ONE COUNTRY

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

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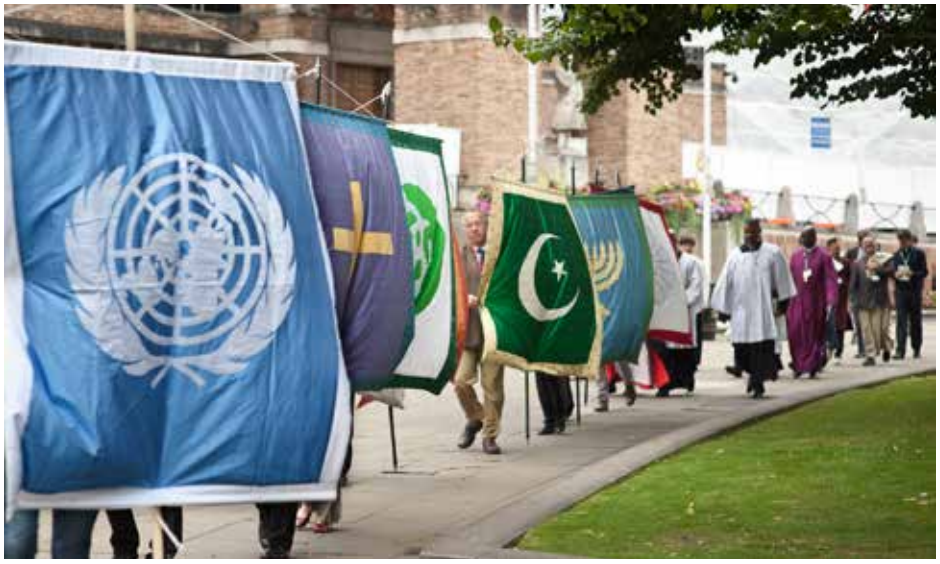
DEVELOPMENT

New partnerships between religions and international organizations tackle sustainable development



Religious leaders from around the world gathered in Bristol, UK, in September with UN officials to discuss how faith communities can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

BRISTOL, UK — The images of religious leaders in diverse garb, marching behind colorful banners with symbols of the world's major faiths, conveyed a sense of the sacred nature of a meeting held in this historic English seaport in September 2015.

But at the head of the procession was an ensign with the logo of the United Nations — an institution generally concerned with more worldly affairs.

The juxtaposition, however, conveys well the theme of the meeting and its agenda, which was to develop a series of action plans by faith communities in support of Agenda 2030, the new global development plan adopted by the UN later in the month.

The faith community action plans, which include things like pledges to develop microcredit programs for the poor, increase access to education, plant trees, invest in clean energy, and establish green pilgrimages, were welcomed by officials from the United Nations, who were present at the meeting.

"More than 80 percent of the world's people express a religious affiliation," said Paul Ladd, then the director of the post-2015 development agenda team at the UN Development Programme (UNDP), speaking in Bristol. "Knowing this, it becomes clear that the UN needs to work closely with faith communities over the next 15 years if the new global goals for sustainable development are to be achieved."

***Partnerships**, continued on page 11*

A statement to COP21: Shared Vision, Shared Volition — Choosing Our Global Future Together

The following is a statement of the Bahá'í International Community to the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France.

IN BRIEF

- **Anthropogenic climate change is not inevitable; humanity chooses its relationships with the natural world. The question today is how new patterns of action can best be established.**
- **Truly transforming individual and collective patterns of life will require a much deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of the planetary biosphere.**
- **Human behavior and personal decision-making are therefore critical to the success of sustainability efforts, particularly in the sphere of values, ethics, and morals.**
- **Religion offers a vital source of commitment to new and potentially challenging patterns of daily life.**

Anthropogenic climate change is not inevitable; humanity chooses its relationships with the natural world. This lies at the heart of the 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP 21), the efforts of which are, in many ways, focused on identifying means by which better choices can be made. The current global order has often approached the natural world as a reservoir of material resources to be exploited. The grave consequences of this paradigm have become all too apparent, and more balanced relationships among the peoples of the world and the planet are clearly needed. The question today is how new patterns of action and interaction can best be established, both individually and collectively, through personal choices, social systems, and governing institutions.

With the adoption of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including its social, economic and environmental dimensions, momentum for meaningful change has been building. A universal, legally binding agreement on carbon emissions seems within reach for the first time. Yet sustainability is defined as much by human and social factors as ecological ones. Correlation has been found, for example, between inequality and environmental degradation, suggesting that the relationships linking human beings with one another have a direct impact on the physical resources of the planet. The global systems that have left many facing poverty and want, have similarly impoverished the natural environment.

A more balanced attitude toward the environment must therefore address human conditions as consciously as it does natural ones. It must be embodied in social norms and patterns of action characterized by justice and equity. On this foundation can be built an evolving vision of our common future together. And that vision, in turn, stands as a powerful mechanism for mobilizing action around the world and coordinating numerous efforts into mutually reinforcing lines of action.

Foundations for a New Consciousness

Setting humanity on a more sustainable path to the future involves transformation in attitudes and actions. Reform of institutional structures will be critical, and indeed this is a central focus of those gathered at COP 21. Yet ultimately it is people, whatever their role or place in society, who implement the policies of a central administration or ignore them, who participate in well-conceived programs or continue patterns of life as before. We all have agency and none of our decisions are without consequence. Establishing sustainable patterns of individual and collective life will therefore require not only new technologies, but also a new consciousness in human beings, including a new conception of ourselves and our place in the world.

From where will this consciousness arise? And where will the volition and self-discipline needed to embody it in countless cities, towns, and villages be found? Qualities such as the capacity to sacrifice for the well-being of the whole, to trust and be trustworthy, to find contentment, to give freely and generously to others derive not from

mere pragmatism or political expediency. Rather they arise from the deepest sources of human inspiration and motivation. In this, faith has shown itself to be key, whether in the efficacy of sustainability efforts or the capacity of the human race.

Of particular note is the role to be played by religious faith. Religion has been a feature of human civilization since the dawn of recorded history, and has prompted countless multitudes to arise and exert themselves for the well-being of others. Religion offers an understanding of human existence and development that lifts the eye from the rocky path to the distant horizon. And when true to the spirit of its transcendent founders, religion has been one of the most powerful forces for the creation of new and beneficial patterns of individual and collective life.

Religion therefore offers a vital source of commitment to new and potentially challenging patterns of daily life. It is notable that religious leaders and faith-based organizations have been increasingly active on environmental and justice issues as they relate to climate change. But religious conviction does not automatically translate into service to the common good. It is entirely possible, for example, to have a congregation of well-intentioned adherents whose actions do little to contribute to the betterment of society. Clearly there is much to learn about how noble ideals become expressed in committed, sustained action. In this sense, religious communities can be understood as communities of practice in which spiritual teachings are translated into social reality. Within them, a process of capacity building that enables people of all backgrounds to participate in the transformation of society can be set in motion. How this unfolds in different contexts and cultures promises to be an area of rich exploration for all working on sustainability issues.

Identifying the spiritual principles at the root of ecological challenges can also be key in formulating effective action. Principles — that humanity constitutes but a single people,

Serik Tokbolat, a Representative of the Bahá'í International Community, speaks on a panel at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, discussing community resilience in the face of climate-driven extreme events.

for example, or that justice demands universal participation in the work of sustainable development — reflect the rich complexity of human nature. Just as importantly, they help foster the will and the aspiration needed to facilitate the implementation of pragmatic measures. Identifying the principles underlying given issues and formulating action in light of their imperatives is therefore a methodology that all can benefit from and contribute to — those in traditionally religious roles, but also leaders of government, the corporate sector, civil society, and others involved in the formulation of public policy.

