

# ONE COUNTRY

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

Newsletter of the  
Bahá'í International Community  
October 2012-March 2013  
Volume 22, Issue 4

DEVELOPMENT

## Inside this issue

page 2

Perspective:  
Regarding Poverty  
and Participation



page 4

At the UN, a high level  
event explores how to  
best promote religious  
tolerance



page 6

At the UN, "deep  
concern" over  
human rights  
violations in Iran



page 12

In Maryland, Hoda  
Mahmoudi outlines  
her vision for the  
Bahá'í Chair for  
World Peace



page 20

Review: *Human  
Rights in an  
Advancing  
Civilization* by  
Aaron Emmel



## The UN and civil society begin to discuss post-2015 development goals

**U**NITED NATIONS — When they were formulated some 15 years ago, one of the main ideas behind the Millennium Development Goals was to provide a set of concrete and measurable objectives to guide UN agencies and others in a global effort to eradicate poverty, promote gender equality, and ensure sustainable development.

And today there is wide agreement that the MDGs have brought focus and significant progress to international development.

"On the whole, the MDGs have been an incredibly effective mobilizing tool, not only for development but also for getting people to understand some of the problems in the world and in rallying civil society around them," said Minh-Thu Pham, public policy director for the UN Foundation.

Now, with the Goals set to expire in 2015, the UN has embarked on a wide-ranging process to determine the "post-2015 development agenda," as the subject is commonly known. And civil society is eager to join in the discussion.

A number of broad coalitions of non-governmental and civil society organizations have recently emerged to address the post-2015 framework, producing statements and creating websites aimed at stimulating discussion and offering their viewpoints on the so-called "post-MDGs."

The UN, for its part, has set up a series of meetings, venues, and channels for civil society input, aiming to make the process more open than when the MDGs were devised. Although the Goals can trace their priorities to the global conferences of the

**Post-2015**, continued on page 14



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (fourth from right, front row) poses for a group photo with the members of his High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda on 25 September 2012. (UN Photo)

# Regarding Poverty and Participation

## IN BRIEF

- **Those living in poverty must be included in decision-making processes not simply because it is the “right” thing to do, but because the progress of society as a whole depends on their full participation.**
- **Expanding meaningful opportunities for participation also has intrinsic value as it respects the inherent worth and dignity of all peoples and provides an environment in which their experiences and perspectives can be heard.**
- **The task of incorporating all people, regardless of material wealth, into the effort to advance civilization calls for the articulation of a vibrant and compelling vision of human prosperity at its widest and most inclusive.**

*[Editor’s note: The following is adapted from the Bahá’í International Community’s recent contribution to the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights regarding the participation of persons living in poverty. The full report can be read at <http://www.bic.org/statements/meaningful-participation> ]*

**T**he idea that every person has a role to play in shaping the processes and structures that impact their lives is now widely accepted and considered by many as a cornerstone of social action.

Poverty is a condition that arises from the injustices of society. The very structures that perpetuate poverty also perpetuate the lack of participation of the materially poor in decisions that affect their lives. Too often, those living in poverty are not treated as part of society; social norms and structures, legal mechanisms and economic policies develop in ways that, either explicitly or not, exclude them from full participation. The responsibility lies with society — its communities and social institutions — to make it possible for all people to contribute their energies and talents to the construction of a more just and equitable global community.

The expansion of opportunities for the materially poor to voice their perspectives on issues that affect their lives has been expressed in terms of both human rights and obligations. Equally important, though less acknowledged, is the reality that only by involving the people directly affected by decisions can the best ideas emerge and the greatest advances be made. Those living in poverty must be included in decision-making processes not simply because it is the “right” thing to do, but because if they are not, the progress of society as a whole

— impacting rich and poor alike — will be hindered.

The erroneous belief that those with power and resources already possess everything needed for society to thrive undermines the meaningful participation of those who have traditionally been excluded and thwarts human development as a whole, by discounting a rich source of insights, knowledge, ideas and resources.

A key question, then, is whether efforts to involve the materially poor in decision-making are conceived in terms of their contribution to society as a whole, or whether their involvement is understood merely within the context of projects created by others — generally those with access to resources and power.

It is an unfortunate reality that participatory mechanisms designed for those living in poverty often take the form of pro forma consultations or largely symbolic “listening-sessions.” Participation must be substantive and creative if it is to further constructive social transformation. It must engage constituents in the full range of the decision-making process, from identifying challenges, devising solutions, and choosing approaches to determining implementation strategies and articulating criteria for evaluation. In particular, the more individuals are included in the early stages of the process, the more fully they can express their agency.

The present-day social order, in which materialism and exploitation have largely supplanted the organizing principles of justice and mutualism, exerts its influence on each one of us and shapes our understanding of ourselves and our role in society. The exclusion of individuals from relevant decision-making processes, the failure of society to consider their needs and aspirations,

too often distorts their perceptions of their dignity and self-worth. Expanding meaningful opportunities for participation, then, has intrinsic value as it respects the inherent worth and dignity of marginalized peoples and provides an environment in which their experiences, perspectives, their hopes and fears can be heard.

Expanding the participation of those who have historically been excluded from decision-making not only increases the pool of intellectual resources, but can also foster the trust and mutual commitment needed for sustained, collective action. A diversity of opinions, on its own, however, does not provide a means to bridge differences or resolve social tensions. A unifying process of decision-making is needed — one which helps participants to formulate common goals, to manage collective resources, to win the good-will and support of all stakeholders, and to mobilize diverse talents and capacities.

Though much remains to be learned, certain features seem integral to such a process. Among these is the effort to identify and apply moral and social principles to the matter at hand. Many well-intentioned groups can formulate approaches to the problems before them, but such plans are valuable only to the degree that they can be translated into action. Because good intentions and good ideas will not suffice in the face of stretched budgets, meager resources, and contending visions of progress and well-being, agreement will need to be reached on the underlying principles.

Reaching a shared vision of action requires processes of collective inquiry and decision-making that focus on ascertaining facts and assessing circumstances, rather than on advancing competing claims and interests. In such an atmosphere, ideas that have been shared no longer “belong” to the individuals who expressed them, but become a resource to be adopted, modified or discarded by the group as a whole. And while individuals are free to express differing opinions and viewpoints in a candid and frank manner, interactions need to be dignified and



Kanchanpur, Nepal. Meaningful participation includes those who have traditionally been excluded, and provides a rich source of insights, knowledge, ideas, and resources.

guided by a shared search for the truth about a given situation.

Conventional models of disputation and debate, which exclude the masses of the world’s people, perpetuate patterns of conflict, and place inordinate emphasis on the concerns of a powerful few, have proven inadequate to the task of building a world in which all can thrive and prosper.

Building the capacity of the world’s peoples and social institutions to create a prosperous and just society will require a vast increase in knowledge. Rather than unquestioningly adopting “solutions” developed elsewhere, an emphasis on strengthening local capacity to generate, apply and diffuse knowledge can help to put into place an ongoing process of action and reflection. Such an approach encourages respect of the existing knowledge base of a community, raises the community’s confidence in its ability to devise, implement and assess solutions, and helps to systematize and expand local knowledge.

Every community possesses structures for decision-making and consensus building. To the extent that they are recognized and utilized by members of the community, these structures and modes of organization can provide a starting point for efforts to give a greater voice to the perspectives and concerns of the materially poor in decisions that affect their lives and the progress of the community.

