

ONE COUNTRY

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

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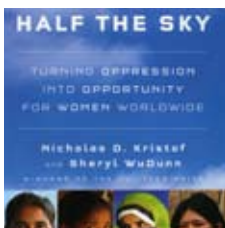
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World religions pledge concrete action on climate change



Members of the Boys' and Girls' Brigade lead a colorful procession of religious and secular delegates towards Windsor Castle on 3 November 2009. [Courtesy ARC/Stonehouse Photography]

WINDSOR, United Kingdom — Like most major interfaith events, the recent "Many Heavens, One Earth" gathering here in November was marked by considerable pageantry.

Led by drums and banners, leaders from virtually every major world religion arrived at the historic Windsor Castle in a diversity of colorful attire, showcasing the great diversity of faith communities.

By all accounts, however, the meeting was more than pomp and circumstance. The leaders also brought along concrete plans and commitments, outlining how the billions of people in the faith communities they represent could and would contribute to healing the earth's environment.

"Your potential impact is enormous," said UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the keynote speaker, noting that faith groups run or help run half the world's schools, represent the third largest category of investors, and produce more weekly magazines and newspapers than the secular press in the European Union.

"You can establish green religious buildings. Invest ethically in sustainable products. Purchase only environmentally-friendly goods," he said. "You are among the most powerful educators in this world."

The plans offered by the faiths reflected these strengths. They spoke of making temples, churches, mosques, and religious schools more environmentally friendly, of increasing efforts to establish or boost environmental education programs for children and youth, and of advocating simpler, more environmentally conscious lifestyles based on divine teachings.

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Identity and the search for a common human purpose

IN BRIEF

- The resolution of the problems now engulfing the planet demands a more expansive sense of human identity
- The idea that we are members of one human family is powerful and capable of fostering global identity
- An inherent aspect of such a universal identity is recognition of the spiritual reality that animates our inner selves

The world's religions can be seen to be one in their nature and purpose with each being a wellspring 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.

[Editor's note: The following Perspective has been adapted from a longer piece, written by Matthew Weinberg, in the 2005-2006 edition of The Bahá'í World.]

At the heart of human experience lies an essential yearning for self-definition and self-understanding. Developing a conception of who we are, for what purpose we exist, and how we should live our lives is a basic impulse of human consciousness.

Today, as the sheer intensity and velocity of change challenge our assumptions about the nature and structure of social reality, a set of vital questions confront us. These include: What is the source of our identity? Where should our attachments and loyalties lie? And what is the nature of the bonds that bring us together?

The direction of human affairs is inextricably connected to the evolution of our identity. For it is from our identity that intention, action, and social development flow. Identity determines how we see ourselves and conceive our position in the world, how others see or classify us, and how we choose to engage with those around us.

The sources of identification which animate and ground human beings are immensely diverse. But which identity or identities are most important? Can divergent identities be reconciled? And do these identities enhance or limit our understanding of, and engagement with, the world? Each of us on a daily basis, both consciously and unconsciously, draws upon, expresses, and mediates between our multiple senses of identity. And as our sphere of social interaction expands, we tend

to subsume portions of how we define ourselves and seek to integrate into a wider domain of human experience. This often requires us to scrutinize and even resist particular interpretations of allegiance that may have a claim on us.

Modernity has transformed identity in such a way that we must view ourselves as being not only in a condition of dependence or independence but also interdependence. Our connections to others now transcend traditional bounds of culture, nation, and community. The unprecedented nature of these connections is radically reshaping human organization and the scale and impact of human exchange.

Clearly, the perceptions that human beings hold of each other matter. In a world convulsed by contention and conflict, conceptions of identity that feed the forces of prejudice and mistrust must be closely examined. Assertions that certain populations can be neatly partitioned into oppositional categories of affiliation deserve particular scrutiny.

"A tenable global ethics," Kwame Anthony Appiah observes, "has to temper a respect for difference with a respect for the freedom of actual human beings to make their own choices." Existing mores, practices, and institutions can inform, validate, and even ennoble the human condition, but cannot or should not foreclose new moral or social directions for individuals and communities. Indeed, collective learning and adjustment are defining characteristics of social evolution. Because our perceptions and experiences change, our understanding of reality necessarily undergoes change. So too, then, do our identities change.

The prevalent stance that identity is about difference is untenable.

Perceiving identity through the relativistic lens of separation or cultural preservation ignores compelling evidence of our common humanity and can only aggravate the forces of discord now so pervasive in the world. The only alternative to this path of fragmentation and disunity is to nurture affective relationships across lines of ethnicity, creed, territory, and color — relationships that can serve as the warp and woof of a new social framework of universal solidarity and mutual respect. A one-dimensional understanding of human beings must be rejected.

As Amartya Sen underscores, “The hope of harmony in the contemporary world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity, and in the appreciation that they cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division.” The resolution of the problems now engulfing the planet demands a more expansive sense of human identity. As articulated by Bahá’u’lláh more than a century ago: “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.”

From a Bahá’í perspective, a universal identity is a vital precursor to action that is universal in its effects — to the “emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture.” In emphasizing our global identity, Bahá’u’lláh presents a conception of life that insists upon a redefinition of all human relationships — between individuals, between human society and the natural world, between the individual and the community, and between individual citizens and their governing institutions.

In the Bahá’í view, social origin, position, or rank are of no account in the sight of God. As Bahá’u’lláh avers, “man’s glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, his wisdom, and not in his nationality or rank.”

The watchword of the Bahá’í community is “unity in diversity.” More than creating a culture of tolerance, the notion of unity in diversity entails



vanquishing corrosive divisions along lines of race, class, gender, nationality, and belief, and erecting a dynamic and cooperative social ethos that reflects the oneness of human nature.