A Basis for Collective Action

Action on issues of sustainability is often grounded in the sentiment that we all live on the same planet. Of course shared concerns such as climate change, transnational migration, and global pandemics are not to be discounted. But truly transforming individual and collective patterns of life will require a much deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of the planetary biosphere. People and the environment are interconnected aspects of one organically integrated system. At this point in history, neither can be accurately understood in isolation from the other.

Implicit in this understanding is the organic oneness of the human race itself. Deceptively simple in popular discourse, the concept that humanity constitutes a single people has numerous implications for the formulation of effective action at all levels. COP 21, for example, can be understood as an opportunity to embrace more deeply the practical implications of the oneness of humanity, including the obligation to translate our moral responsibility toward one another and the natural world into tangible agreements, approaches, and plans of action.

A rich and deepening consciousness of the oneness of humankind is the only way that the obstacles inherent in dichotomies like rich/poor, north/south, developed/developing can be overcome. Designations of this kind are not without basis, for some countries do have more financial resources than others. But while such realities are not to be denied, neither should they be allowed to paralyze constructive action. Rather, they should be incorporated into the perspective that an integrated, sustainable and prosperous world will not be built by "us" working together with "them," but by all of us working on behalf of everyone.

The principle of the oneness of humankind highlights the powerful connections found between raising the well-being of people and reversing environmental degradation. It is true

that the ecological footprint of certain areas is far larger than that of others. This is a reality that will need to be addressed through both voluntary choice and governmental regulation. But equally important will be lifting billions out of poverty in ways that not only reduce harm to the environment, but actively improve it. Addressing social needs in the context of environmental ones responds to the pressing moral imperatives of climate change. But its rationale is highly pragmatic as well, for climate change calls for urgent action, and the dividends of such steps are greater the sooner they are taken.

Efforts of this kind also lay a foundation for valuing people and the planet as explicitly as profit has been. It is widely recognized today that the single-minded pursuit of financial gain has all too often led to the destruction of both natural systems and human lives. This legacy has left deep ambivalence about the role the corporate sector and market forces should play in sustainability efforts. Such questions are complex and not simply answered. But what seems imperative is that good faith efforts be integrated into a just global effort that avoids all forms of exclusion that breeds opposition, hostility, defensiveness, and distrust.

Recasting Relationships for a Sustainable Planet

The principle of the oneness of humankind has implications for relationships at all levels. Individual choices and governmental action are often subtly placed in opposition to one another, suggesting that one or the other either takes or deserves precedence. In reality, of course, both are needed. Agreements and protocols at the governmental level will not be sufficient if individuals do not adopt more sustainable lifestyles and behaviors. Similarly, individual actions alone, such as conserving water and reducing waste, for instance, will not be sufficient if governments do not make the necessary changes at the structural level. Also crucial is the community which, as a distinct unit of civilization with its own capacities and qualities, has a unique and vital role that cannot be overlooked. Increasing integration between these three levels will be needed, if long-lasting progress is to be achieved

What might this look like in practice? Consumption habits provide a helpful illustration. People might be open to recycling, for example, but live in areas without services such as drop-off centers or community composting. Without appropriate supports from government, then, possibilities for individual change are severely constrained. Institutional action to create an enabling environment is needed. Government has a vital role to enact the policies, laws, and regulations needed to support the desired actions and behaviors.

New Patterns of Action

This framework, however, merely sets the stage. For ultimately it is individuals who take the initiative to adopt new patterns of action or continue with business as usual. Human behavior and personal decision-making are therefore critical to the success of sustainability efforts, particularly in the sphere of values, ethics, and morals. Such qualities might seem diffuse or somewhat "soft," but changes in lifestyle will not be sustained if normative drivers of behaviors such as attitudes and beliefs do not shift as well. Consumption habits will not change if acquisition and the ongoing accumulation of luxury goods are seen as powerful symbols of success and importance. Building more sustainable patterns of life will therefore require continuing conversation about human nature and the prerequisites of well-being.

How do such conversations arise? Government can contribute, through educational outreach and efforts to build commitment among stakeholders. But the community has a vital role to play in allowing for dialogue about choices and behavior. Are municipal or provincial policies on water conservation welcomed as progress or treated as an unnecessary hassle? Are collective decisions about infrastructure informed by a shared vision of the future or do individuals mostly look out for themselves? The qualities of culture that inform questions such as these arise within the context of community. The community can provide an arena in which numerous participants, backgrounds, talents, and efforts combine to achieve change and progress. It also provides a key space in which consensus on shared goals and objectives can be reached and a common vision of the future built among a population. The growing list of cities taking far more robust action than their national governments on climate issues is just one example of the power inherent in a community that is able to pursue a common purpose through coordinated efforts.

Exploring new patterns of interaction among the actors of society, such as individuals and institutions, will be central to the task of building more sustainable relationships with the natural world and among various segments of the global family. The work of addressing global climate change ultimately revolves around the aim of human lives well lived, which is a goal cherished by people and cultures the world over. In it can therefore be found a powerful point of unity to support the work ahead. We trust that the efforts of those at COP 21 will contribute to building a firm foundation on which the well-being and prosperity of humanity can be ever more effectively pursued for this and future generations.

Reframing the discourse about migration and refugees in Europe

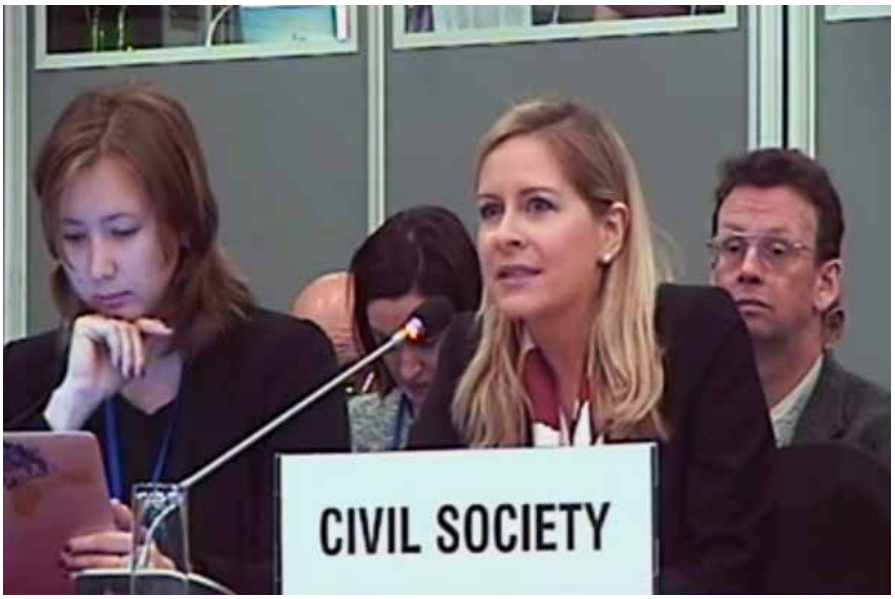
BRUSSELS — In recent months, the Brussels Office of the Bahá'í International Community has sought to participate in the discourse about the movement of refugees to Europe and the overall question of migration.

The Office has participated in a number of recent conferences and events, including: the annual human rights and democracy conference of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), held 21 September to 2 October 2015 in Warsaw, Poland; the annual general conference of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), held 14 to 16 October in the Hague, Netherlands; and the Quaker Council for European Affairs and Quaker Peace and Social Witness joint conference, held 4 to 6 December in Brussels, Belgium.