The task of incorporating all people, regardless of material wealth, into the advancement of civilization calls for the articulation of a vibrant and compelling vision of human prosperity at its widest and most inclusive. Such a vision must address the need for harmony between varying aspects of development (cultural, technological, economic, social, moral, spiritual), and must give rise to a widely-shared sense of common purpose.

Approaching social progress in such a way requires a model of human relationships that coherently incorporates the pervasive and growing interdependence characterizing the peoples and nations of the world today. One such model can be found in the complexity and coordination that characterizes the human body, in which millions of cells, immeasurably diverse in form and function, collaborate to make life possible. Every cell plays a role in maintaining a healthy body and each is linked to a lifelong process of giving and receiving. The growing consciousness of a common humanity lying just beneath the surface is redefining our relationships with one another as individuals, communities, and nations.

# At the UN, an exploration about how to best promote religious tolerance

## IN BRIEF

- **A ministerial level side event sponsored by Italy and Jordan during the high level summit of world leaders in September explored the connection between human rights and religious tolerance.**
- **Among other things, participants said while freedom of religion or belief is often overlooked as a significant human right, it is nevertheless crucial in promoting religious tolerance and reducing tension in many regions.**
- **Civil society plays a key role in promoting tolerance.**

**U**NITED NATIONS — While the right to freedom of religion or belief is often overlooked or under-enforced by governments, it is nevertheless crucial in promoting religious tolerance — and is thus central to reducing tensions in many of the world’s current flash points.

That was among the main themes of a discussion sponsored by Italy and Jordan during the UN’s annual high level summit of world leaders in September.

As part of an initiative by the two governments to promote religious tolerance worldwide, the discussion, held on 27 September 2012, focused on the issue of “current and future challenges” in the protection of religious minorities, featuring the views of civil society representatives.

“The protection of religious liberty is clearly the challenge of our times and the challenge of the 21st Century,” said panelist Elizabeth Defeis, a professor of law at Seton Hall Law School.

Ms. Defeis cited a new report by the Pew Research Center that says 75 percent of the world’s population lives in countries with high government restrictions on or high social hostilities towards religion.

“The report indicates that Christians are most at risk, and are the subject of such discrimination in more than 110 countries,” she said. “Such actions are of course in violation of international law.

“As an aspect of sovereignty, all nations have a responsibility to protect their own populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity,” said Prof. Defeis. “Sadly, violence directed



Panelists at a discussion on religious tolerance at the United Nations on 27 September 2012 included, left to right, Pamela Falk, a CBS News foreign affairs analyst; Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations, and William Vendley, secretary-general of Religions for Peace.

against civilians because of religious practices and beliefs can rise to the level of crimes against humanity.”

Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations, said efforts to uphold religious freedom provide an antidote to religious intolerance and the resulting crises that emerge when religious groups clash.

“It has been well established that the repression of freedom of religion or belief leads to political and social instability, unrest, at times culminating in violent clashes and loss of life,” said Ms. Dugal.

---

**“It has been well established that the repression of freedom of religion or belief leads to political and social instability, unrest, at times culminating in violent clashes and loss of life.”**

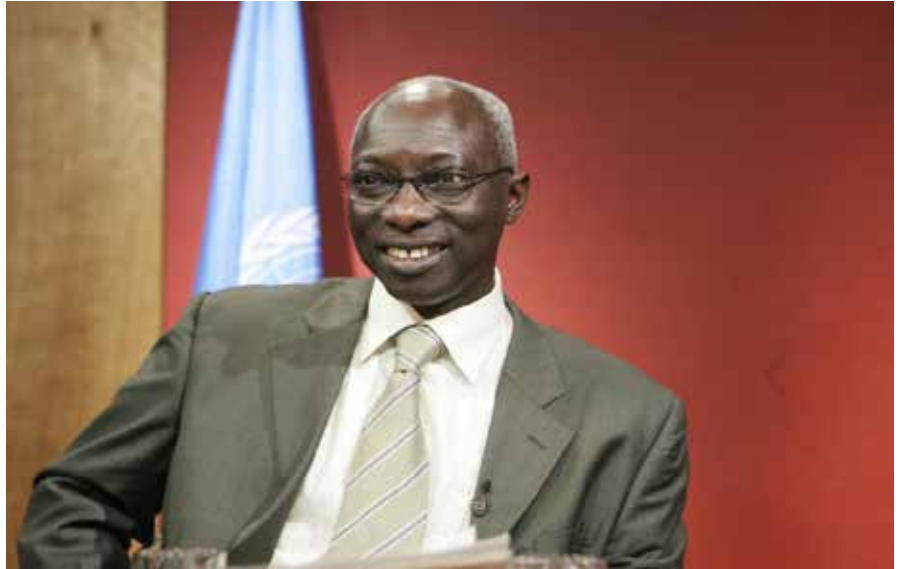
— Bani Dugal, Bahá’í International Community

“When governments actively suppress or repress these freedoms, they marginalize religious communities, exacerbate misunderstandings, and encourage the propagation of harmful and hateful stereotypes.”

She cited the case of Iran’s persecution of Bahá’ís as a dramatic example of “state-sponsored religious persecution.”

“No society is perfect, but the freedoms enjoyed in pluralistic societies in which diversity of religion and belief is protected, coupled with the rule of law, provide a much more stable foundation for peaceful relations between members of different religions and for positive dynamics in society at large,” said Ms. Dugal.

Also on the panel were William Vendley, secretary general of Religions for Peace, who discussed a wide range of interfaith programs sponsored by his organization around the world, and James Patton of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy. Pamela Falk, a CBS News foreign affairs analyst, moderated the discussion, which was one of three panels at a day-long forum on religious tolerance.



Adama Dieng, the UN Secretary General’s Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, was a keynote speaker at the Ministerial Level side event on human rights as a tool for promoting religious tolerance, held at UN headquarters on 27 September 2012. (UN Photo/Mark Garten)

## **A priority for governments**

Earlier in the day, Italy’s foreign minister, Giulio Terzi, joined the foreign minister of Jordan, Nasser Judeh, to discuss why freedom of religion must be addressed as a priority by governments and civil society. Among the best remedies to religious intolerance, they said, was increased education about human rights.

“Civil society,” said Minister Judeh, “particularly human rights defenders and religious and community leaders, play a crucial role in countering all forms of extremism and hatred and in promoting tolerance, fostering dialogue and mutual understanding.”

“The promotion of religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue have always been the main principles that Jordan abides by and adheres to,” he added.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay, UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova, and UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng also addressed the meeting, which was held as a side event to the annual September summit meeting of the UN General Assembly.

Mr. Dieng said religious tolerance and respect for freedom of religion or belief is essential in defusing “identity-based” conflicts that sometimes lead to genocide.

“In a world where societies are more and more diverse, tolerance is more likely to flourish when the human rights of all religious groups are respected and, similarly, human rights can thrive only if different groups are treated in the same way,” said Mr. Dieng.

Ms. Bokova took note of the recent religious disturbances in many Muslim countries following the posting of an anti-Muslim film on YouTube.