The ideology of difference so ubiquitous in contemporary discourse militates against the possibility of social progress. It provides no basis whereby communities defined by specific backgrounds, customs, or creeds can bridge their divergent perspectives and resolve social tensions. The value of variety and difference cannot be minimized, and neither can the necessity for coexistence, order, and mutual effort.

To foster a global identity, to affirm that we are members of one human family, is a deceptively simple but powerful idea. While traditional loyalties and identities must be appreciated, they are inadequate for addressing the predicament of modernity, and consequently, a higher loyalty, one that speaks to the common destiny of all the earth’s inhabitants, is necessary.

An inherent aspect of such a universal identity is recognition of the spiritual reality that animates our inner selves. To be sure, a global identity grounded in awareness of our common humanness marks a great step forward from where humanity has been, but a strictly secular or material formulation of global identity is unlikely to provide a sufficient motivational basis for overcoming historic prejudices and engendering universal moral action. Establishing a global milieu of peace, prosperity, and justice is ultimately a matter of the heart; it involves a change in basic attitudes and values

that can only come from recognizing the normative and spiritual nature of the challenges before us.

Our quest for spiritual identity is what ultimately informs personal and shared social meaning, and therefore our social arrangements. From perceiving that we are all sheltered under the love of the same God, comes both humility and the means for true social cohesion.

Our different senses of identity consequently become fully realized through the development of our spiritual identity; they each provide a means for achieving our basic existential purpose — the discovery and refinement of the spiritual capacities latent within us.

In this respect, the world’s religions can be seen to be one in their nature and purpose with each being a wellspring 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.

Realizing a common understanding of human purpose and action, especially in a complex world of pluralistic identities and rapidly shifting cultural and moral boundaries, depends on the recognition and expression of a spiritual conception of life.

By redefining identity in terms of the totality of human experience, the Bahá’í teachings anticipate the moral reconstruction of all human practices. When an emerging global society draws upon the spiritual mainspring of human identity and purpose, truly constructive avenues of social change can be pursued.

Ethics are “missing dimension” in climate debate, says IPCC head

IN BRIEF

- During September’s UN Summit on Climate Change, NGOs issued an appeal emphasizing the moral and ethical dimensions of global warming
- At a breakfast launch, Dr. Rajendra K. Pachauri, IPCC chairman, spoke about the need for a groundswell of grassroots action
- Dr. Pachauri expects future IPCC assessments to show the climate is changing faster than expected

Dr. Rajendra K. Pachauri, chairman of the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, at the Bahá’í International Community offices on 23 September 2009.

NEW YORK — The inequities and injustices that are likely to occur on a global level because of climate change mean that world leaders must carefully examine the moral and ethical dimensions of global warming, said Dr. Rajendra K. Pachauri, chairman of the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

“The impacts of climate change are going to be inequitable, unequal, and severe in many parts of the world,” said Dr. Pachauri, addressing a breakfast meeting at the Bahá’í International Community offices on 23 September 2009.

“We have to think at a much higher level. And I think this is where ethics comes in so critically as the missing dimension in this debate,” he said.

Dr. Pachauri’s comments came at the official launch of an appeal, directed at world leaders gathered at September’s UN Summit on Climate Change in New York, to emphasize the importance of the moral and ethical dimensions of global warming and its impact in their deliberations.



The appeal was drafted by the Bahá’í International Community and has been signed by 25 non-governmental organizations, religious groups, and policy institutes. The document calls on world leaders to “consider deeply the ethical and moral questions at the root of the climate change crisis.”

“The impacts of climate change are going to be inequitable, unequal, and severe in many parts of the world. We have to think at a much higher level. And I think this is where ethics comes in so critically as the missing dimension in this debate.”

—Dr. Rajendra K. Pachauri, chairman of the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

“The quest for climate justice is not a competition for limited resources but part of an unfolding process towards greater degrees of unity among nations as they endeavor to build a sustainable, just and peaceful civilization,” the appeal states.

Tahirih Naylor, a Bahá’í representative to the United Nations, said the purpose of the document is to call attention to the fact that climate change is more than a political, economic, and scientific problem.

“There is a moral and ethical dimension to climate change that must be addressed,” said Ms. Naylor. “For example, we know that wealthy nations have contributed more to climate problems than the poor nations, and so there is

an element of justice that must be considered in any long-term solution.”

Dr. Pachauri said that while science can provide the building blocks for understanding the impact and likelihood of climate change, it will be important for citizens’ groups and individuals to provide the motivation for action.

“I feel you really cannot rely on the leaders, you really cannot rely on the nation states,” he said. “You really need a groundswell of grassroots action and grassroots consciousness on what needs to be done. If that is happening, then leaders will follow.”

He encouraged the representatives of civil society gathered for the breakfast meeting to continue to work to keep the moral and ethical issues front and center in the climate debate.

“You have to persevere and persist,” he said. “If you do, you certainly will be able to change the nature of the debate.”

He said the long-term impact of climate change on future generations must be taken into account. “Ethics demands that action has to be taken early,” he said.

Dr. Pachauri also said he expects that whatever its outcome, the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December was unlikely to be the final word on the subject.

“When the IPCC’s fifth assessment comes out in 2013 or 2014, there will be a major revival of interest in action that has to be taken,” said Dr. Pachauri, speaking of the periodic assessments rendered by the group of more than 400 scientists around the world that he leads. “People are going to say, ‘My God, we are going to have to take action much faster than we had planned.’”