"One of our main goals in participating in these events has been to join others in seeking to understand and contribute to the ongoing discourse about the impact of migration in Europe," said Rachel Bayani, Representative of the Brussels Office. "And one theme of our contribution has been to suggest that the discourse can be reframed in the context of an understanding of humanity's essential oneness."

In remarks to the plenary at the Warsaw meeting, Ms. Bayani encouraged the OSCE to explore how educational processes and capacity-building endeavors can reinforce the collective awareness of humanity's oneness, especially among the youth and younger generations.

"There is a need to search for ways to strengthen the collective awareness of humanity's underlying oneness and to broaden the understanding of our primary over-arching human identity," said Ms. Bayani, adding that intolerance and discrimination often stem from the tendency of people to identify solely with social, cultural or physical characteristics.



Rachel Bayani, Representative in the Brussels Office of the Bahá'í International Community, addresses the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in September.

"This is not to dismiss the diversity of our secondary identities, which are a source of strength and wealth," she said. "Rather, we need to learn to focus on our primary identity in a manner that simultaneously values the many secondary aspects of human diversity."

Interconnectedness of humanity

At the meeting in the Hague, the Office delivered a statement that drew particular attention to the profound interconnectedness of humanity.

"The movement of populations illustrates that the peace, stability and prosperity of the different regions of the world are interconnected and that solutions cannot be intelligently considered in isolation from this global reality," said the statement.

"Social, institutional and legal arrangements that meet the needs of one region, but do not take into consideration those of another, are proving insufficient. What is becoming apparent is that the movement of populations is but the latest symptom of a much deeper and far-reaching concern."

At the meeting in Brussels, Ms Bayani emphasized the need to re-conceptualize our understanding of humanity and see it as one entity, rather than a juxtaposition of different entities.

"The movement of populations is among those phenomena that highlights the organic and systemic oneness of humanity," she said in remarks to the conference there. "It shows that when there is conflict in one part of the world, another part is affected. We start seeing with increasing clarity that the well-being of people who are geographically distant affects us."

Regional office for Africa seeks to contribute to peace and development discourses

ADDIS ABABA — The Addis Ababa Office of the Bahá'í International Community has delivered statements to and cosponsored several side events at major UN conferences in 2015.

In July, at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD), the Office cosponsored a side event convened by the African Interfaith Initiative on the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

Held on 14 July 2015 at the Grand Yordanos Hotel, the event brought together policy makers and faith leaders, including Sheikh Abdallah Mangala Luaba, Grand Mufti of the Democratic Republic of Congo; Bishop Abraham Desta, Apostolic Vicar of Meki Vicariate, Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar; and Iteffa Gobena Molte, Ecumenical Envoy to the African Union, All African Conference of Churches (AACC).

Techeste Ahderom, Resident Representative of the BIC office in Addis, delivered closing remarks to the meeting, stressing the importance of applying spiritual principles — such as "ethics, values, duty, honesty, and justice" — to the issues of financing for development.

In September, the Office cosponsored an event in New York during the UN Sustainable Development Summit on "Agenda 2063 — The Africa We Want." Cosponsored with the South African Institute of International Affairs," the event addressed the question of how to end conflict in Africa.

"The goal of ending all conflict in Africa within five years is highly ambitious, but speaks to the unparalleled role peace plays in development efforts," said Mr. Ahderom. "This is a burning issue for the continent."

In November, the Office released a statement on the occasion of to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Paris. The statement addressed the issue of climate change and African agriculture, discussing, among other things, the importance of involving women farmers and religious leaders in efforts to both improve agriculture and ameliorate climate change, which are linked.

"One such challenge that afflicts communities in Africa is the marginalization of girls and women," the statement said. "This situation will only be aggravated by environmental changes as women are largely responsible for securing food, water and energy for cooking and heating. Scarcity of resources arising from climate change intensifies the woman's burden and leaves less time to earn an income, attend school or care for the family."

The Addis Office of the BIC works in collaboration with governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental agencies operating on the African stage. Prominent among its efforts is participating in discourses that contribute to the well-being and progress of African populations. It seeks thereby to lend impetus to the advancement of world peace and the spiritual and material advancement of a global civilization.

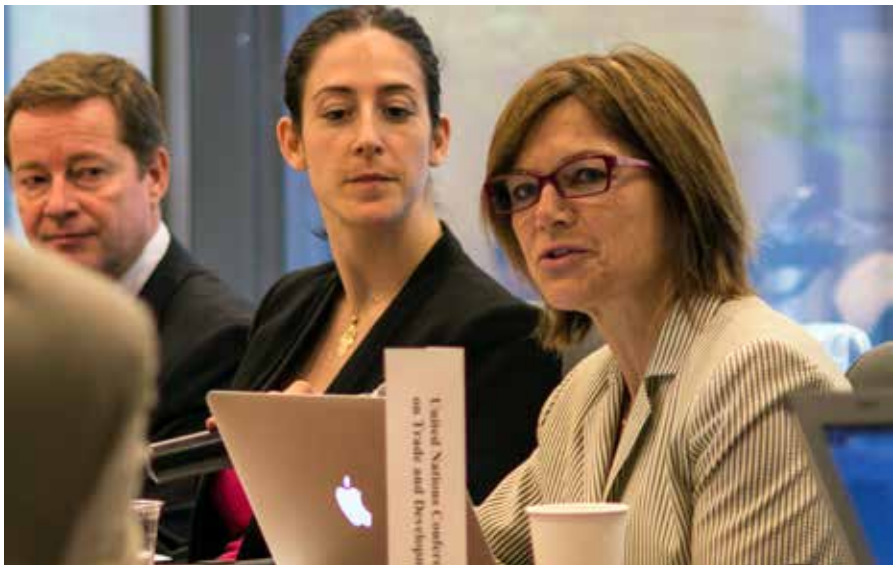
The Office maintains strong ties with the African Union, which traces its roots to the founding of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa in 1963.

The Office is committed to all efforts that advance the prosperity, peace and security of Africa, including the realization of the African Union Development Agenda 2063.

Techeste Ahderom, right, Resident Representative of the Addis Ababa Regional Office of Bahá'í International Community, in June at a ceremony on the Day of the African Child at the main conference centre of the African Union Commission. At left is Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Koloko, AU Commissioner for Social Affairs.

Informal meetings between diplomats, UN officials and civil society chart evolution of Agenda 2030

Chantal Line Carpentier, Chief, New York Office of UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), at right, was among the participants at the 28 May 2015 breakfast meeting, one of eight meetings held in 2015 at the offices of the Bahá'í International Community on the post-2015 development agenda.



IN BRIEF

- **A series of breakfast meetings on the post-2015 development agenda at the Bahá'í International Community offices in New York reflect the new norm of inclusion that defined the negotiation of Agenda 2030.**
- **The meetings provided a venue for diplomats, UN officials, and civil society to discuss the evolution of Agenda 2030 in an interactive and informal manner.**
- **The topics — from climate change to finance — paralleled the negotiations on Agenda 2030 at the United Nations.**

NEW YORK — By all accounts, Agenda 2030 represents the most ambitious and far-reaching global development program ever undertaken by the United Nations — or any other organization.

Approved by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, the Agenda has at its core 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that address virtually every major challenge facing humanity today, from poverty to climate change, from gender equality to peace and security.

The Agenda's preamble speaks to the scale of aspiration: "We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path."

The plan was devised during a several-years long process that included the participation of not only governments and UN agencies but also thousands of civil society representatives and stakeholder organizations, who gave input in a series of more than a hundred global and regional consultations. By the UN's count, more than 130,000 people in at least 86 countries participated directly or online in these events, with many more giving their input via surveys.