“The new global public space created by the Internet has opened new challenges, but new opportunities for dialogue also,” said Ms. Bokova. “We know that to achieve lasting peace nowadays, unlike 40 years ago, that co-existence is not enough. It has to be upheld by mutual respect, by genuine dialogue.”

# At the UN, governments express “deep concern” over human rights violations in Iran

Ahmed Shaheed, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, speaking at a press conference on Wednesday 24 October 2012. (UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe)



## IN BRIEF

- **By a vote of 86 to 32, the UN General Assembly expressed in December “deep concern” over “serious ongoing and recurring human rights violations in Iran.”**
- **The vote followed new reports from the UN Secretary-General and the Special Rapporteur on Iran that documented abuses ranging from torture and increased executions to discrimination against minorities, including members of the Bahá’í Faith.**

**U**NITED NATIONS — In an overwhelming vote, the UN General Assembly in December approved a resolution expressing “deep concern” over Iran’s “serious ongoing and recurring” human rights violations, decrying abuses that include torture, an increase in executions, widespread restrictions on freedom of expression, and discrimination against minorities, including members of the Bahá’í Faith.

By a margin of 86 to 32 with 65 abstentions, the General Assembly called upon Iran to stop such violations, to release prisoners of conscience, and to open its doors to international human rights monitors.

“This vote signals loud and clear the international community’s refusal to accept Iran’s ongoing and intensifying repression of its own people — or the government’s claims that such violations do not take place,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations.

“The list of abuses outlined in this resolution is long and cruel. Overall,

the picture it paints is of a government that is so afraid of its own people that it cannot tolerate anyone who holds a viewpoint that is different from its own repressive ideology.

“For the Bahá’ís, there has been persistent and worsening persecution at the hands of the government and its agents,” said Ms. Dugal, noting that more than 100 Bahá’ís were currently imprisoned in Iran.

The text of the resolution — which was put forward by Canada and co-sponsored by 43 other countries — calls on Iran to better cooperate with UN human rights monitors, particularly 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, which was the 25th such on human rights violations in Iran by the General Assembly since 1985, followed the release in October of two high-level reports that documented and similarly condemned Iran’s behavior.

In his annual report on Iran to the UN General Assembly, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed “grave concern” over reports of torture, amputations, unfair trials, overuse of the death penalty, and the persecution of minorities, including Bahá’ís.

Ahmed Shaheed, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, also released his report to the Assembly, saying he had this year “catalogued a wide range” of human rights violations, including illegal limits on freedom of expression, failures of legal due process, attacks on freedom of religion, and the wrongful imprisonment of children.

“These violations are products of legal incongruities, insufficient adherence to the rule of law, and the existence of widespread impunity,” said Mr. Shaheed.

## Journalists imprisoned

Mr. Ban’s report highlighted the situation of journalists, human rights defenders, and women’s right activists, who he said are increasingly targeted by the Iranian government as it seeks to limit freedom of expression or assembly.

“As of December 2011, at least 40 journalists had reportedly been imprisoned, with several others at risk of arrest,” said Mr. Ban.

Mr. Ban also noted that human rights defenders have reportedly been tortured while in detention for “peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.”

He also took note of the situation of minorities, highlighting in particular the situation of Iran’s Bahá’í community. More than 474 Bahá’ís have been arrested since 2004, he said, and Bahá’ís face “severe socioeconomic pressure.” He noted for example that Bahá’í students are “frequently prevented” from pursuing higher education.

## Freedom of religion denied

Dr. Shaheed’s report extensively discussed freedom of religion, specifically addressing the situation of Bahá’í,

Christian, and Dervish communities in Iran. “Members of both recognized and unrecognized religions have reported various levels of intimidation, arrest, detention and interrogation that focus on their religious beliefs,” said Dr. Shaheed.

Dr. Shaheed devoted two paragraphs to the situation of the Bahá’í community of Iran. He noted that while the government claims that Bahá’ís have “equal legal, social and economic rights,” he continues to receive reports that Bahá’ís “face intimidation and arrest because of their religion.”

“For example, on 17 February 2012, officials reportedly arrived at a charity event in Mashhad, demanded the cell phones of all present, required them to report on their personal details, and identify their religion in writing and in front of a video camera....”

“Moreover, individuals that identified themselves as Muslims were reportedly separated from Bahá’ís, questioned about their relationships with Bahá’í attendees and released. The authorities then reportedly proceeded to arrest a number of Bahá’ís,” wrote Dr. Shaheed.

---

**“On 17 February 2012, officials reportedly arrived at a charity event in Mashhad, demanded the cell phones of all present, required them to report on their personal details, and identify their religion in writing and in front of a video camera.... Individuals that identified themselves as Muslims were reportedly separated from Bahá’ís... and released. The authorities then reportedly proceeded to arrest a number of Bahá’ís.”**

— Report of Ahmed Shaheed.

Dr. Shaheed also expressed concern about revisions to Iran’s national “Islamic Penal Code,” which he said treats men and women unequally

and institutionalizes religious discrimination.

“For example, article 558 of the revised Islamic Penal Code stipulates that *diyya* [blood money] be equally distributed to religious minorities that are recognized by the Constitution. However, equitable application of the law does not apply to religions that are not recognized by the Constitution, such as the Bahá’í.”

## The oppression of children

Mr. Shaheed’s report also expressed concern over violation of the rights of children, noting in particular that Iran itself had recently announced that some “70 children that had not committed any crime lived in prisons because their mothers were imprisoned.” Other reports, he noted, indicated that as many as 450 innocent children are wrongfully imprisoned in this way.

“In addition to being deprived of childhood experiences, these children are also exposed to poor prison conditions, including poor hygiene and malnutrition, which drastically impair their physical, emotional and cognitive development and place them at a serious disadvantage when they are released with their parent,” wrote Dr. Shaheed.

Dr. Shaheed concluded: “The submissions and interviews considered for this report provide a deeply troubling picture of the overall human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including many concerns which are systemic in nature.”

# New report documents violence unleashed by the Iranian government against Bahá'ís

## IN BRIEF

- **A new report documents hundreds of incidents of torture, physical assault, arson, vandalism, cemetery desecration and the abuse of schoolchildren directed against the Iranian Bahá'í community since 2005.**
- **Produced by the Bahá'í International Community, the report says these attacks were actively encouraged by Iranian authorities and the Muslim clergy, in part by allowing attackers to enjoy utter impunity from prosecution.**
- **Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, speaking at the launch of the report, said the attacks against Bahá'ís in Iran are "one of the most obvious cases of state persecution" in the world today.**

**G**ENEVA — A new report by the Bahá'í International Community documents hundreds of incidents of torture, physical assault, arson, vandalism, cemetery desecration, and the abuse of schoolchildren directed against the Iranian Bahá'í community since 2005 — all carried out with utter impunity.

"The entire situation puts the Bahá'ís in an impossible position because they must ask for justice and protection from the same authorities who are systematically inciting hatred against them and from a judicial system that treats virtually every Bahá'í who is arrested as an enemy of the state," said Diane Ala'i, the Community's representative to the United Nations in Geneva.

Titled "Violence with Impunity: Acts of aggression against Iran's Bahá'í community," the 45-page report was released in March 2013 during the 22nd UN Human Rights Council.

Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, spoke at the report's launch, saying the attacks against Bahá'ís in Iran are "one of the most obvious cases of state persecution" in the world today.