As chairman of the IPCC, Dr. Pachauri accepted the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, which was awarded jointly to the IPCC and former U.S. Vice President Al Gore for their work in warning of the potential impact of global warming.

Among the organizations that have signed the appeal are the International Peace Research Association, Oxfam International, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, Solar Cookers International, Women Organizing for

S T A T E M E N T

Moral and Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change: Appeal to World Leaders

We, the undersigned non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, leaders of the world’s religions, and other members of civil society, urge the governments of the world to participate in the UN High Level Event on Climate Change through representatives at the highest level and unequivocally call on them to:

- Consider deeply the ethical and moral questions at the root of the climate change crisis — questions of justice and equity that will determine the survival of cultures, ecosystems, and present as well as future generations;
- Recognize that the quest for climate justice is not a competition for limited resources but part of an unfolding process towards greater degrees of unity among nations as they endeavor to build a sustainable, just, and peaceful civilization;
- Distinguish their contributions to this High-Level Event by demonstrating trust, justice, solidarity, and a vision of prosperity for the most vulnerable populations;
- Demonstrate courage and moral leadership as they articulate the vision and secure the foundations for a comprehensive and legally binding agreement during the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC and the 5th Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol in December 2009; and
- Ensure that commitments in all arenas of the climate change challenge are guided by ethical and moral considerations so as to inspire the trust and confidence of individuals, communities and

institutions to effect the changes needed to build a sustainable civilization.

We call on the gathered leaders to summon the same spirit and sense of urgency that led to the creation of the United Nations, to forge a climate change agreement worthy of the trust of humankind.

- *Bahá’i International Community*
- *Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul*
- *Congregation of Notre Dame*
- *The Congregations of St. Joseph*
- *The Fellowship of Reconciliation*
- *Franciscans International*
- *GRATIS Foundation*
- *Initiatives of Change International*
- *International Peace Research Association*
- *International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation*
- *International Public Policy Institute*
- *International Women’s Anthropology Conference*
- *Loretto Community*
- *Oxfam International*
- *Passionists International*
- *School Sisters of Notre Dame*
- *Sisters of Charity Federation*
- *Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur*
- *Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries*
- *Solar Cookers International*
- *SustainUS*
- *UNANIMA International*
- *WEDO*
- *WOCAN*

Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN),

and the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO).

Jazz singer Tierney Sutton takes a spiritual look at “Desire”

Jazz vocalist Tierney Sutton has won rave reviews for her complex, deep, and hauntingly beautiful interpretation of classic Jazz songs.



IN BRIEF

- **Jazz vocalist Tierney Sutton is gaining recognition for her complex and beautiful interpretations**
- **The Bahá'í Faith has influenced her musical insight and collaborative relationship with fellow musicians**
- **Her latest album, *Desire*, explores whether material things lead to happiness**

LOS ANGELES — Tierney Sutton is hardly alone among jazz vocalists in trying to bring a spiritual dimension to her music. Some trace jazz back to African-American spirituals in the 1800s. More recently, musicians from Duke Ellington to John Coltrane have touched on spiritual themes.

But the 46-year old singer has taken this to a new level, not only because of the way she incorporates the Bahá'í sacred writings into her latest album but also the manner in which she uses spiritual principles to help create her music.

Her album *Desire*, released in early 2009, exemplifies these elements — and, like her previous albums, has received rave reviews — and a third consecutive Grammy nomination.

“Over the course of her widely acclaimed career, jazz vocalist Tierney Sutton has made several splendid concept albums,” wrote Mike Joyce in the *Washington Post* in August. “Now she has made a splendid and spiritual one, her most personal statement yet.”

Reviewer Suzi Price at *jazzreviews.com* wrote: “Tierney Sutton brings forth personal hope, self-worth and honesty in a world gone awry—a stunning inward look into your own soul from an exceptionally gifted vocalist.”

A member of the Bahá'í Faith since the age of 18, Ms. Sutton has indeed emerged as one of the outstanding jazz singers of the past decade — “a serious jazz artist who takes the whole enterprise to another level,” said the *New York Times* in 2007.

Desire features 11 well-known songs such as “Fever” and “Cry me a River.” The first and last tracks — “It’s Only a Paper Moon” and “Skylark” — are introduced by spoken extracts from *The Hidden Words*, a work by Bahá'u'lláh that states spiritual truths common to religions throughout the ages.

Ms. Sutton, whose previous two albums each won Grammy nominations, said she has wanted for years to do a record challenging the modern tendency to exalt material wealth

and self-gratification over humanity's higher, spiritual nature. Finally, the time was right.

"Material things that we want or desire are not usually a path to happiness," Ms. Sutton said, "and are not usually a path to ourselves."

The key to this exploration, she said, is the 15-year relationship she has with her band — Christian Jacob on piano, Trey Henry and Kevin Axt on bass, and Ray Brinker on drums — and the way the five have learned to work with one another and with the music. Together, they are known as the Tierney Sutton Band.

"I wouldn't have set about doing this in the first years that our band was together," Ms. Sutton said. "We are a collective and make all our decisions collectively. As time went by, we were all craving to get deeper — both musically and conceptually. We'd reached a place where we were all very comfortable about doing this."

As she began work on the album, she set about exploring the literature of the world's religions to find relevant passages to use.

"My 12-year-old son and I have held an interfaith children's class for the last six or seven years, so I had all the books from the different traditions to go to," she said. "I read through all of them looking for texts about materialism. Of course, all faith traditions speak of this but in the end, I found that Bahá'u'lláh's writings seemed to be the most direct and concise in terms of materialism."

"In the course of researching this album, my understanding of *The Hidden Words* changed, and I now see the core issue of the book as humanity's struggle between its spiritual nature and materialism."