In this regard, the process that led to the creation of Agenda 2030 is now widely considered to be among the most inclusive ever at the UN — and a model for future global consultations.

On a small scale, the new kinds of interactions between governments, UN officials and representatives of civil society that gave birth to Agenda 2030 have been reflected in a series of breakfast meetings held at the offices of the Bahá'í International Community. Indeed, the discussions at those gatherings track quite well the evolution of the post-2015 development agenda.

Launched in July 2012, and cosponsored with International Movement ATD Fourth World, the meetings have been held roughly once a month. Each has focused on a particular topic, in parallel with the negotiations at the UN. And the meetings have sought

If the post-2015 breakfast meetings have been useful, it's partly because of the process

NEW YORK — Participants in the breakfast meetings held on Agenda 2030 over the last three and a half years at the offices of the Bahá'í International Community say that, beyond the substance provided by keynote speakers, it has been the inclusive and informal nature of the process at the gatherings that made them the most useful.

"Part of the problem with the UN is that it is very formal," said Francois Gave, Counsellor for development and sustainable development with the Permanent Mission of France to the UN. "It is rarely interactive; those who do things on the ground rarely speak out.

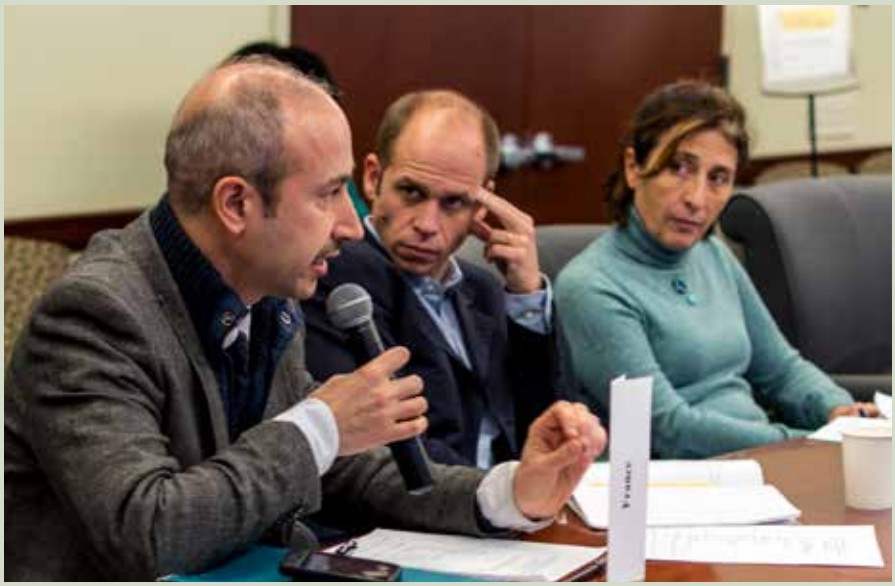
"And that is why [these] meetings are helpful. They are more interactive, less formal, and doers sometimes speak out," said Mr. Gave, who has been a frequent attendee at the breakfasts.

As of December 2015, there had been 30 such breakfast meetings, all focused around themes and issues related to the post-2015 development agenda, as Agenda 2030 was known before its adoption in September.

The format has been simple. Two or three "experts" — representing a diversity of viewpoints (North/South, governments/UN, business/academia) — were invited to give brief keynote talks. Participants were then encouraged to engage in a unconstrained conversation on the topic.

The idea has been to create a serious but informal atmosphere, where participants could exchange ideas on an equal footing.

Perhaps most important to this has been the use of the Chatham House Rule for follow-up discussions after the keynote talks. The Chatham House Rule states simply that participants may freely use the information received but without identifying the identity or affiliation of the discussant.



Francois Gave, left, of the Permanent Mission of France to the UN, speaks at a breakfast meeting at the BIC offices on 24 November 2015.

The idea has been to encourage open and forthright discussion, by allowing people to express views which may not be those of their organization.

"We like the use of the Chatham House Rule," said Evans S. Maturu, Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Kenya to the UN. "People can express their views freely and it's a place that encourages people to say what is on their minds. It is very informative."

A second element of the process has been to explicitly encourage diplomats, UN officials, and civil society representatives to engage freely with each other in an atmosphere of trust and civility. After opening statements, more than an hour is devoted to an off-the-record exchange among participants.

"The idea was to create a space where the UN officials, member states, and civil society can come together in an open, consultative atmosphere to discuss issues related to the post-2015 agenda," said Serik Tokbolat, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, who often moderates the meetings.

John Gilroy, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN, also a frequent participant, said his mission appreciated "the variety of opinions, across member states, the UN system and civil society."

"It is never just like-minded navel gazing," he added. "Many other meetings see the discussion taper out after the main speakers intervene."

UN officials also find the meetings helpful in their work. Sylvia Hordosch, a Policy Adviser with UN Women said the "balance between a structured conversation around a clearly defined topic and the openness of the conversation, the mix of people and the safe environment" has made the meetings particularly useful to her.

"The meetings were an important learning opportunity — hearing what others think on specific aspects of the post-2015 negotiations, an opportunity

to share our views and to meet people," said Ms. Hordosch.

Viniciu Carvalho Pineiro, Deputy Director of the International Labour Organization's Office for the United Nations, said the openness of the meetings has created "a way to get inside information and to hear early insights into issues that will be very important" in the near future in relation to the post-2015 process.

For representatives of civil society, too, the egalitarian and forthright nature of the meetings has been important.

"It's such a good example of the kind of discussion you can't have within the UN," said Nicole Cardinal, Senior Advocacy Advisor with Save the Children International's Global Advocacy Office in New York. "You get a wide variety of UN officials, member states and civil society around the table. And [the meetings] are less agenda-driven then other side events where the organizers want to get a point across.

"It's an open platform and everyone is equal," she added. "It allows a way for civil society to interact with member states in a way that is not as intimidating to some."

Daniel LeBlanc, chair of the NGO Committee on Financing for Development, and the UN representative of Oblates of Mary Immaculate, said the consistent high level of participation by governments and UN officials was proof of the meetings' value.

"They can talk in a way that is different from the UN where they have to give their government's position. Here they can speak more freely about what they are thinking and feeling," he said.

This is particularly important to civil society he added. "This allows us to form allies and plan who we can advocate with."

[Editor's note: Complete reports on each breakfast meeting can be found at www.bic.org.]

explicitly to bring together diplomats, UN officials and civil society representatives in an informal, egalitarian setting, to enable a free exchange of views. *[See page 8]*

In 2014, the breakfast meetings addressed key issues facing UN negotiators as they sought to devise a replacement for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), covering topics like how to finance the Agenda, the end of traditional "north-south" lines, the impact of conflict and violence on development, and the role of civil society.

The series of meetings in 2015, of which there were eight, addressed a different set of issues, reflecting a shift from what the Agenda should be to questions about how it can be most effectively communicated, implemented, and monitored.

"The range of themes we addressed in 2015 was broad," said Serik Tokbolat, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN. "Our criteria for topics were mainly just to follow closely what was being discussed at the UN, and then choosing the most relevant or important theme in relation to that. It is basically reading reality."

According to those who participated in the meetings, the result over time was a fruitful process of learning and the generation of new ideas and knowledge that were carried back to the formal negotiations among member states. The series also reflects an underlying theme of integration and inclusion found in the Agenda.

Communicating the goals

The first two meetings of 2015 addressed the question of communicating the Agenda. On 11 February, David Donoghue, the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN, who was then co-chairing the negotiations, said the new goals must "in some way capture the imagination of ordinary people around the world."