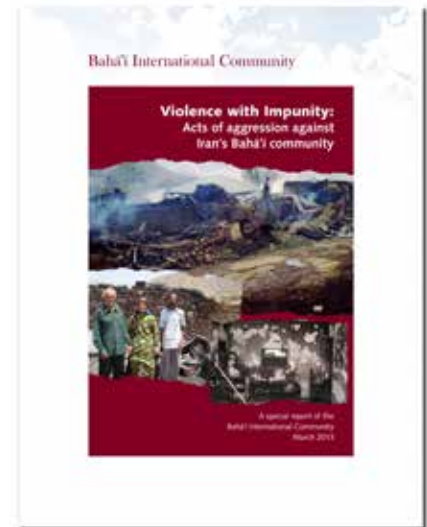
The repression faced by Bahá'ís spans "all areas of state activity, from family law provisions to schooling, education, and security," said Dr. Bielefeldt.

The report focuses on the seven year period from 2005-2012. During that time, there have been at least 52 cases where Bahá'ís have been tortured or held in solitary confinement while in detention and another 52 incidents where Bahá'ís have been physically assaulted — often by government agents but usually by plainclothes or unidentified attackers.

"This report shows that attacks on Bahá'ís are engineered by government agents and actively encouraged by the authorities and the Muslim clergy in Iran

— and that attackers are well aware that they will go unpunished," said Ms. Ala'i.

The report also describes some 49 acts of arson against Bahá'í homes and shops, and at least 42 incidents of cemetery desecration. There have also been at least 30 cases of vandalism directed against Bahá'í properties, more than 200 instances of threats made against Bahá'ís, and some 300 incidents of abuse directed against Bahá'í schoolchildren.



"Many of the attacks documented in the report — such as the cases of torture or assault during arrests and imprisonment — are undertaken directly by government agents," said Ms. Ala'i. "Other attacks, such as arson, cemetery desecration, and vandalism, often come in the middle of the night, by unidentified individuals.

"But in all cases, these violators need to be brought to justice, as is required by the international laws to which Iran is a party. The government's unwillingness to prosecute for these crimes, then, is yet another element in their overall campaign of religious persecution against the Bahá'í minority," said Ms. Ala'i.



## Causes of violence against women are examined at the UN

**N**EW YORK — Breaking the cycle of violence against women will require basic changes at the level of culture, attitudes and beliefs — including a fundamental reconception of prevailing notions of power.

These were among the ideas offered to this year's United Nations Commission on the Status of Women by the Bahá'í International Community (BIC).

Addressing the 57th Commission's main theme of the "elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls," the BIC issued a statement stressing the importance of taking steps to prevent violence against women instead of merely reacting to it.

"Prevention must begin by identifying and addressing the underlying causes of the violence rather than its symptoms. Efforts aimed at prevention must consider the prevailing conceptions of gender identity and of power, and the forms of discrimination and disadvantage that place women and girls at risk of violence."

The conception of power especially needs to be "seriously questioned and fundamentally redefined," said the statement.

"The dominant thinking of power as 'power over' must be replaced with the concept of 'power to' — power as a capacity of the individual or of the collective."

It continued: "Distorted expressions of power and authority promote in children attitudes and habits that are carried to the workplace, to the community, and to public life."

The eight person BIC delegation to the 57th Commission, which was held 4-15 March 2013, sought to contribute these ideas — and to "build bridges

and bring people together," said Bani Dugal, principal representative of the BIC to the United Nations.

"The last time the Commission focused on violence against women was in 2003, and member states were unable to agree on an outcome," said Ms. Dugal. "As we spoke with delegates and other non-governmental organizations the consensus was clearly for a strong outcome document this year."

The Commission's agreed conclusions, indeed, were hailed by many groups for their language in support of women's rights and concrete measures to prevent violence and protect women.

"The Commission affirms that violence against women and girls is rooted in historical and structural inequality in power relations between women and men, and persists in every country in the world as a pervasive violation of the enjoyment of human rights," said the Commission.

The document also focused on preventative measures, such as education and awareness-raising, as well as efforts to address gender inequalities in the political, economic and social spheres.

*The full BIC statement to the Commission can be read at: <http://www.bic.org/statements/towards-eradication-violence-against-women-and-girls>*

**Members of the Bahá'í International Community's delegation to the 57th UN Commission on the Status of Women.**



# Empowerment as a means of social transformation is addressed at the UN

## IN BRIEF

- **At the UN Commission on Social Development, the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) offered contributions focusing on the issue of empowerment, suggesting that traditional concepts that pit one group against another should be discarded.**
- **Instead, empowerment should be "approached as a universal and shared enterprise and not something the 'haves' bestow on the 'have nots.'"**
- **The Commission's Chairperson, Sewa Lamsal Adhikari, said empowerment is increasingly seen by the UN as a vital issue in addressing social transformation.**

**N**EW YORK — Concepts of empowerment that pit one group against another should be discarded in favor of a new vision where social transformation is approached as a collective enterprise in which all people are able to participate.

That was among the main themes of a statement issued by the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) to the UN Commission on Social Development at its 51st session in February 2013.

"The impulse to rectify social inequalities is unquestionably noble, but us/them dichotomies only perpetuate and reinforce existing divisions," said the statement, which was titled "Empowerment as a Mechanism for Social Transformation."

"Careful thought needs to be given to ways in which empowerment can be approached as a universal and

shared enterprise and not something the 'haves' bestow on the 'have nots.'" One way to avoid such extremes is to understand humanity as a single social organism, suggested the statement.

"Implicit in such a conception are characteristics such as the interdependence of the parts and the whole, the indispensability of collaboration, reciprocity and mutual aid, the need to differentiate but also harmonize roles, the need for institutional arrangements that enable rather than oppress, and the existence of a collective purpose above that of any constituent element."

The statement was among the BIC's contributions to this year's Commission, which was held 6-15 February, and took as its priority theme the "empowerment of people" in addressing poverty, social integration, and full and decent employment.



Rose Kornfeld Matte, right, of Chile's National Service for Older People, speaks during a panel discussion at the offices of the Bahá'í International Community on 7 February 2013 during the UN Commission on Social Development. At the left is Sewa Lamsal Adhikari of Nepal, Chairperson of the Commission. In the center is Ming Hwee Chong of the Bahá'í International Community.

*The full BIC statement, Empowerment as a Mechanism for Social Transformation, can be read at: <http://www.bic.org/statements/empowerment-mechanism-social-transformation>*

On 7 February, the BIC sponsored a panel discussion on the topic. Among the panelists was the Commission's Chairperson, Sewa Lamsal Adhikari, who said empowerment is increasingly seen by the UN as a vital issue in addressing social transformation.

"Empowerment of people is at the root of social development," said Mrs. Adhikari. "It is becoming one of the core elements that underpin efforts towards the achievement of the three core goals of the World Summit for Social Development: poverty eradication, full and productive employment and decent work for all, and social integration."

**"Empowerment of people is at the root of social development. It is becoming one of the core elements that underpin efforts towards the achievement of the three core goals of the World Summit for Social Development: poverty eradication, full and productive employment and decent work for all, and social integration."**

—Sewa Lamsal Adhikari, chair,  
UN Commission on Social  
Development

"As such, empowerment is a means towards the ends of social development." Mrs. Adhikari is Charge d'Affaires of the Permanent Mission of Nepal to the United Nations.