It took her many years to consider her work as a form of service.

"There are deep prejudices in our society about the usefulness of artists," said Ms. Sutton, who grew up in Milwaukee in the central United States and now lives in Los Angeles. "I first set out to study Russian because I thought I would be able to serve humanity with it."

In the process of pursuing a bachelor's degree in Russian, she discovered jazz. "I knew there was something

spiritual there, but I couldn't see standing on a stage singing 'do-be-do' as service," she said. "Then, after about 10 years, we started to get reviews where the critic could catch in our performances something of what I was trying to convey as a Bahá'í."

Following one of her shows, a *New York Times* review said she "conveyed a sense of jazz singing as an extension of spiritual meditation in which adherence to an ideal of balance and consistency and, yes, humility took precedence over any technical or emotional grandstanding."

Letters from listeners began to confirm her in the idea of service.

"One man wrote to me and said our concert had given him his first experience of joy since his 20-year-old son had died the year before," she said. "Another email came from a man who was thinking of taking his own life. He heard one of our songs on the radio and came to our concert that night, and he changed his mind."

Finding harmony

Ms. Sutton said she sees her voice as just another instrument in the ensemble. The band is incorporated, with each member an equal partner in the finances.

"Look at the state of art and music in the world. It's in a very sorry state. I see people changed by listening to the level of excellence in this band," she said.

She also said that even though the other band members are not Bahá'ís,

they use a Bahá'í-inspired method of collaborative decision making, referred to as "consultation," in the process of making music.

"We want to offer our experience as a model to corporations and all sorts of organizations who struggle with problem solving. We are inspired by a true process of consultation. When we set out to make a song, one person puts out an idea and the others contribute theirs. We all know each other extremely well. We have different styles, strengths and weaknesses," she notes.

"We can only do what we do if we remain united. Unity changes the way you do everything. And when we are onstage we always need to have a deep and profound sense of humility. We are there to serve the music."

Ms. Sutton is one in a line of accomplished jazz musicians who have been inspired by the Bahá'í teachings, most notably Dizzy Gillespie, one of the 20th century's foremost trumpeters. She believes that there are parallels between the way that jazz works and concepts found in the Bahá'í Faith.

"Despite what people think, jazz is not a kind of music without rules," she said, "but its rules create a structure that inspires diverse expression. In the band, we all trust each other to follow certain rules. Likewise, the diversity and the variation of individual Bahá'í experience are vast and personally directed in many ways, but there are core values or principles guiding it."

The Tierney Sutton Band has been together for 15 years and, with the help of Bahá'í principles of consultation, has developed a unique collaboration.



A glimpse of conditions faced by Bahá'í prisoners inside Iran's Evin prison

IN BRIEF

- **Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi was imprisoned for about three weeks with two women Bahá'í prisoners**
- **She describes bleak conditions they face as they await trial**
- **Hundreds if not thousands more journalists, women's activists, human rights defenders, and others currently face similar conditions in Iran**

"Fariba and Mahvash were two of the women prisoners I met in Evin who inspired me the most. They showed me what it means to be selfless, to care more about one's community and beliefs than about oneself."

— Roxana Saberi

NEW YORK — During her time in Iran's notorious Evin prison, journalist Roxana Saberi met a number of fellow women prisoners who gave her strength and inspiration as she faced the interrogations of her keepers and the harsh conditions of the jail itself.

Among these were two Bahá'í prisoners, Fariba Kamalabadi and Mahvash Sabet, with whom Ms. Saberi shared a cell for about three weeks in early 2009.

"Fariba and Mahvash were two of the women prisoners I met in Evin who inspired me the most," said Ms. Saberi in a recent interview. "They showed me what it means to be selfless, to care more about one's community and beliefs than about oneself."

Ms. Saberi, an Iranian-Japanese-American journalist who was arrested in Tehran, had served about a month of an eight-year sentence for spying when she was released in May 2009, apparently in response to international pressure.

However, Ms. Kamalabadi and Ms. Sabet — along with five male Bahá'í leaders — remain in Tehran's Evin prison. The seven were arrested in March and May 2008 and have since been held on charges of espionage, "insulting religious sanctities" and "propaganda against the Islamic republic."

As of this writing, the seven have been given a new date for a trial: 12 January 2010. Earlier trial dates, however, have been previously announced, only to be postponed for various reasons.

Diane Ala'i, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, said the seven are

being held on baseless charges and should be immediately released.

"Their indictment is based entirely on religious persecution," said Ms. Ala'i. "The unfounded detention of these seven individuals reflects the degree to which the Iranian government cannot abide the existence of any group of Iranians whose ideas are not in conformity with the official line."

Ms. Saberi's description of the conditions facing the two Bahá'í women offers considerable insight into what it is like to be unjustly incarcerated in Iran today — a situation experienced not only by Bahá'ís, but by hundreds if not thousands among the journalists, women's activists, human rights



Roxana Saberi at a news conference in May 2009 after her return to the United States. [GettyImages News]

defenders, and peaceful protestors who are currently held in Iran.

According to Ms. Saberi, the two Bahá'í women are confined in a small cell about four meters by five meters in size, with two little, metal-covered windows.

They have no bed. "They must sleep on blankets," said Ms. Saberi. "They have no pillows, either. They roll up a blanket to use as a pillow. They use their chadors as a bed sheet.

"The floor is cement and covered with only a thin, brown carpet, and prisoners often get backaches and bruises from sleeping on it.

"The bathroom is down the hall, and prisoners must get permission to use it," she said.