Amina Mohammad, then the Special Advisor to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on post-2015 development planning, agreed that communicating the significance of the new goals will be crucial in their ultimate success, saying they must have support from the international to the grassroots.

"It is not just about governments and businesses," said Ms. Mohammad. "There are many more partnerships that will hold this all together."

On 24 March, Hahn Choonghee, the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the UN, said the UN must find "very touching and inspiring ways of communicating" the significance of the goals. One way to do that, he said, is to focus on inspirational qualities, like human rights, equality, and justice.

Maher Nasser, Director, Outreach Division of the UN Department of Public Information, said new technologies will need to be used. "The world is much more connected. About one-third of humanity has access to high speed internet."

How to pay for Agenda 2030

On 20 April, the breakfast focused on how to pay for the proposed SDGs. Discussing "Mobilizing Resources for Economic Justice: The Road to Addis Ababa" were Mahmoud Mohieldin of the World Bank and Tamer Mostafa of the Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the UN.

Mr. Mohieldin, the Bank's corporate secretary and the president's special envoy on the post-2015 process, stressed the importance of working with national-level institutions.

"While it is very useful to have goals and targets and the initiation of interesting proposals to get things done at the global level, if you don't really have well-coordinated policy at the national level, if you don't have institutions, if you don't have leadership, and if you don't have the means of implementation, these goals and targets are going to remain either unfulfilled or just aspirational," said Mr. Mohieldin

Mr. Mostafa said in his view all countries — developed and less developed alike — must take increased responsibility for the progress of the whole. "If this is going to be a shared responsibility, rather than 'common but differentiated responsibilities,' we need everybody to stand up for that challenge," he said.

High Level Political Forum

On 28 May, the meeting focused on the need for new modes of monitoring and review. Christian Wenaweser, the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein's mission to the UN, said countries involved in negotiations on the SDGs had generally reached agreement on the need for a review mechanism, but had so far only decided it should be "state-led" and "principally voluntary in nature."

He added that his country — along with an ad hoc group including Egypt, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, the Republic of Korea, and Switzerland — were pushing for a strong review mechanism that would obligate the input of civil society and other stakeholders. Specifically, he said, the seven were calling for the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to become "the key forum" for review — an idea adopted in the Agenda.

Climate change and the SDGs

On 28 July, the breakfast examined the interrelationship between climate change negotiations and the post-2015 agenda. Ronald Jean Jumeau, the Ambassador for Climate Change and Small Island Developing State Issues of the Republic of Seychelles, said recent UN meetings had established clear links between the two processes.

He noted the outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD), held in July in Addis Ababa, explicitly connects development financing to the fight against climate change, while the SDGs call it "one of the greatest challenges of our time" which will "undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development."

David Nussbaum, Chief Executive of the Worldwide Fund for Nature in the UK, said: "If we look at the SDGs as analogous to putting out some of the fires that are burning around the world — poverty, malnutrition, etc. — then climate change, if you will, acts like petrol being poured on those fires, making them burn more intensely."

SDGs and humanitarian crisis

On 22 September, the meeting looked at the growing humanitarian crises in the world and the SDGs.

Guillermo Rishchynski, then the Permanent Representative of the Mission of Canada to the UN, said "the sense of urgency that exists in so many quarters around our planet" and the "understanding that if we don't come together to act" there will be increased "vulnerability" was one reason diplomats were able to agree on the SDGs, which in their 17 overall goals and 169 specific targets in effect also address the root causes of these disasters, whether natural or man-made.

Kyung-wha Kang, an Assistant Secretary General at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said the World Humanitarian Summit, scheduled for May 2016, will strive to link the humanitarian agenda with the development agenda.

"Our appeal to the developmental sector is that they have to come in more quickly and link up with the humanitarian intervention [sector] so as to make that transition seamless, and in support of enabling people to grow out of their chronic vulnerabilities," she said.

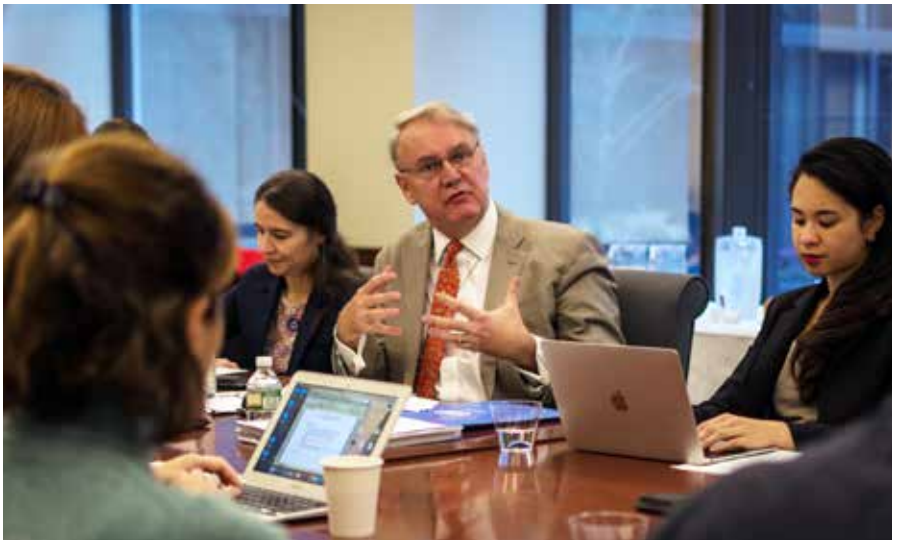
Need for indicators

The breakfast on 5 November considered the challenges of developing good indicators of progress towards meeting the Agenda's 169 targets. Linda Hooper of the UN Statistics Division briefed the group on the outcome of the Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, held in October in Bangkok, while John Romano of the Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network, talked about the "deep and complex" issues delegates to that meeting faced as they sought to balance "ambition and reality."

Fit for Purpose

On 24 November, the meeting considered whether the UN is "fit for purpose" in its administrative structure to effectively implement the SDGs. John Hendra, Senior Coordinator of UN Fit for Purpose, noted that the SDGs are "much more universal" than the MDGs, and they take a human rights based approach. "This is a transformed agenda — we need transformed responses," he said. "We need to make sure there is accountability, inclusiveness, and that financing is transparent."

Naiara Costa, Advocacy Director of Beyond 2015, said reform is not an end in itself. "Being fit is not only about losing weight but gaining muscles," she said.



John Hendra, Senior Coordinator of UN Fit for Purpose, speaking at the 24 November 2015 meeting.

New partnerships between religions and international organizations tackle sustainable development

IN BRIEF

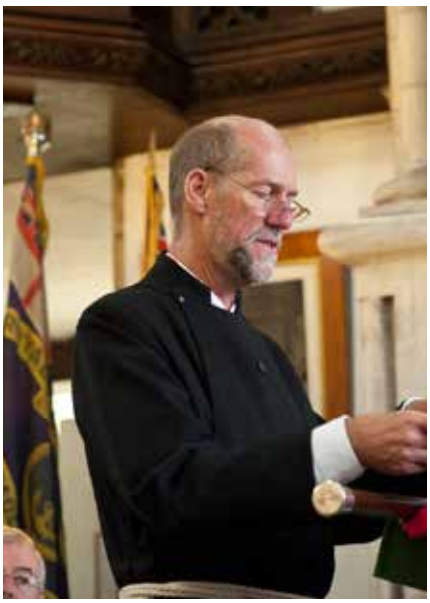
- **International development agencies are forming new or stronger partnerships with religious groups.**
- **The trend is driven by recognition that faith based-organizations often have strong connections at the grassroots — and a galvanizing moral perspective on development issues.**
- **There have been numerous high-level and low-level meetings recently between religious leaders and development officials, including at the World Bank and the UN.**

***Partnerships**, continued from page one*

While the Bristol Commitments represent an important step in bringing grassroots support to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as the 17 goals in Agenda 2030 are known, the Bristol meeting and its outcome are far from the only new or expanding collaboration between religious groups and international development agencies in 2015.