Ming Hwee Chong, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, suggested that it was no accident that the theme had reached center stage in discussions about social development.

"It is a natural evolution of the development discourse," said Mr. Chong, who moderated the panel. "It is reflective of what is happening around the world, part of an expanding consciousness of who we are, what our potential is, both individually and collectively, as the human race."

Other speakers at the 7 February side event — formally titled



Members of the Bahá'í International Community's delegation to the 51st session of the United Nations Commission on Social Development. Left to right, top row: Ming Hwee Chong, Amanda Coleman, Mark Scheffer. Bottom row: Hou Sopheap, Judith Therese Eligio-Martinez, Nisha Patel, and Carmel Rawhani

"Empowerment: Of Whom? By what means? Towards what ends?" — included Rosa Kornfeld Matte, director of the National Service for the Elderly in Chile; Corinne Woods, director of the Millennium Campaign; and Yao Ngoran from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

### **"Learning by doing"**

A second panel discussion sponsored by the BIC on 8 February, titled "Empowerment in Action," offered reflections by grassroots development practitioners from Bahá'í-inspired organizations.

Hou Sopheap, executive director of the Cambodian Organization for Research, Development and Education (CORDE), said his organization takes a "learning by doing" approach that aims to build capacity in youth so that they can better serve their communities.

CORDE offers supplementary educational programs to more than 3,000 young people in northwest Cambodia. Among other things, it requires its students engage in acts of service to their home communities in addition to textbook work. "So everything has

a component of study and of action," he said.

Judith Therese Eligio-Martinez, program coordinator for the Bahá'í-inspired agency, Bayan Association in Honduras, likewise said service is at the core of their program, which currently reaches some 6,000 high school age students in 12 of Honduras's 18 departments.

"It is built upon the belief in the capacity of the individual to make decisions for him or herself, and to help develop the capacities of three major actors (in community development): the individual, the community, and institutions," said Ms. Eligio-Martinez.

Developed in Colombia by a Bahá'í-inspired organization, FUNDAEC, and known by the acronym SAT, for "Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial" in Spanish, the program trains and coordinates community-based tutors who then offer a high school education appropriate for rural areas.

"We consider SAT to be a creative way of becoming educated, but with its center being the idea of service to humanity and making the world a better place to live, on a local level as much as possible," said Ms. Eligio-Martinez. "And in this way, we feel we are contributing to empowerment."

# New thinking on human nature and globalization are essential for peace, says new incumbent of Bahá'í chair

## IN BRIEF

- **Prof. Hoda Mahmoudi, the new incumbent of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, outlines her view of peace studies in an inaugural lecture.**
- **Old thinking that violence and war are inborn behaviors are challenged by new research about the human brain, genes and evolution.**
- **Likewise, traditional ideas about the best way to promote peace are challenged by the forces of globalization.**
- **The role of peace studies can be to advance an educational process that will create a body of tested knowledge that can be applied to foster a more just and peaceful order.**

**C**OLLEGE PARK, Maryland, USA — Any contemporary discussion of peace must include a consideration of new research on human nature — and reflection on the vast changes caused by globalization and similar forces in the modern world.

That's the view offered by the new incumbent of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, Hoda Mahmoudi, who presented her inaugural lecture at the University of Maryland on 16 November 2012.

"Understanding human nature is essential to any discussion of peace because an examination of what scholars are learning about this subject highlights the issue of education and its potential for building a better world," said Prof. Mahmoudi.

"Both the nineteenth-century doctrine that biology is destiny and the twentieth-century doctrine that the mind is a blank slate have been rejected as a consequence of knowledge that is being generated through research in the sciences of the mind, brain, genes and evolution."

This new thinking, she said, disproves the view that "that violence and warring are inborn human behaviors and, therefore, unchangeable."

The transformations wrought by globalization must also be factored into new considerations of how humanity can best achieve world peace, she said.

"Our global community is undergoing great transformations," said Prof. Mahmoudi. "Consequently, our conventional thinking about the political, economic and cultural components of the social order is being tested on every side."

"In an effort to study realistically the pathways that may lead to peace, considerable attention must be devoted to adapting existing theories that are no longer capable of describing the changing world. By way of example, three trends can be highlighted. These are: modernity, globalization, and cosmopolitanism. All of these phenomena are indicators of the sea change that continues to shape the global order."

Founded in 1993 within the University's College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, the Chair is an endowed academic program that advances interdisciplinary examination and discourse on global peace, generating knowledge that promotes the interests and well-being of humanity.

---

**"Today, unfortunately, aggression and conflict characterize our social order, an order that encompasses political, religious, economic and cultural systems. In fact, many are resigned to the view that violence and warring are inborn human behaviors and, therefore, unchangeable.**

— Hoda Mahmoudi

"Today, unfortunately, aggression and conflict characterize our social order, an order that encompasses political, religious, economic and cultural systems," said Prof. Mahmoudi. "In fact, many are resigned to the view that violence and warring are inborn human behaviors and, therefore, unchangeable. Such beliefs are often responsible for and lead to a paralysis of will among individuals, a cognitive

numbness that is not easy to reverse, but which must be overcome. Here, the role of education is vital in removing unfounded views about human nature.”

“Knowledge must take us to new ways of conceptualizing the world as a unity. In this way we can carry out research in pursuit of knowledge that is relevant and valid to our ever-changing global community,” she said.

## The struggle for peace

Prof. Mahmoudi briefly reviewed the history of humanity’s search for peace, calling it a central concern. “Generation after generation, men and women have longed for, struggled for, and perished for peace,” she said.

At one point, she said, the achievement of peace was largely viewed as “simply the elimination of war or the prohibition of the weapons and methods of war.”

But, she said, “world peace is more than the elimination of war and violence — which are currently the dominant means for managing international conflicts,” she said. “Prohibiting weapons of mass destruction, although an important goal, will not move us closer to peace.”

“Rather, peace stems from an inner state, one that is supported by values. Here, the aspiration for peace is an attitude, a will and a yearning which promotes the discovery and implementation of practical measures for peace,” she said.

She also said there are major global social issues that must be addressed before peace can reign, such as “rising global inequality, discrimination and violence against women, tensions and divisions caused by religious conflicts, a growing culture of hate, the scourge of prejudice and racism, lack of universal education, and failure to teach the concept of world citizenship.”

In this context, she said, the Bahá’í Chair is “is committed to offering students a broad, realistic and applied education for and about peace.”

“The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace has a unique responsibility to advance an educational process that will create



Prof. Hoda Mahmoudi, the new incumbent of the Bahá’í Chair for World Peace, delivers her inaugural lecture at the University of Maryland on 16 November 2012.

a body of tested knowledge which can be applied to foster the emergence of a more just, secure and sustainable international order,” she said.

Prof. Mahmoudi holds a Ph.D. in Sociology, an M.A. in Educational Psychology, and a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Utah. Prior to joining the faculty of the University of Maryland, Prof. Mahmoudi was head of the Research Department at the Bahá’í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, where she had served since 2001.

Previously, Prof. Mahmoudi was dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. At that institution she was a member of the Department of Sociology faculty.