Exercise periods were also limited. "When I was with them, we were allowed into a walled-in cement yard four days a week for 20 to 30 minutes," she said. "We were allowed to take a shower and wash our clothes by hand on the other three days of the week."

Before she joined them, the two had for a time each been kept in solitary confinement, and they had no access to outside news or books — save for the Qur'an and a few Islamic prayer books.

"They must sleep on blankets. They have no pillows, either. They roll up a blanket to use as a pillow. They use their chadors as a bed sheet."

— Roxana Saberi

"When I was with Mahvash and Fariba, they tried to keep a routine of reading those books that are allowed in prison, watching the state-run TV news, exercising in place in the cell, and praying," Ms. Saberi said.

Based on her experience and her knowledge of the situation in Iran today, she said their trial will most likely be closed, as hers was.

"The Bahá'í leaders' case seems to be seen by certain Iranian authorities as a 'security' one, and a major problem in Iran is that 'security' and 'threats to national security' are often politically



motivated and so vaguely, broadly and arbitrarily defined that innocent defendants can be considered guilty.

"If the Bahá'í leaders are lucky, they will be assigned a judge who will give them a fair trial. However, there are many shortcomings in Iran's judicial system, and it is likely the seven will be confronted with these shortcomings.

"It is common for defendants to be prohibited from having substantive or private meetings with their lawyers before trials, for their lawyers to lack sufficient access to their files and for the lawyers and defendants to be barred from studying what the prosecution claims is 'evidence.'

"We have already seen infringements of their rights from the very beginning, including being held incommunicado, being interrogated while blindfolded, and having no access to a lawyer for months and months."

Ms. Saberi described the response of the two Bahá'í women.

"I believe they always kept in mind the fact that their behavior in prison could have consequences for the wider Bahá'í community. They seemed to feel this was both a responsibility but also a blessing, something that gave them strength to carry on," she said.

The seven Bahá'í prisoners, photographed several months before their arrest, are, in front, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Saeid Rezaie, and, standing, Fariba Kamalabadi, Vahid Tizfahm, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, and Mahvash Sabet.

UN Secretary General releases report criticizing human rights abuses in Iran

The report focused extensively on the Iranian government's response to post-election protests. It noted that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon himself had on 22 June issued a statement "expressing dismay at the post-election violence, particularly the use of force against civilians, which had led to the loss of life and injuries."

UNITED NATIONS — The UN Secretary General released in October a report expressing strong criticism of Iran's human rights record, voicing concern about the use of excessive force after the recent presidential election, the harassment of women's rights activists, the ongoing execution of juveniles, and the continued persecution of minorities, including Bahá'ís.

In a 19-page report written specifically to address a request made last December from the UN General Assembly about human rights in Iran, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said there have been "negative developments" in the area of civil and political rights since 2008.

The year saw "an increase in human rights violations targeting women, university students, teachers, workers and other activist groups, particularly in the aftermath of the elections," Mr. Ban said.

"Members of various ethnic and minority groups faced harassment, violence and, in some cases, persecution," he added, noting that "a pattern of concern arises with respect to the protection of minorities, including the Bahá'í community, the Arab minority in Khuzestan, the Nematollahi Sufi Muslim community, the Kurdish community, the Sunni community, the Baluchi community, and the Azeri-Turk community."

The report made specific mention of seven imprisoned Bahá'í leaders who were arrested in the spring of 2008 and have since been held in Evin prison, noting that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has written to Iran "on numerous occasions to express concern and seek clarification" about their status.

Mr. Ban also noted that during the year reports "continued to be received about members of the Bahá'í community being subjected to arbitrary detention, confiscation of property and denial of employment, government benefits, and access to higher education."

The report, dated 23 September 2009 but released in October, focused extensively on the government's response to post-election protests. It noted that Mr. Ban himself had on 22 June issued a statement "expressing dismay at the post-election violence, particularly the use of force against civilians, which had led to the loss of life and injuries."

That statement, the report noted, called on the authorities to respect fundamental civil and political rights, especially freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of information. It also called for an immediate stop to the arrests, threats, and use of force. Yet, the report noted, a spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry said the following day that he rejected the secretary general's statement.

Like a similar report he issued last year, Mr. Ban also took note of reports of Iran's continuing execution of juveniles, reports of the use of torture, and the oppression of women's rights activists.

"I encourage the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to address the concerns highlighted in the report and to continue to revise national laws, particularly the new penal code and juvenile justice laws, to ensure compliance with international human rights standards and prevent discriminatory practices against women, ethnic and religious minorities, and other minority groups," he said in the report's conclusion.

UN resolution on Iran sends powerful message on human rights

UNITED NATIONS — The approval of a strongly worded resolution on human rights in Iran sends a powerful signal to the Iranian government that the world is gravely concerned about how Iran treats its citizens, said the Bahá'í International Community.

The resolution, approved on 20 November 2009 by a vote of 74 to 48 by the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, expressed “deep concern at serious ongoing and recurring human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran.” The list of violations included oppressive measures taken after the June presidential election and “increasing discrimination” against minority groups, including Bahá'ís.

“This year’s resolution — which is among the most forcefully worded in more than 25 years of resolutions on Iran — sends a potent message to the government there, stating vigorously that the international community will not turn a blind eye to human rights violations,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations.

“The General Assembly identifies numerous violations, including the use of torture, the repeated abuse of legal rights, the violent repression of women, and the ongoing discrimination against minorities, including Bahá'ís, who are Iran’s largest religious minority and are persecuted solely because of their religious belief,” she said.

The resolution also expresses concern over the treatment of “Arabs, Azeris, Baluchis, Kurds, Christians,

Jews, Sufis and Sunni Muslims and their defenders.”