In April, the World Bank launched an initiative to better involve religious organizations in its effort to end extreme poverty. That initiative centered on the creation of a joint statement, titled "Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative," which was initially endorsed by some 30 global religious leaders and faith-based organizations — including the Bahá'í International Community.

The idea, said the Bank, is to "generate the necessary social and political will" to end extreme poverty by 2030 by "tapping into many of the shared convictions and beliefs" of the world's major religions about the moral duty to combat poverty.



Martin Plamer, Secretary General of the Alliance on Conservation and Religion, speaking in Bristol, UK.

Other development agencies, both at the United Nations and among governments, are also increasingly collaborating and building partnerships with religious groups to address sustainable development, climate change, and poverty issues.

Examples include the creation of an interagency task force at the United Nations to consider how to better partner with faith-based organizations on development, a July "Summit of Conscience" in Paris to create greater support to combat climate change, and the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, a new endeavor of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation and other international development agencies.

"Religion is back at the table," said Martin Palmer, secretary general of the UK-based Alliance on Conservation and Religion (ARC), one of the oldest and best known groups that has sought to bring together religions with environmental groups and development organizations like the World Bank.

"Move hearts and minds"

"The hope is that the faiths can actually move people's hearts and minds, and change human behavior with respect to the whole range of issues related to sustainable development," said Mr. Palmer, who was deeply involved in an earlier World Bank/religions project, a contributor to the "extreme poverty" initiative in April, and the organizer of the Bristol meeting.

According to Mr. Palmer and others, the shift in thinking about how religions can help international development agencies meet their goals stems in part from the growing realization that governments cannot do it all, that they must turn increasingly to civil society to meet global challenges, and that religions, especially,

as a segment of civil society, have a dedicated following with the motivation and capacity to undertake change and transformation.

"I think in general there has been an increasing recognition within the development discourse that the role of private actors is taking on a much more significant role within the organizations of development," said Adam Russell Taylor, who leads the Faith-Based Initiative at the World Bank Group.

"Twenty years ago, ODA (Official Development Assistance) was the biggest source of financing for development. Now the private sector has far eclipsed what ODA provides, and a significant part of that sector is religious and faith-based organizations," said Rev. Taylor, who is also an ordained minister in the American Baptist Church.

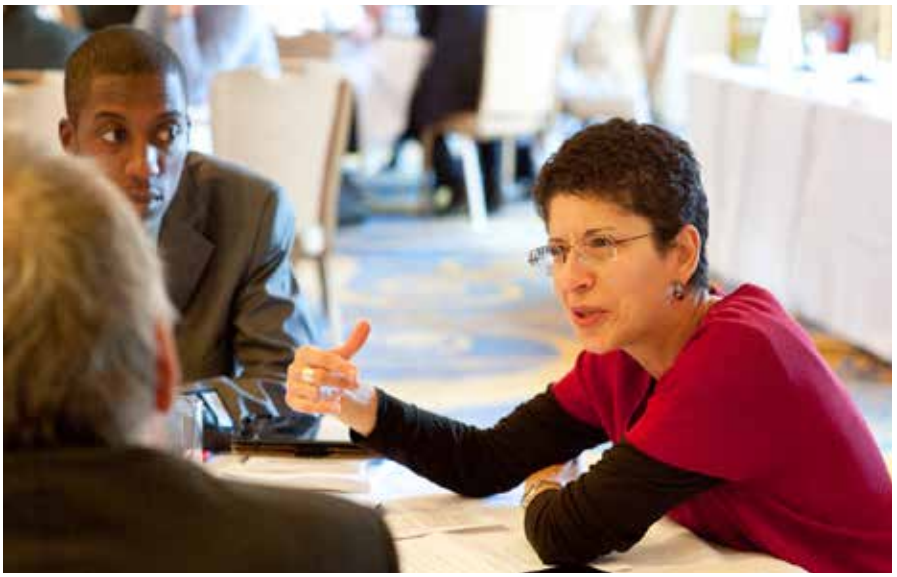
Rev. Taylor said this new understanding of the importance of faith-based groups in development is bolstered by the recognition that "the developing world is becoming more religious and not less religious."

New guidelines

This trend has led a number of UN agencies recently to develop guidelines for working with faith-based organizations. Since 2009, at least five agencies — UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, and UNHCR — have produced and published such documents as internal blueprints for how their agencies should work with religious groups and to guide religious groups who wish to work with the UN.

"The case for working with faith-based organizations, as one community among many critical agents of change, is no longer a matter of discussion, but rather, one of considered, systematic and deliberate engagement of the like-minded partners among them," say the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) guidelines.

"Moreover," the guidelines continue, "there is clearly an important parallel faith-based universe of development, one which provides anywhere between 30-60% of health care and educational services in many developing countries.



Azza Karam, a Senior Advisor on culture at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), was one of many UN officials at the Bristol, UK, meeting on SDGs and religions.

At a time when basic needs are becoming increasingly harder to provide for more than half of the world's population, we can no longer avoid acknowledging these parallel faith-based development interventions which reach so many and provide so much. Many are critical venues for outreach, resources, and service delivery."

Azza Karam, a senior advisor on culture at the UNFPA, said religion has become "the new normal" at the UN. "Because of what has happened over the last five to ten years, there has been a shift from where the UN has seen religion as the 'other' — because religious issues and actors weren't really supposed to be a part of the UN system as understood by the UN — to where the UN can't seem to get enough of it."

Dr. Karam also said the shift is partly driven by the rise in violence in the name of religion, coupled with the rise in evangelization and proselytization among some religious groups. "These trends have forced us to pay attention to religion," she said.

Role of motivation

The World Bank initiative on extreme poverty highlights another aspect of the trend: the desire to capitalize on the ability of faith groups to mobilize support and to advocate because of their strong reputation for moral and spiritual leadership.

Representatives of religious organizations who drafted the moral imperative were keen on this point.

"We believe faith has the capacity to tap the deepest reservoirs of human motivation and therefore release the collective will and raise the consciousness of people in a way that brings the moral dimension of poverty to come to the fore," said Bani Dugal, the representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN.

"All individuals have the responsibility to assist people living in poverty. The societies and the institutions are responsible for creating the conditions in which poverty can be eradicated. Bahá'í communities around the world are contributing to eradicating poverty with grassroots efforts to build capacity through education and other processes, with a goal of enabling individuals everywhere to become protagonists of their own progress and development.

"These initiatives also encourage individuals to consider their social responsibilities towards others. Measures to promote the well-being of all have been blocked largely by the pursuit of self-interest and overall disunity that, sadly, seems to characterize many of our individual and institutional pursuits today," said Ms. Dugal.

Despite promises by Iran to improve human rights, violations against Bahá'ís continue

IN BRIEF

- **Despite Iran's declaration that a "new chapter" has been opened in its relations with the world, the country's human rights record remains a major concern within the international community.**
- **This is evidenced by a UN General Assembly resolution in December and critical reports from the Secretary General and the UN's expert on human rights in Iran.**
- **Bahá'ís, in particular, face continuing and unabated human rights violations.**
- **These include unjust imprisonment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and denial of access to higher education.**
- **Iran also continues its campaign of economic persecution against Bahá'ís, which is documented in a new BIC report.**

UNITED NATIONS — In his third appearance before the United Nations General Assembly last September, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani announced that "a new chapter has started in Iran's relations with the world."