Before that she served as a vice president and dean of Olivet College, where she was instrumental in the institutional transformation that brought national recognition to Olivet.

Prof. Mahmoudi’s research interests have included comparative civilizations, social change, modernity and gender equality. In her published works she has analyzed Bahá’í topics and themes in the context of established scholarly methodologies and debates.

The first two Bahá’í Chair incumbents were Suheil Bushrui (1993-2006) and John Grayzel (2006-2011).

In an official message to the University of Maryland community, John Townshend — dean of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, where the Chair is hosted — praised Mahmoudi as “a proven leader dedicated to scholarship and research and a distinguished member of the Bahá’í community.”

For her part, Prof. Mahmoudi said that she looks “forward to building on the strong international reputation of the Bahá’í Chair, while also moving it in new directions.”

“The Chair’s affiliation with an outstanding flagship university,” she continued, “combined with its location in close proximity to the nation’s capital, places it in an excellent position to influence both scholarly and policy discussions.”

# The UN and civil society begin to discuss post-2015 development goals

*Post-2015, continued from page one*

## IN BRIEF

- **With the Millennium Development Goals set to expire in 2015, the UN has launched a wide discussion about formulating new goals for human well being in the next era.**
- **Civil society, eager to participate, has created several broad coalitions to provide input in formulating the post-2015 development agenda.**
- **Many want new elements in future goals that better address inequality, climate change, and employment.**
- **Others are also concerned that any new goals be applied universally, so that all countries are included in creating “the future we want.”**
- **One ongoing issue is how to balance development with environmental sustainability.**

1990s, their actual articulation came more or less from the top, initially drafted by UN staff in the Secretary-General’s office.

“The process that has been in place this time is much more open,” said Bernadette Fischler, who focuses on the post-MDGs as a policy analyst with the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development. “The UN is really trying.”

Among other things, the UN Secretary-General has appointed a high level panel of “eminent persons” to make recommendations — and they have begun meeting with civil society representatives around the world.

In parallel, civil society has been invited to a series of national-level consultations in more than 60 countries and a set of 11 thematic consultations that have been organized by the UN Development Group to discuss possible new goals for the “post-2015 development agenda.”

## Emerging themes

Although it is still early, a number of ideas have begun to emerge from these consultations. These include the view that new international development goals must be more integrated and holistic than the MDGs, and that they must be more universal, requiring action not just in poorer nations but also in those considered wealthy and “developed.”

“We believe that for the post-2015 framework to be able to meaningfully address the challenges that we are all facing, they have to be universal in scope,” said Gerard Vives, the European outreach officer with Beyond 2015, a global coalition of some 500 organizations around the world that

seeks a “strong and legitimate successor framework” to the MDGs.

“They must apply to all countries, regardless of their level of development, with definite rights and responsibilities for each country,” he said.

---

**“We believe that for the post-2015 framework to be able to meaningfully address the challenges that we are all facing, they have to be universal in scope.”**

— Gerard Vives of Beyond 2015

Mr. Vives and others said global civil society also wants to see a larger focus on environmental issues in the post-2015 development framework, and an emphasis on going beyond simple poverty eradication to measures that would strive to reduce economic inequality.

“Most of the critics of the MDGs would say that they don’t pay enough attention to inequality,” said Frances Stewart, a professor emeritus in development economics at Oxford University who was until last year chair of the UN Committee for Development Policy.

Civil society representatives also said other themes that should be addressed include how to achieve more and better employment, greater emphasis on climate change and environmental degradation, and goals on peace and security as they relate to poverty and under-development.

“The MDGs have lagged in the so-called ‘fragile states’ where conflict and crisis prevent the delivery of aid,” said Ms. Pham of the UN Foundation. “So the next goals need to deal with development in that context.”

## History of MDGs

In the broadest sense, the MDGs evolved from the global plans for action that emerged from the thematic global conferences of the 1990s, such as the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, which together identified new global challenges for sustainable development and gender equality.

They were further developed by UN agencies, who saw the need for measurable targets. Finally, they were given broad approval by the international community in the Millennium Declaration, made by world leaders at the 2000 Millennium Summit.

Eight goals were established, to be realized by 2015: to halve extreme poverty, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat global pandemics, ensure environmental sustainability, and create a global partnership for development.

Today, according to the United Nations Development Programme, broad progress has been made.

“Extreme poverty is falling in every region,” the UNDP said in a 2012 report, noting that preliminary estimates already show it to be less than half the 1990s rate, suggesting that the first goal may already have been achieved.

Towards other goals, the world has achieved parity in primary education between girls and boys, said the report, and enrollment rates have increased markedly for primary school children.

At the same time, however, “inequality is detracting from these gains,” said the report. “Decreases in maternal mortality are far from the 2015 target” and “hunger remains a global challenge,” with an estimated 850 million living in hunger, more than 15 percent of the world’s population.

Because of the apparent success of the MDGs, there is general agreement that the post-2015 framework should include some type of measurable goals and targets once again.

At the same time, there is a strong feeling that they must also go further,

## W O M E N

# Women’s groups also mobilizing to address post-2015 agenda



Ms. Bani Dugal, of the Bahá’í International Community, and, at right, Ms. Eleanor Blomstrom of the Women’s Environment and Development Organization. Ms. Dugal was co-moderator at a consultation at UN Women on the post-2015 development agenda in September 2012. (Photo credit: UN Women)

**U**NITED NATIONS — A meeting in September reflected the growing cooperation between UN agencies and civil society as they work to define the post-2015 development agenda.

Co-convened by UN Women and the Global Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) campaign, the day-long event brought together UN officials and representatives from non-governmental organizations on 13 September 2012.

“It seems there is a lot of political will for looking at the complexities of women’s lives and for identifying certain things that are priorities for us, and for seeing how we can bring those to all of the discussions on the post-2015 agenda and the sustainable development agenda,” said Savi Bisnath of the US-based Center for Women’s Global Leadership.

Lakshmi Puri, deputy executive director at UN Women, said she believes her agency and civil society can collaborate to develop a transformational agenda that underscores gender

equality and women’s empowerment as defining principles in future development frameworks.

Charlotte Bunch of GEAR, who moderated a discussion on alliance-building and advocacy strategies, said she hoped that UN Women could use its access to governments and other UN entities to create the necessary space for civil society’s voice to be heard.

“The post-2015 agenda is huge but what we want is to make sure that gender equality is seen as one of the underlying values and achievements that is needed in order to have the kind of society we would want,” said Ms. Bunch.

For its part, UN Women said it plans to set up an extranet platform to facilitate on-line engagement within and among the civil society advisory groups that are being set up at the global, regional and country level.



*Mr. Katsuhiko Takahashi, Minister of Economic Affairs at the Japanese Mission to the UN, delivers opening remarks at a recent breakfast dialogue on the Post-2015 Development Agenda at the offices of the Bahá'í International Community in New York.*

that they should be more encompassing, and that they reflect the complexities of challenges facing the world.

“The strength of the MDGs lies in their simplicity and quantification,” said Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, a professor of International Affairs at the New School in New York, who has followed the MDG process closely.

“But there is a problem with oversimplification. Take the idea of reducing the problem of gender inequality,” said Prof. Fukuda-Parr. “In the MDGs, it is reduced mainly to the issue of primary and secondary school enrollment for girls. And then there are some things that you can’t measure that are priorities.”