The resolution, which was put forward by Canada and cosponsored by 42 other countries, calls on Iran to better cooperate with UN human rights monitors, such as by allowing them to make visits to Iran, and asks the UN secretary general to report back next year on Iran’s progress at fulfilling its human rights obligations.

“The resolution also sharply condemns Iran’s severe curbs on freedom of expression and its use of violence to silence dissent after the presidential election in June,” said Ms. Dugal. “We can only hope that, given the severity of the resolution’s expression, Iran will at long last heed the international community’s recommendations and change its ways.”

Post-election turmoil

Noting the turmoil that followed the presidential elections, the resolution devoted eight paragraphs to express “particular concern” about oppressive measures used by the government to suppress dissent. It noted specifically the persecution of journalists, human rights defenders, students and “others exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and association.”

It also noted the “use of violence” against “Iranian citizens engaged in the peaceful exercise of freedom of association, also resulting in numerous deaths and injuries.” And it criticized the holding of “mass trials and denying defendants access to adequate legal representation.”

It makes extensive mention of the persecution of Bahá'ís, expressing

concern over “attacks on Bahá'ís and their faith in State-sponsored media, increasing evidence of efforts by the State to identify, monitor and arbitrarily detain Bahá'ís, preventing members of the Bahá'í Faith from attending university and from sustaining themselves economically.”

The resolution also notes the continued detention of seven Bahá'í leaders who were arrested in March and May 2008, stating they have faced “serious charges without adequate or timely access to legal representation.”

— Bahá'í World News Service

“This year’s resolution – which is among the most forcefully worded in more than 25 years of resolutions on Iran – sends a potent message to the government there, stating vigorously that the international community will not turn a blind eye to human rights violations.”

— Bani Dugal, Bahá'í International Community



Religious and secular delegates who received certificates for their long-term commitments to protect the environment stand together on the stage at Windsor Castle, along with Prince Philip and Ban Ki-moon. [Courtesy ARC/Stonehouse Photography]

IN BRIEF

- Amid pageantry, Windsor event unveiled concrete action plans on environment by world religions
- The plans promise the greening of thousands of religious buildings worldwide, increasing environmental education programs for children and youth, and simpler, more environmentally conscious lifestyles based on divine teachings
- Vast numbers of followers make religions perhaps “the largest civil society movement for change”

World religions pledge concrete action on climate change

Windsor, continued from page 1

Held 2-4 November 2009, the Windsor event was sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), an organization founded in 1995 by HRH Prince Philip to help major religions to develop environmental programs.

The main session at Windsor Castle, held 3 November, sought to ceremoniously unveil the commitments of participating religions. Each offered a multi-year effort to promote “generational change” in global attitudes towards the environment.

31 plans

Thirty-one plans were presented, reflecting representation by virtually all of the world’s independent religions: the Bahá’í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism, and Sikhism.

Their emphasis was on concrete action, focused on what religious believers themselves can do in their own lives and within their faith communities.

The Jewish plan, for example, aims to encourage Jewish institutions and individuals to apply environmental criteria in making investment decisions, to growing more of their own food, and to integrating

environmental education into rabbinical and other schools.

The Muslim plan likewise urges a greater focus on environmental education, calling for the development of more material on conservation that can be used in Islamic schools. It also calls for the establishment of an umbrella organization, the Muslim Association for Climate Change Action (MACCA), that will represent Islamic nations and faith communities around the world, the creation of an Islamic environmental labeling system, and movement towards a “green hajj” to make the traditional Islamic pilgrimage more environmentally friendly.

The Buddhists of Shanghai pledged to hold regular environmental lectures and seminars, run Zen “Mind Meditation Camps” to teach about mindfulness towards nature, and to develop educational materials. They are also urging followers to eat a more vegetarian diet to protect the environment.

Both Chinese Buddhists and Daoists pledged to promote the use of fewer sticks of incense in worship, something that comes partly in response to the relatively recent practice in newly affluent China of people burning hundreds of incense sticks and creating local pollution. By insisting that fewer incense sticks are enough, Daoist and Buddhist monasteries hope not only to protect their own clean air, but also to send a

symbolic message that wastefulness is not a good way to be faithful.

The Sikh plan aims to have all Sikh *gurdwaras* — temples — start to recycle, compost, use eco-stoves, adopt rainwater harvesting, and purchase reusable plates and cups.

The Church of South India, which has four million members in 21 dioceses, pledged to become a “green church” through efforts such as rainwater harvesting, interactive eco-Bible study programs, Environment Day celebrations, the training of resource persons, and the promotion of organic farming and tree planting.

The Bahá’í plan pledges to use the Faith’s worldwide system of regional training institutes to encourage Bahá’ís around the world to commit themselves to “acts of service related to environmental sustainability.” [See page 14]

Scarcity versus abundance thinking

Martin Palmer, secretary general of ARC, said the plans and commitments unveiled at Windsor represent an important break from traditional thinking about how to solve environmental challenges.

He noted that many environmental groups exist to lobby others — such as governments — to take action or pass laws. “We took a deliberately alternative approach,” said Mr. Palmer. “We are not telling anybody what they should do. We are saying what we will do, and then asking governments and others to join us.”

Religions think differently about social problems, he said.

“If one were to sum up what Windsor represents, it is the contrast between scarcity thinking and abundance thinking.

“For national governments and most mainstream environmental groups, it is scarcity thinking. ‘There isn’t enough to go around. I’m going to give as little as possible but I want somebody else to do more.’

“With the faiths, it is abundance thinking. ‘We will give what we can and we want you to do so as well,’” Mr. Palmer said.