Upon his election two years ago, he said, the Iranian people had given him a "mandate for consolidating peace and constructive engagement" with the world. Citing the successful negotiation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, President Rouhani said he has fulfilled that promise.

One thing President Rouhani did not mention, however, was his country's record on human rights, which continues to be a major concern among the community of nations.

The level of concern is evidenced by a series of reports and resolutions after President Rouhani's UN appearance that spoke powerfully about Iran's failure to abide by international human rights law.

In December, the UN General Assembly approved a resolution by a vote of 81 to 37 with 67 abstentions expressing "serious concern" over Iran's continuing human rights violations, the 28th such resolution since 1985. It called on the Iranian government to end a wide range of violations, including the too-frequent use of the death penalty, failure to uphold legal due process, restrictions on freedom of expression, and ongoing discrimination against women, ethnic minorities and religious minorities.

The General Assembly's resolution came after a report in October by the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Ahmad Shaheed, who said Iran continues to violate the rights of its citizens, also in a wide range of areas. And Dr. Shaheed's report followed one by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who also expressed concern over continuing violations — listing similar concerns over executions, freedom of expression and assembly, and discrimination against minorities.

The situation of Bahá'ís

All three actions — the resolution and the two reports — specifically referred to the situation of Iranian Bahá'ís, who continue to face persecution for their religious beliefs.

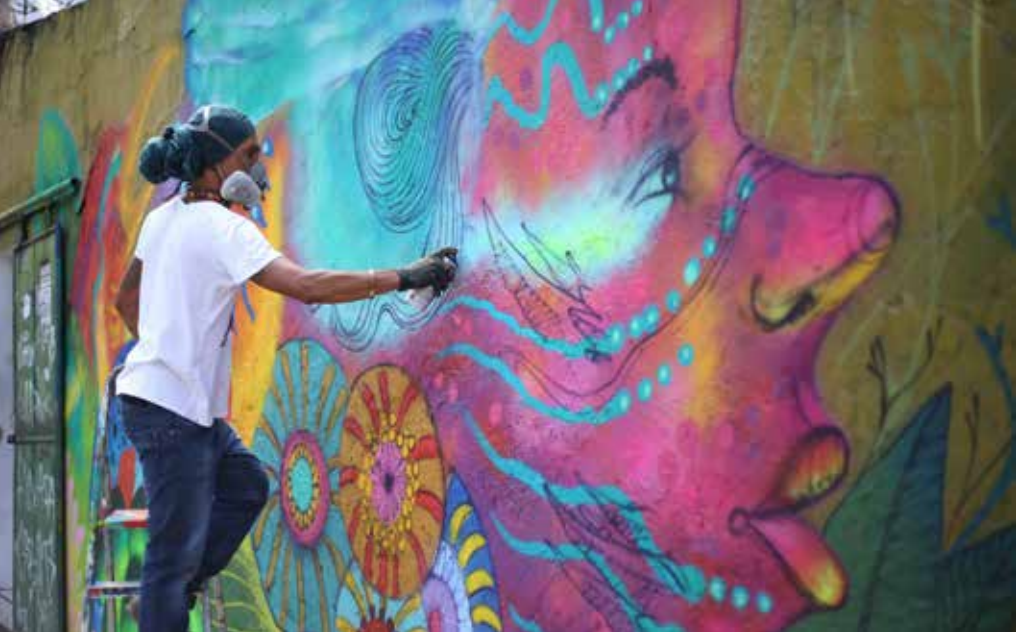
The General Assembly, for example, expressed "serious concern about ongoing severe limitations and restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief," noting specifically the case of Bahá'ís, and also calling for Iran to release the seven imprisoned Bahá'í leaders, who have been wrongly detained since 2008.

Dr. Shaheed's report devoted three paragraphs to the situation of Iranian Bahá'ís, noting among other things that 74 Bahá'ís were imprisoned as of June 2015, and that authorities "continue to summon, interrogate and arrest Bahá'ís, and close down businesses" belonging to Bahá'ís.

Mr. Ban likewise noted that "authorities have not relaxed restrictions on members of the Bahá'í community," noting reports of "severe constraints on their professional activities," fresh arrests, and "incidents of desecration of Bahá'í cemeteries."

Representatives of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) say the UN's concern is justified.

"Certainly for Iranian Bahá'ís, the government's policy of systematic and widespread persecution remains unchanged," said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the BIC to the UN, who welcomed the General Assembly's resolution. "It shows that the international community remains aware and concerned about Iran's continued violations of the rights of its citizens in a wide range of areas,



In Salvador, Brazil, artist Eder Muniz works on a mural as part of the "#NotACrime" campaign, which uses street art to call attention to Iran's denial of higher education to Bahá'ís. Other cities where artists have participated in the campaign include Sao Paulo, New York, Johannesburg, and Sydney. *(Photo courtesy* Iranwire*)*

despite government rhetoric to the contrary and its promises to improve."

Ms. Dugal noted that in November, just as the General Assembly began to consider its resolution, Iranian authorities arrested 20 Bahá'ís in three cities and closed at least 28 Bahá'í businesses in another six. "Such actions demonstrate the wide-ranging and centrally directed nature of the government's anti-Bahá'í program."

80 Bahá'ís in prison

As of December 2015, more than 80 Bahá'ís were imprisoned in Iran. All of the charges against them are related solely to their religious belief and practice. Typically, for example, Bahá'ís who are imprisoned are accused of things like "activities against national security," "propaganda against the regime," and/or "membership in the unlawful 'Bahaism' administration."

Diane Ala'i, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN in Geneva, explained the government's rationale for these charges at a Forum on Minority Issues on 25 November 2015, saying that the "lack of fair treatment that Bahá'ís face in the criminal justice system stems from the Iranian government's false assertion that membership in the Bahá'í Faith is considered to be 'acting against the security of the State.'"

"Therefore a simple observance of one's holy day, or providing spiritual education to children and youth, or even putting some flowers on the tomb of a departed relative can provide sufficient evidence for one's being imprisoned, sometimes for many years," said Ms. Ala'i. "Members of the revolutionary guards do not simply enter the home of Bahá'ís, they storm into them, ransacking the rooms and confiscating such 'dangerous' items as books with religious content and photos of spiritual figures of the Bahá'í Faith."

Since President Rouhani came to power, the arrest and detention of Bahá'ís has continued — despite his election campaign promises to end discrimination based on religion. Since 2005, more than 800 Bahá'ís have been arrested — and at least 125 of these arrests have occurred President Rouhani's election.

The government continues to prevent young Bahá'ís from attending university by blocking release of their entrance examinations, or expelling them if they do enroll. Since August 2013, at least 25 Bahá'ís have been expelled. In addition, attacks on Bahá'í cemeteries have also continued, with attackers going unpunished.

Economic persecution

Bahá'ís also faced numerous incidents of economic persecution last year. Many were documented in a Bahá'í International Community report, "T*heir Progress and Development Are Blocked" — The economic oppression of Iran's Bahá'ís*, published in October. It recorded more than 780 incidents of direct economic persecution against Iranian Bahá'ís since 2007, such as shop closures, dismissals, the actual or threatened revocation of business licenses, and other actions to suppress economic activity.

