— By Arash Vafa Fazli*



## In The Hague, religious leaders pledge support for universal human rights



The Peace Palace in The Hague was the venue for the signing of the Faith in Human Rights statement.

**Hague Conference**, continued from page one  
 freedom of religion or belief, the principle of equality and the prohibition of torture.

“We wish to state clearly that the Declaration should not be regarded as a ‘pick-and-choose’ list. There is an urgent need for a thorough reflection on the integral acceptance of each right.”

In speeches at the ceremony, leaders both religious and secular hailed the statement as a milestone in the promotion of human rights, and especially freedom of religion or belief.

### “A crucial moment”

“This is a crucial moment to affirm these principles,” said Maxime Verhagen, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs. “Because unfortunately, respect for freedom of religion and belief is declining in many parts of the world. The position of religious minorities in particular is increasingly under threat.”

However, said Minister Verhagen, “you are telling the world that religion and human rights are not in conflict, that in fact religion can be a major source of legitimacy for human rights.”

Swami Dayananda Saraswati, a noted Hindu leader, said the statement is “espe-

cially important” because “it states that human rights embody universal values, valid for everyone. This implies that we do not accept that there would be double standards in values; thus, not one set of values for believers and another set for non-believers.”

Adopted by the United Nations in 1948, the UDHR lists some 30 rights as a “common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations,” including “the right to life, liberty and security of person,” equality before the law, freedom of movement, the right to work, the right to education, and the “right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”

The event was organized by *Justitia et Pax* (Justice and Peace Netherlands) in cooperation with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Justitia et Pax* is the Dutch Catholic human rights organization, established by the Catholic Bishops Conference of The Netherlands.

Jonneke Naber of *Justitia et Pax* said the aims of the conference and statement were to stimulate human rights awareness within religious communities, to serve as the basis for further debate on common principles and practices, and to inspire believers to promote human dignity and human rights.

### Excerpts from the 2008 Faith in Human Rights statement

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we ... pronounce and confirm that our religions recognize and support the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every human person, alone or in community with others.

We recognize our responsibility towards our believers and to the world at large and reaffirm our intention to take all necessary steps both within our communities and in co-operation with others to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms for each and every person, irrespective of religion or belief.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights celebrates the dignity of the human person, irrespective of religion, race, sex or other distinctions.

We wish to emphasize the importance of two of its principles: that every person enjoys the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and that no one should be discriminated against on the basis of religion or belief.

The rights, freedoms and obligations laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are recognized all over the world. Nevertheless, they are not fully accepted everywhere. We observe tensions with regard to a number of specific rights, such as the freedom of religion or belief, the principle of equality and the prohibition of torture. We wish to state clearly that the Declaration should not be regarded as a “pick-and-choose” list.

**Among the charter signers of the Faith in Human Rights statement were:**

- **His Eminence Ayatollah al-Uzma Al-Sheikh Bashir Hussain Al-Najafi / Grand Ayatollah of Hawza Al-Najaf, Iraq**
- **His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso / 14th Dalai Lama**
- **The Most Revd and Rt Hon. Dr. Rowan Williams / Archbishop of Canterbury**
- **His Excellency Dr. Gerard J.N. de Korte / Bishop of Groningen, The Netherlands**
- **Rev. Master Zhi Wang Lee / Founder/President Taoist Mission Singapore**
- **Grandmother Mona Polacca / Hopi/Havasupai /Tewa Elder**
- **His Holiness Drikung Skyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche / Supreme Head of the Drikung Kagyu Order of Buddhism**
- **His Eminence Bishop Charles E. Blake / Presiding Bishop, Church of God in Christ International**
- **Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie / President, Union for Reform Judaism**
- **His All Holiness Bartholomew / Ecumenical Patriarch**
- **Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia / General Secretary, World Council of Churches**
- **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Henry Sacks / Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth**
- **His Holiness Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati / Convener of the Acharya Sabha**
- **The Right Reverend Bishop Athenagoras / Bishop of Sinope (Belgium)**
- **Ms. Bani Dugal / Principal Representative of Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations**



*Ms. Bani Dugal of the Bahá'í International Community, front, and The Right Reverend Bishop Athenagoras, sign the Faith in Human Rights statement at The Hague on 10 December 2008.*

In a background paper she wrote for the event, Ms. Naber noted that more than three-fourths of the world's population follows one of the world religions, and said that religious leaders and communities “play an essential — sometimes very discrete — role in processes of social transformation.”