## The big challenge

Prof. Fukuda-Parr and others said perhaps the main challenge in devising the post-2015 framework lies in combining the traditional agenda for poverty eradication with the international agenda on sustainable development and the environment.

Last June, at the Rio+20 UN Summit, governments endorsed the idea of “sustainable development

goals” (SDGs) to augment or even replace the MDGs.

“The SDG process is driven by governments who are not seeking to have a rich world/poor world poverty agreement,” said Prof. Fukuda-Parr. “They want a universal vision that combines sustainability and environmental issues with economic and social development. They want an agenda that is applicable in Nigeria and Kenya, and India and China — and also the United States and Germany.”

A dichotomy also occurs among non-governmental organizations, she said, where there is a split between NGOs that are oriented toward the environment and those oriented towards anti-poverty efforts.

Others, however, see less conflict between the two agendas. “From a conceptual point of view, they are two sides of the same coin,” said Mr. Vives. “You cannot have development without environmental sustainability. And I think member states are getting more

and more aware of the need for a unified agenda, to have a single overarching framework.”

In September, some 300 civil society representatives gathered in Montreal for the 2012 CIVICUS World Assembly and issued a joint statement that advocated a combined post-2015 framework.

“We affirm that we will work united and collaborate to ensure a legitimate and inclusive development framework is in place to succeed the current MDGs, that delivers lasting change in the world. We affirm that this framework must work to genuinely integrate ending poverty, ensuring environmental sustainability and promoting human rights. The framework must fully reflect the priorities and perspectives of people directly affected by poverty and inequality, the majority of whom are socially excluded populations, for example, women, children, youth and indigenous peoples.”



## In post-2015 discussions, Bahá'ís seek to create a space for meaningful discourse and the promotion of unity

**N**EW YORK — The Bahá'í International Community has sought to contribute to the formulation of a new post-2015 development agenda by offering both substantive contributions about development priorities for the future and by creating spaces for meaningful discussion that can also engender a sense of unity among all participants.

“Development involves the building and enhancement of the capacities of individuals, communities and institutions as three main protagonists in a global effort to create an ever-advancing civilization,” said Ming Hwee Chong, a Bahá'í International Community representative to the United Nations.

“In the context of deliberating on the post-2015 agenda, we are striving to put forward an overarching and unifying vision that can help motivate all protagonists along this path,” said Mr. Chong.

Equally, Mr. Chong said, the BIC hopes to play a role in bringing all parties together.

“We see ourselves as partners in learning with a broad range of allies, making an effort to engage with them as sources of insight, knowledge, and experience, from which we have much to learn,” he said.

To this end, the BIC has hosted a series of informal “breakfast dialogues” on the post-2015 development agenda at its offices in New York, organized in collaboration with the International Movement ATD Fourth World.

As of late March 2013, eight such dialogues had been held, each focusing on a general topic, like poverty or inequalities, and each bringing together a wide range of UN officials, ambassadors, and NGO representatives.

A September 2012 breakfast on the topic of sustainable development, for

example, brought together representatives from the Permanent Missions of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Guatemala, Guyana, India, Nigeria, Singapore, Switzerland and the United Kingdom with officials from various UN agencies, including UNDP, UNICEF, and UN Women. Among civil society organizations present were the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the Global Policy Forum Europe, the International Disability Association, the International Movement ATD Fourth World, the Stakeholder Forum and the UN Foundation.

Participants discussed whether there was a “false dichotomy” between the Rio+20’s Sustainable Development Goals as the “green agenda” and the MDGs as the “poverty agenda,” concluding it was important to take an holistic approach that encompasses both.

Also discussed was the degree to which the world has become “multipolar,” with participants saying it is

critical to move away from the traditional “North-South” dichotomy to better reflect global realities.

A breakfast meeting in November addressed the topic of poverty. Among other things, participants spoke about the need to directly include the poorest in consultations on the post-MDGs, the importance of viewing poverty eradication and sustainable development as one agenda, and the centrality of human rights to economic development.

Participants also discussed the nitty-gritty of development. Diarrhea and pneumonia continue to be huge factors in infant mortality, they said. Also significant are the growing inequalities between small and large farmers, the impact of new and erratic weather patterns on development, and the challenges posed by the demographic “bulge” of youth worldwide.

*For more, visit <http://www.bic.org>*



Ming Hwee Chong, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community, moderates a recent breakfast dialogue on the post-2015 development agenda at the BIC offices in New York. As of March 2013, the BIC with International Movement ATD Fourth World has sponsored a series of eight such breakfast meetings for the UN community in New York.

## In New Delhi, seminar explores ending violence against children

**N**EW DELHI — Violence against children is a global problem, with the abuse and maltreatment of young people happening in every country.

That includes India, where its vast population gives the problem a special dimension. By one count, one in five children in the world live here.

Sadly, many of them experience some type of violence, said Dora Giusti, a child protection specialist with UNICEF in India. Two out of three children in India report some type of physical abuse, she said, and one in two have been sexually abused.

“The protection of children from violence is a priority for action,” she said. “The need is for a multi-faceted approach to build a protective environment for children.”

Ms. Giusti’s remarks came at a seminar on “Ending Violence against Children,” held at the Bahá’í House of Worship on 22 November 2012, which

addressed topics such as corporal punishment, policies and processes for protection of children from violence, and the underlying causes of violence in society.

Sponsored by the Bahá’í community of India in association with the National Foundation for Communal Harmony, the North India Chapter of the Global Network of Religions for Children, and the India Alliance for Child Rights, participants included representatives of the government, non-governmental organizations, UNICEF, academicians, students, journalists, and families from violence-affected regions.

Dr. Shanta Sinha, Chairperson of the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, emphasized the need to build a culture of non-violence as a long term solution, saying that the use of corporal punishment is rampant in homes, schools, orphanages, and work places, creating

a norm for violence against children generally.

“Nowhere is the child to be insulted, humiliated, beaten up, scolded, or shown disrespect — because it hurts, it damages the psyche, and the child loses confidence. The child loses self-esteem and it can be of permanent damage to the child,” said Dr. Sinha. “Where you condone violence, whether it is small or big, it is the first step towards something big that can happen.”

Vinay Srivastava, a professor of anthropology at Delhi University, also warned of the effect of corporal punishment and other forms of abuse often suffered by children, even at the hands of well-meaning parents or guardians. “The humiliation that children suffer in childhood stays with them throughout their lives,” said Prof. Srivastava, suggesting there should be studies to examine the culture of violence in society.

Farida Vahedi, director of the Indian Bahá’í Office of Public Affairs, said one way to address violence against children is with a new concept of trusteeship, where “every child is born into this world as a trust of the whole of humanity.”

“Human beings are both spiritual and material beings and it is important to have an understanding of the human nature and to see and understand that we are all one,” said Ms. Vahedi, saying we are all “like the members of one human body and that our diversity is our strength and needs to be celebrated.”

Ms. Vahedi said it is only when children’s right to spiritual education, nutrition, health, shelter, security and safety are ensured that they can fulfill their responsibility towards the process of change and development.



Participants in the seminar “Ending Violence against Children,” held in New Delhi on 22 November, take part in an interactive session. Pictured: (from left) Farida Vahedi, Bahá’í Office of Public Affairs; Dora Giusti, UNICEF; Javed Naqvi, journalist; Shanta Sinha, National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights; and Nilakshi Rajkhowa, Indian Bahá’í Office of Public Affairs.