In October 2014, for example, Iranian authorities descended on some 80 Bahá'í-owned shops in the cities of Kerman, Rafsanjan, and Jiroft, placing official seals of closure on their doors and posting banners saying the shops had been closed due to "violations of trading rules" after shop owners had closed their establishments in observance of important Bahá'í holy days. Similar incidents occurred in April and May 2015, when government agents closed at least 35 shops in some of those same cities, and again in October 2015, as Ms. Dugal noted, when agents closed at least 28 shops in six cities.

"These recent incidents are about far more than a trampling of religious sensibilities," said the report. "They reflect the latest element of Iran's long-running, government-directed campaign to suppress the economic livelihood of its Bahá'í citizens — a focus on closing small shops and businesses. This focus is significant since such small enterprises remain virtually the only way left for Iranian Bahá'ís to earn a living."

The report also detailed the scope of a continuing anti-Bahá'í propaganda campaign, one that has actually expanded since President Rouhani took office. Over the course of 20 months, from January 2014 through August 2015, the report said, government-controlled media in Iran, including websites, published more than 7,000 anti-Bahá'í articles.

Many of these articles "seem calculated to suppress the economic activity of Iranian Bahá'ís," the report said, inasmuch as they often "repeat fatwas stating that Bahá'ís are 'unclean' and suggest that good Iranians should refuse to associate with them or patronize their shops and businesses."

ELEVEN, *continued from page 28*

and urban gardens will also need to become commonplace.

But Mr. Hanley is concerned with more than landscapes. If we are to feed 11 billion, he says, we must also change the way we think by transforming our "inscapes." That's because he believes so much of what is unsustainable about current human activity stems from an incorrect but prevailing mental paradigm that equates consumption with happiness. One chapter starts, for example, by suggesting that the proliferation of fast food restaurants is not only environmentally unsound but also unhealthy and fundamentally unsatisfying.

"Much, even most, of what we do — from eating doughnuts to building car-dominated cities — lies on a continuum between unnecessary and destructive," writes Mr. Hanley. "Therein lies an opportunity. Not only would we be happier and healthier if we gave up many unnecessary and all destructive activities, letting go would free up resources to do things right."

Because the consumerist mindset is so deeply seated in modern culture, changing it will ultimately require a massive and global education campaign, he writes.

"Just as we have been trained in current norms by our families, schools, peers, workplaces, the media, and other environmental influences, we need to be trained to live in a world of 11 billion," writes Mr. Hanley. "We will have to replace conventional education modelled on the current, defective world view, which is focused mainly on turning out a new crop of passive, self-interested consumers. We need an educational approach ... that will *educe* the innate moral capacity of human beings and guide them toward thoughtful and effective involvement in the process of carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization."

More evidence of the need to re-think our values, he writes, can be found in the fact that humanity is already growing enough to feed the seven billion currently alive. Yet extreme poverty and malnutrition continue to exist, proof of misplaced priorities.

"The momentum of the current world order, its inequalities and blindness to ecological realities, will be impossible to change without an ethical transformation," he writes. "Until an ethos built around the material well-being of the individual in the present shifts to one built around the spiritual well-being of humankind throughout time only limited progress will be made."

At the book's end, he discusses alternative education programs that promote this ethos, mentioning the Millennium Villages Project and the Harlem Children's Zone. But the model he finds most promising is a program developed by the Bahá'í-inspired Ruhi Institute in Colombia, which he describes in the final chapter.

That program uses a "low-cost process of learning and capacity building that is continuously adaptive," he writes.

Moreover, "the Ruhi approach offers a viable alternative to a materialistic worldview that is driving a social-ecological system based on unjust, unequal, and unsustainable economic activities. It promotes a balanced approach to development, understanding that happiness is achieved through the quality of one's inner life and relationships."

As such, he suggests, the Ruhi approach could be used to help humanity transform its "inscape" — and help us wean ourselves from those behaviors that are unsustainable.

"The core proposal of this book is that human beings are fundamentally virtuous, but these virtues only develop through effort by families and communities and institutions to foster them," he writes. "This educational process will require everyone's involvement. Many are already leading the way, and many more will become early adopters, but in time the moral education process will come to involve whole villages and neighborhoods and spread through whole countries. Ultimately, to make the world work for 11 billion people, we will be called to become what can only be described as a new human race."

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

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

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REVIEW

Why 11 is a very important number for the future of humanity

ELEVEN

By Paul Hanley
Friesen Press
Victoria, BC

IN BRIEF

- **Canadian journalist Paul Hanley asks — and answers — an urgent question: Can we feed the projected 11 billion people by 2100 without destroying the earth's ecosystem?**
- **Yes, he says, but only if humanity moves from materialistic, consumer-based, economy to one driven by concern for the community, and planet, as a whole.**
- **Such a shift will require a global program of alternative education that stresses human values, based on the "understanding that happiness is achieved through the quality of one's inner life and relationships."**

Paul Hanley's bold and sweeping new book, *Eleven*, opens with a simple but extremely consequential question: Given that the world's population is by all accounts slated to reach 11 billion by the year 2100, how will we feed everyone?

Mr. Hanley, a Canadian journalist specializing in agriculture and the environment, gives a two-part answer.

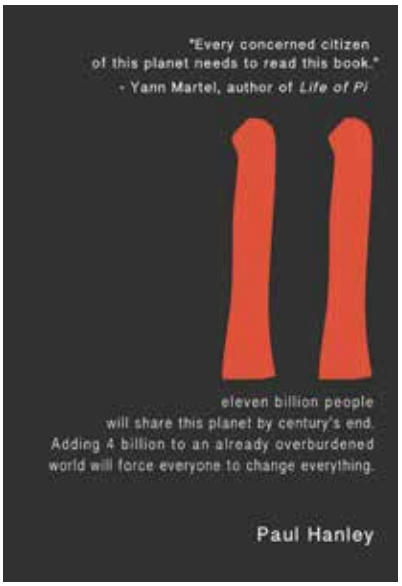
First part: if humanity stays on its current consumerist economic path, there is no way we can feed another four billion people. Indeed, he says, the earth is already taxed beyond its carrying capacity in the effort to feed seven billion, and will soon reach a crisis point.

Second part: If people adjust by embracing a new conception of themselves and rethinking their relationship with material things, it is quite possible for all 11 billion to have enough to eat — and to enjoy a bountiful and meaningful life.

Like many others, Mr. Hanley says our current path is unsustainable, noting human activity already exceeds the earth's ecological carrying capacity by 60 percent. "While the sheer volume of Earth's natural capital may allow us to carry on as is for some time, to do so with 50 percent more people would mean that our collective ecological footprint in 2100 would exceed Earth's carrying capacity several times over."

He then explores what can be done to ensure humanity does not starve itself and precipitate an ecological collapse at the same time — an exploration that in its positive and pragmatic detail makes this book stand out from purveyors of environmental gloom and doom.

In one chapter, for example, he methodically totals up the available global acreage of damaged or underutilized land that can be recovered. And he offers success stories, like China's restoration of of the upper banks of the Yellow River, calling it a "little-known, $500 million enterprise" that transformed an area the size of Taiwan from a "dusty wasteland to productive farms, wetlands, and forest" through "terracing, watershed restoration, replanting native trees and other vegetation" with the help of the World Bank.



He also cites studies saying that organic farming can easily match and even exceed the yield — and profits — of petroleum-based agriculture, which is unsustainable. Organic farming also helps sequester carbon, which, he says, can "substantially mitigate climate change if done on a large scale."

"This form of geoengineering is a safe, win-win situation, since land restoration and soil improvement also restores watersheds, fosters biodiversity, improves productivity, and assists with rural poverty reduction," he writes, adding that community

ELEVEN, *continued on page 15*