“Faith-based organizations are often close to poor and less privileged people,” wrote Ms. Naber. “Religious leaders have moral authority among large groups of people and have, in many cases, made statements against poverty and injustice and in favor of the protection of human rights. Furthermore, they often fulfill a role in encouraging their religious communities to actively work for the improvement of their societies. Support from all religions worldwide is therefore essential for the implementation of human rights.”

One example of a new group lending its support to the issue was in the participation of Bishop Charles E. Blake, a major leader in the Christian Pentecostal movement. He is listed as a charter signatory and, in a videotaped speech to the conference, he said: “Basic human rights must be upheld and supported by religious people everywhere.”

Paul Alexander, a professor of Theology and Ethics at Azusa Pacific University in California, said “Pentecostal involvement is an amazing development.”

“There are approximately six hundred million Pentecostals in the world — 25% of all Christians,” said Prof. Alexander. “They

have traditionally not been involved in support of justice initiatives, peacemaking, and human rights advocacy at this level. Bishop Blake’s endorsement, as the Presiding Bishop of the largest American Pentecostal denomination, might serve to encourage other Pentecostal leaders and communities to support international cooperation.”

Nazila Ghanea, a lecturer at Oxford University who specializes in human rights said the event and statement were significant for exactly that reason — that religious leaders have such a profound impact on the thinking of their communities.

“It is very significant, also, because religious communities are often criticized for failing to respect or support human rights,” said Dr. Ghanea. “So this is kind of a counterforce to that. Especially in the context of the unfortunate link between religion and interfaith conflict at the communal level, this kind of a signal from an international gathering like this is very positive.”

### **Against “cultural relativism”**

Some participants said the statement was also significant for its effort to dismiss the idea of “cultural relativism” with respect to human rights. The term is often understood as a code word for the idea that different religious traditions or cultural experiences give license to some regions or nations to emphasize some rights and discard others, such as, for example, the equality of women.

“The rights, freedoms and obligations laid down in the Declaration are ‘universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated,’” said Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, using language from the 1993 Vienna Declaration on Human Rights, which itself sought to put notions of cultural relativism to rest.

“Despite the national and regional particularities, as well as historical, cultural and religious backgrounds of many, arguments regarding the cultural relativity of human rights should not be encouraged,” said Rev. Kobia.

Bani Dugal, who signed the statement on behalf of the Bahá'í International Community, said it was significant that the statement, with its strong support for the universality of human rights, was signed by such a diverse group of religious representatives. “They are, for the most part, genuine leaders in their communities,” said Ms. Dugal. “So it very much strikes back at this idea that rights are related to culture and traditions, or regional views.”\*✻

## Manna from Heaven

*Review, continued from page 16*

“The conclusion is that economics sees society as being composed of spiritually rational agents and predicts ultimate extinction for any society in which the generality of its members are not spiritual, that is, where they are myopic and selfish,” Dr. Garis writes, adding that this is not generally acknowledged by modern economists.

“What is obvious to most spiritually minded individuals is that the source of such attitudinal behavior is rooted in the dialogues of the world’s religions. Placed therein is the structure and logic justifying interpersonal investments and actions that delay gratification.”

Dr. Garis finds many other commonalities between the knowledge that has been revealed to humanity in the world’s great religions and modern economics. He discusses, for example, the cost of corruption and hate

in economic systems — two moral hazards that are, of course, discouraged in the sacred scriptures of the world’s religions.

Even the concept of sin has parallels in economics. “Since economic science studies how people use resources in ways yielding the greatest possible returns, then anything leading to systematic waste comes pretty close to the concept of sin,” he writes. “For example, if finished goods of high value ready for human consumption (bread) were diverted to use as an intermediate input good (feed) to make another finished good (chicken), this would be a sin because of the waste involved.”

Dr. Garis said the idea for the book came from a personal exploration of the verses of the Qur’an and other holy books for their economic content. “Soon I was convinced that the divine dialogues and verses of these books had an unexplored capacity to establish the fundamentals of economic science and also of many financial practices now commonplace.”\*

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## Faith-based organizations discuss population issues in Istanbul



*Fulya Vekiloglu, second from right, represented the Bahá’í International Community at the Global Forum of Faith-based Organizations, held this month in Istanbul. The photograph is of the closing ceremony.*

**I**STANBUL, Turkey — The Bahá’í International Community was among the religious groups and nongovernmental organizations that participated in a two-day Global Forum of Faith-based Organizations, convened by the United Nations Population Fund.