Arthur Dahl and Tahirih Naylor, at left, representing the Bahá’í International Community, receive certificates from Prince Philip, center, Martin Palmer and Ban Ki-moon, far right. [Courtesy ARC/Stonehouse Photography]

“Bahá’ís believe that religious belief and spirituality lie at the foundation of human motivation and behavior.”

— Tahirih Naylor, Bahá’í International Community

Mahmoud A. Akef, executive director of Earth Mates Dialogue Center in London, which helped put together the Muslim plan, said “the idea of scarcity is a myth and most of our economic problems exist because of this [idea].”

Nigel Savages, executive director of Hazon, a New York-based Jewish environmental organization that helped put together the Jewish plan, said religions have two key contributions that can be made: “They have a moral voice and are capable of taking a long-term perspective.”

In his view, the Jewish plan is essentially a “campaign,” intended to “catalyze” the response of the Jewish people to climate change.

“The plans that were submitted at Windsor, including the Jewish one, were not authoritarian in nature,” said Mr. Savages. “They were not religious leaders, speaking on behalf of their community, saying ‘such and such must happen, and we instruct you to do X.’”

Tahirih Naylor of the Bahá’í International Community said religious belief can bring a uniquely powerful force for individual and collective change to the environmental movement.

“Bahá’ís believe that religious belief and spirituality lie at the foundation of human motivation and behavior,” said Ms. Naylor, one of two Bahá’í delegates to the Windsor event.

“We believe that efforts to change harmful human behavior — such as those actions that contribute to global warming or environmental degradation — can be greatly facilitated by processes that lead to a better understanding of our own relationship to God, and of humanity’s relationship with nature. It is from such understanding that action naturally arises.”

Olav Kjørven, assistant secretary general of the United Nations and director of the Bureau of Development Policy at the UN Development Programme, said the sheer numbers of people who are deeply involved in their faith communities make religions perhaps “the largest civil society movement for change.”

“Climate change is complex, and dealing with it requires us to change at many levels,” said Mr. Kjørven. “It requires a change of ethos. Religions

have an unparalleled ability to reach out to people at the grassroots and to touch hearts and minds. Religious institutions are the third largest actors in international markets. Environmentally friendly purchasing decisions by them would have a huge impact across the world.”

“Religions have an unparalleled ability to reach out to people at the grassroots and to touch hearts and minds.”

— Olav Kjorven, UNDP

Tony Juniper, special adviser to the Prince of Wales’ Rainforests Project and former executive director of the Friends of the Earth, said governmental action on the environment can only go so far.

“Scientific rationalism gave rise to good science, which in turn gave rise to strong political arguments for cleaning up the environment,” Mr. Juniper said.

“As a result, governments dealt with acid rain and other environmental threats. But these changes were only superficial,” he said.

“Purely scientific rationalism cannot change our fundamental understanding of who we are and how we should live. Religion and science must work together to bring about a fundamental transformation in our relationship to the world. This kind of change needs a spiritual foundation,” he said.

— *With reporting by Barney Leith*

ENVIRONMENT

Excerpts from the Bahá’í International Community’s Seven Year Plan of Action on Climate Change

The Bahá’í writings state: “We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.”

The Bahá’í International Community has worked for more than two decades to contribute to discourses on issues related to the environment. This plan describes the approach the Bahá’í community proposes to educate our community about climate change, to raise consciousness about environmental issues, and to build the capacity of our members to contribute to the resolution of this global challenge.

The plan reflects certain general principles that are important for the Bahá’í community. Bahá’ís believe that progress in the development field depends on and is driven by stirrings at the grass roots of society rather than from an imposition of externally developed plans and programmes. This plan, then, seeks to increase local communities’ and individuals’ awareness of the needs and possibilities and of their capacity to respond. ...

Bahá’ís all over the world are engaged in a coherent framework of action, which includes certain core activities. These activities promote the systematic study of the Bahá’í writings in small groups in order to build capacity for service. Small groups unite with each other in prayer and devotion shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character. They provide for the needs of the children of the world and offer them lessons that develop their spiritual

faculties and lay the foundations of a noble and upright character. They also assist junior youth to navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and to become empowered to direct their energies toward the advancement of civilization. ...

The most effective method to raise the consciousness of the worldwide Bahá’í community on the subject of climate change and to engage them in acts of service related to environmental sustainability is ... to develop a course to explore the relationship of humans to the environment as articulated in the Bahá’í sacred writings. This course would not simply be aimed at increasing knowledge on the subject but would build the capacity of participants to engage in acts of service related to environmental sustainability. Similarly, the programs for children and junior youth would include material on climate change and the contribution that the younger generation can make to address the climate crisis.

There are already examples of devotional gatherings in local communities that have chosen as their theme “care of the earth” or “the environment.” Prayers, sacred writings and meditations during the devotional have elaborated this theme. Several children’s classes offer acts of service to their communities. In some cases this action has been planting a community garden or cleaning up a stream or river.

Thousands of people worldwide have participated in these core activities. In 2006, the most recent year for which comprehensive statistics are available, an estimated 46,000 people participated in study circles worldwide, 112,000 attended devotional meetings, and some 93,000 were involved in children’s classes.

Review: *Half the Sky*

Half the Sky, continued from page 16

are the heart-rending and intimately detailed personal stories that illustrate how deeply rooted these problems are in some parts of the world — and, yet, how it is nevertheless possible to make headway against them.

The book opens with the story of Srey Rath, a young Cambodian woman who at the age of 15 went to Thailand to wash dishes to help support her impoverished family and was instead taken to Malaysia where she was held

“One study after another has shown that educating girls is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty.”

— Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn

captive and forced to have sex for money. To ensure compliance (and smiles for her customers), her captors routinely beat and drugged her.

Yet Ms. Rath escaped, returned to Cambodia, and connected with an aid group that helps girls who have been trafficked start new lives. The group used \$400 in donated funds to buy a small cart and a starter selection of goods so that Rath could become a street peddler.

In another chapter, they tell the story of Mukhtar Mai, a young Pakistani girl who was gang-raped at the order of her tribal council as a monstrous but traditional punishment to her family. “They know that a woman humiliated in that way has no other recourse except suicide,” Mukhtar herself later wrote. But she resisted that urge and went on to become an international spokesperson for women’s rights and the founder of a school for girls.

In such stories, Mr. Kristof and Ms. WuDunn have a goal: to prod individuals into joining a “new emancipation movement to empower women and girls around the world.”

For Bahá’ís, *Half the Sky* stands out for the signal attention it gives to the importance of women’s advancement not only as a human rights issue, but one that is deeply connected to peace and prosperity for everyone.

About a century ago, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá identified women’s equality as a prerequisite to international peace and economic development.

Women, he wrote, “will be the greatest factor in establishing universal peace.... Inasmuch as human society consists of two parts, the male and female, each the complement of the other, the happiness and stability of humanity cannot be assured unless both are perfected.”

The Bahá’í writings, moreover, emphasize the importance of educating girls, stressing that in the extreme instance where a choice must be made between educating boys or girls, girls should be given priority.

Mr. Kristof and Ms. WuDunn, who are married and between them have won several Pulitzer prizes for their reporting, offer considerable evidence that the advancement of women will have powerful reverberations in addressing other global problems. *Half the Sky* takes its title from a Chinese proverb that “Women hold up half the sky,” and they endeavor to prove its accuracy.

“Think about the major issues confronting us in this century,” they write near the book’s conclusion. “These include war, insecurity, and terrorism; population pressures, environmental strains, and climate change; poverty and income gaps. For all these diverse problems, empowering women is part of the answer.

“Most obviously, educating girls and bringing them into the formal economy will yield economic dividends and help address global poverty. Environmental pressures arise almost inevitably from surging population growth, and the best way to reduce fertility in a society is to educate girls and give them job opportunities. Likewise, we’ve argued that one way to soothe some conflict-ridden societies is to bring women and girls into schools, the workplace, government, and business, partly to boost the economy and partly to ease the testosterone-laden values of these countries.”



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Stories from the front lines in the most underreported conflict of the century

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide

— By Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn

Alfred A. Knopf, New York

IN BRIEF

- More than 60 million women and girls are “missing” from the world’s population
- This “gendercide” comes from abuse, neglect, and abortion or infanticide aimed at women
- Pulitzer-prize winning journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn say this “paramount moral challenge” can be addressed by a worldwide grassroots movement

Early in their latest book, journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn offer this startling fact: a straightforward calculation of male-to-female ratios shows that at least 60 million women and girls are “missing” from global population figures.

This gap, they say, has largely come about because of decades of gender-specific abuse, neglect, and infanticide or abortion — “gendercide.”

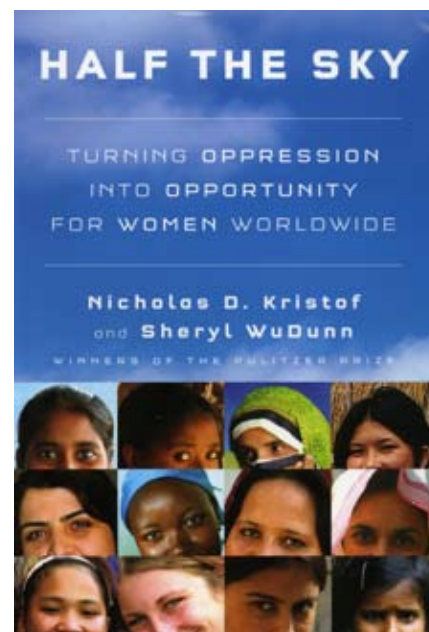
“It appears that more girls have been killed in the last fifty years, precisely because they were girls, than men were killed in all the wars of the twentieth century,” they write in *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*.

Armed with facts and figures like that — and coupled with a wealth of compelling personal stories about women who are on the front lines of this largely unreported war — Mr. Kristof and Ms. WuDunn argue that the “paramount moral challenge” of this young century is “the struggle for gender equality in the developing world.”

Their focus is on three particular abuses: sex trafficking and forced prostitution; gender-based violence, including honor killings and mass rape; and maternal mortality, which they say needlessly claims one woman a minute.

These abuses reflect the darkest aspects of women’s oppression, they say, and yet all can reasonably be addressed by concerted action at the international level and also by individual efforts on the part of global citizens everywhere.

For rather than merely complaining about the difficulties involved in addressing such egregious problems, Mr. Kristof and Ms. WuDunn explicitly



and consciously weave into their tale stories of women who have successfully overcome abuse, neglect and inequality, often with the help of outsiders.

Specifically, they suggest, efforts to boost the education of girls and to provide microfinance for women can pay huge dividends in terms of ending oppression and creating opportunity.

“One study after another has shown that educating girls is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty,” they write.

Many of these ideas, of course, are not new. UNICEF, UNIFEM and other UN agencies, along with numerous non-governmental organizations, have long cast women’s inequality in a human rights framework and stressed the fundamental importance of education for girls in fighting poverty.

What makes *Half the Sky* so compelling, and therefore so important,

Half the Sky, continued on page 15