# Review: Human Rights

*Emmel, continued from page 20*

time extended to include concerns for “one’s family, one’s tribe, one’s nation and eventually to all humanity.”

In his survey, Mr. Emmel brings into the discussion insights from his study and practice of the Bahá’í Faith. He suggests, for example, that the Bahá’í Faith’s emphasis on the oneness of humanity offers a new and particularly significant way to understand the universal nature of human rights.

**“Before we can take advantage of any other freedoms we must first be free to decide who we are and what we believe... If we believe that the universe is knowable, we will ask questions. If we believe that humans have capacity for goodness, we will experiment with extending to them our trust.”**

— Aaron Emmel

Mr. Emmel mentions that the “Bahá’í Faith teaches that the social imperative of the age is the recognition of the oneness of humankind.” This implies that rights are universal. “In other words, every individual on earth, regardless of where he or she was born or where he or she travels, has the same rights. The Bahá’í writings assert that these rights are endowed by God. This means that they are not created by human beings or governments; they already exist, and humanity merely recognizes these rights and enforces them.”

The Bahá’í Faith also addresses the definition of what it means to be human, he says, and how that relates to the intrinsic rights that we all possess. The Bahá’í writings says the main purpose in life is to know and to love God.

From that understanding, he writes, we can understand better the moral imperative for instruments that protect everyone’s right to change or even propagate their religious beliefs — a right that

is severely tested around the world at present.

“Before we can take advantage of any other freedoms we must first be free to decide who we are and what we believe because it is upon these understandings that all our choices depend,” he writes. “If we believe that the universe is knowable, we will ask questions. If we believe that humans have capacity for goodness, we will experiment with extending to them our trust. Thought and its expression are by definition necessary for all other rational activities.

“Freedom of religion and conscience includes, most broadly, the right to seek after truth, to investigate and adopt a religion, to engage in scientific inquiry, to change religion and to not have a religion,” he concludes.

## Rights and Responsibilities

Mr. Emmel also devotes a section of the book to the idea that with human rights also come “responsibilities.” He shows it to be a concept with a long history. He notes, for example, that the development of the jury system in England in the 1600s not only gave people better rights to a fair trial — it also handed to citizens the responsibility to serve on juries.

Today, he believes, the idea is reinforced in the Bahá’í teachings, which discuss the importance of service to the community at large as an essential aspect of human purpose.

For example, writes Mr. Emmel, “because the individual is part of society and the development of each affects the well-being of the other, the responsibility to use one’s rights to advance one’s own development through the cultivation of virtue is intimately linked with a responsibility to contribute to one’s fellows and the institutions that further their interests.”

Written for a broad audience, Mr. Emmel’s book has much to offer as an introduction to human rights. It is a highly readable and accessible history of how human rights have evolved over time. It also suggests the direction in which human rights are likely to evolve in the future — to a world where rights are more universal, more encompassing, and more widely observed and enforced.



ONE COUNTRY is published quarterly by the Office of Public Information of the Bahá’í International Community, an international non-governmental organization which encompasses and represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá’í Faith.

For more information on the stories in this newsletter, or any aspect of the Bahá’í International Community and its work, please contact:

ONE COUNTRY  
Bahá’í International Community –  
Suite 120  
866 United Nations Plaza  
New York, New York 10017  
U.S.A.

E-mail: [onecountry@bic.org](mailto:onecountry@bic.org)  
<http://www.onecountry.org>

Editor: Brad Pokorny

Design: Tom Mann

All material is copyrighted by the Bahá’í International Community and subject to all applicable international copyright laws. Stories from this newsletter may be republished by any organization provided that they are attributed as follows: “Reprinted from ONE COUNTRY, the newsletter of the Bahá’í International Community.”

© 2013 by The Bahá’í International Community / ISSN 1018-9300

Printed using soy-based inks on paper from sustainable forests.



# Where human rights have come from — and where they are likely to go

## *Human Rights in an Advancing Civilization*

By Aaron Emmel  
George Ronald, Oxford

### IN BRIEF

- A new book examines the history of human rights to the present day and concludes that our shared definition of human nature is the key to providing a sure foundation for human rights.
- In that regard, the concept of the oneness of humanity can offer an important universal viewpoint for re-examining rights, writes Aaron Emmel.
- Mr. Emmel suggests also that we are likely to see human rights become more universal, more encompassing, and more widely observed and enforced in the future.

Are human rights merely a list of good ideas, to be discussed and agreed upon? Or are they intrinsic to human existence, founded on something more fundamental? And, either way, are rights universal, applicable to all cultures and times?

These are among the questions addressed in a new book by Aaron Emmel, titled *Human Rights in an Advancing Civilization*.

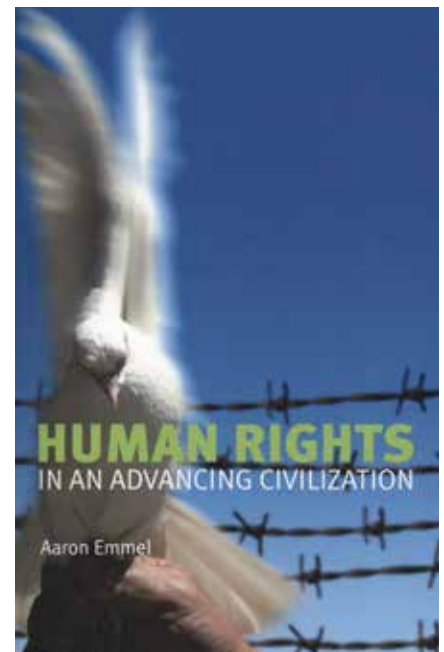
Mr. Emmel, a policy specialist who has worked at several non-governmental organizations in Washington DC, addresses these and other issues in a broad look at the conception and development of human rights in history and to the present day. He also looks proactively towards the future.

His main theme is that to fully comprehend or define human rights, we must first arrive at an understanding of what it means to be a human being. Once the conception of our selves is settled, then the real basis of human rights flows logically.

“Human rights are based on the concept that people are entitled to certain rights simply by virtue of being human,” he writes, noting, however, that such a conception therefore revolves around what people think “constitutes a human being” and who is therefore “qualified to claim human rights.”

In exploring this theme, Mr. Emmel takes readers on a tour of the history of human rights, going back to the concept of sanctuary in Jewish and, later, Roman law. He discusses the rights of citizens in Greek city-states, and the contributions made by Christianity and Islam. He then moves through the Enlightenment philosophers and to the modern day, covering the history of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Along the way, he breaks the discussion into discrete topics, such as minority rights, rights and development, and the rule of law. He discusses, for example, the issue of individual and community identity — and how



those concepts impact the evolving conception of human rights.

Too often in the past, he notes, a society’s limited view of human identity has led to a limited view of rights for some — as, say, when minorities or women are seen as having fewer rights.

But “communities and societies change,” he writes, “and ideas about identity and rights — how members of the community define themselves, and the rights and expectations they have of themselves and others — change with them.”

And for the future, he writes, the “evolution in society as a whole is linked to an expanding sense of self in the individual” — one that has over

**Emmel**, continued on page 19