The gathering, held in Istanbul on 20-21 October, addressed population and development issues related to HIV-AIDS, reproductive health, gender equality, and violence against women.

Fulya Vekiloglu, a representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations who specializes in women’s issues, attended.

In an intervention during a panel discussion on “Violence against Women and Women’s Empowerment,” she stressed the need for attitude change and how faith-based organizations have a unique role in this regard. She also read a short Bahá’í prayer at the closing ceremony of the Global Forum.\*



## Economics with a moral dimension

Some of the most fruitful acts of creativity stem from the combination of two previously distinct fields of thought.

A classic example is when Archimedes famously paired his knowledge of the mathematics about volume with the everyday fact that water rises in a tub when one steps into it. “Eureka!” A way to measure the density of an irregular object was realized.

In *Manna from Heaven: From Divine Speech to Economic Science*, Dalton Garis brings together two fields that are not often paired: economics and religion — and arrives at a creative synthesis that enriches the reader’s understanding of both.

His thesis is that there exists a set of innate commonalities between the laws and principles revealed by religious prophets and the laws and principles that govern economics. And that by better understanding those commonalities, humanity can better control its economic destiny — and also perhaps gain insights into the nature of religion.

Dr. Garis, who is an associate professor of economics at the Petroleum Institute in Abu Dhabi, UAE, ranges widely in his exploration of this thesis.

He considers traditional economic theories and the history of religion — and in particular Islam and the Bahá’í Faith, of which he is a member. He also examines the interplay of science and religion, how ideologies impact human society, and what it takes to effect broad social transformation in our modern age.

The result is an absorbing and thought-provoking volume, especially for its consideration of moral values in economics.

Early economists, of course, were very much concerned with how moral values affect economic behavior. Adam Smith — author of *The Wealth of Nations*, which is sometimes viewed as capitalism’s founding document — was originally known as a moral philosopher, and his work explored economics as part of a moral system.

In *Manna from Heaven*, Dr. Garis argues that economists have moved too far from the proper consideration of moral and spiritual values in their study of how people make economic decisions, reducing the “dismal science” — as Thomas Carlyle once called eco-

nomics — to mathematics and behaviorism.

By studying the dialogues of the prophets, he suggests, it is possible to understand better the moral and spiritual reality in which human society exists — and to better thereby understand economic behavior.

He notes, for example, that much of modern economic analysis is predicated on the “rational” behavior of individuals — the idea that they will act with maximum self-interest in their economic decision-making. But often true self-interest lies in taking a long term view, as when one bypasses a frivolous purchase today in order to save up for something of more lasting value — skipping a double decaf latte, in other words, to save for the down payment on a house.

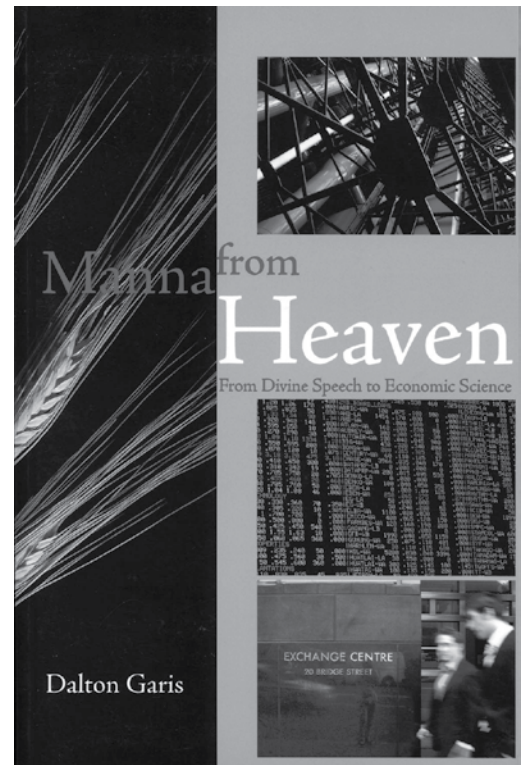
Dr. Garis suggests that the holy writings of all religions have always urged taking the long

***Manna from Heaven: From Divine Speech to Economic Science***

**By Dalton Garis**

**George Ronald**

**Oxford**



view, preaching sacrifice today in order to acquire things of more lasting value, such as social well-being or eternal life. And this appeal to our higher nature, our higher values, is the real basis of economic rationalism, he writes.

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