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International News

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United Nations General Assembly Again Expresses Concern Over Continuing Discrimination Against Iran's Bahá'ís

FOR THE sixteenth time in seventeen years, the United Nations General Assembly has expressed "concern" over human rights violations in Iran, specifically noting the "still-existing discrimination" against the Bahá'í community of Iran.

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

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

More specifically, Prof Copithorne said that Bahá'í property continues to be subject to confiscation. He indicated that a number of Bahá'í families were forced to leave their homes and farmlands in the first months of 2001 in Kata, Buyr-Ahmand. In 2000, he said, information was received that four buildings were confiscated in Tehran, three in Shiraz and one in Isfahan.

"It is also reported that the issuance of business licenses to Bahá'ís has been delayed and that some stores and businesses owned by Bahá'ís have been closed," said Prof Copithorne.

Prof Copithorne also said that Bahá'ís continue to be denied access to higher education in legally recognised public institutions. "Recently three classrooms used by the Bahá'ís for their own educational purposes were seized," he said.

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

In its resolution, the Assembly decided to continue monitoring Iran next year, "paying particular attention to further developments, including the situation of the Bahá'ís and other minority groups."

Since the Islamic Revolutionary regime took power in Iran in 1979, Bahá'ís have been harassed and persecuted solely on account of their religious beliefs. More than 200

Bahá'ís have been killed, hundreds have been imprisoned, and thousands have been deprived of jobs, education or property. In 1983, all Bahá'í institutions were banned, and they remain officially closed.

"Although the number of executions and imprisonments has lessened in recent years,

Bahá'ís in Iran remain without any official recognition or legal protection that might protect them from discrimination," said Bani Dugal, a Bahá'í International Community representative to the United Nations.

"We see these on-going actions— the imprisonment of Bahá'ís, the confiscation of property, the deprivation of education, the restrictions on travel and worship, and the banning of Bahá'í institutions— as evidence of the continuing campaign of the government of Iran to strangle the Bahá'í community of that country," said Ms Dugal.

"The nature of the persecution is clearly based on religious belief," she continued. "Bahá'ís have repeatedly been offered relief from persecution if they were prepared to recant their Faith.

So Bahá'ís continue to be viewed as 'unprotected infidels' by the Government, without any form of legal protection, even though Iran is a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which guarantees freedom of religious belief."

"The Bahá'ís seek no special privileges," Ms Dugal said. "They desire only their rights under the International Bill of Human Rights, of which Iran is a signatory, including the right to life, the right to profess and practice their religion, the right to liberty and security of person, and the right to education and work."

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Visit of His Holiness the Dali Lama to Portugal

DURING THE VISIT of the Dali Lama to Portugal, the mayor of Lisbon dedicated a Garden for Peace and a small monument was built on it. The Bahá'í Community and other religions were present and the text below was read in the name of us all.

"In moments of silence, in communion with nature, we place ourselves closer to the magnificence of God the Creator and to the triumph of Creation.

In the gracious movements of blooming flowers, of birds in flight, of leaves that dance on the wind, we find nothing left to chance, nothing without purpose. Everything completes itself and is set in harmony according to the designs of the Divine Sculptor.

This peace, which we would like to share with all, is at times shaken when we are surprised by misunderstanding and intolerance, when we are invaded by injustice, by envy, by hate and, when we are hurt by destruction.

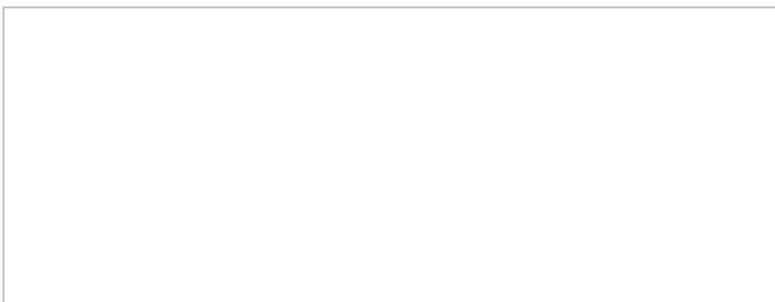
United in our faiths we can build a future where justice triumphs over injustice, good over evil, perfection over imperfection, health over sickness, tolerance over intolerance, love over hate, and, where peace triumphs over war.

A future, in which peace is for all, and not just for the few.

Today, blessed with the presence of His Holiness the Dali Lama, who always strove for peace and who assembled the different religious faiths in this, a Garden for Peace, let us pray in silence, for peace for all, for one minute."

Fifth International Environmental Forum meets in Hluboka

The Fifth Annual International Environmental Forum (IEF) conference, which took place in October last year in the Czech Republic, ended with a call on organisers of the pending World Summit for Sustainable Development



(WSSD) conference 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa in September to include in the agenda the Spiritual Principle as part of discussion towards achieving sustainable development.



The IEF conference, which was under the theme “Knowledge Values and

Participants at the International Environmental Forum

Education for Sustainable Development” was held at the Townshend International School, and was attended by Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, including Professor Bedrich Moldan, Professor of Environmental Sciences, who is also a member of the Czech Parliament.

Professor Moldan, who was the guest speaker, was also among eminent scientists selected from the five regions of the world by the United Nations to produce a report on round-table discussions in Europe and North America on the state of the environment, to be fed into the regional/global preparatory processes of the Johannesburg summit.

In a keynote address, Prof Moldan praised the IEF for its pursuit of the Spiritual Principle as holding the key to solutions to the problem of sustainable development. He said prior to the IEF conference, President Havel of the Czech Republic, on behalf of the Nepon Foundation of Sasakawa invited to Prague spiritual leaders, intellectuals, scientists and politicians including former United States President, Bill Clinton to a high level meeting. At this meeting, the Mr Clinton spoke about the concept of a “global moral” which according to Prof Moldan was similar in approach as expressed at the IEF conference, saying it was his hope that the IEF would help to develop and promote this concept of global moral within it’s current theme which is necessary for the sustainable transformation of societies towards sustainable development.

Dr Arthur Dahl, President of the IEF, explained that the conference was purposely organised in light of the pending WSSD summit in Johannesburg. He said while governments and non-governmental organisations had yet to adopt formally an agenda for the summit, there was an increasing urgency for the IEF to come out with ideas and recommendations that would play an important role in influencing the outcome of the summit, particularly in the light of the growing political, economic and social tensions around the world.

He said that this was necessary because if the purpose of life is defined as the fulfilment of individual material needs and drives and the denial of any other goal in life, the resulting set of values will be very different from higher humanistic goals, or those that define the real purpose of life as the acquisition of spiritual qualities.

Human behaviour as it appears at the moment is unsustainable due to the unsustainable lifestyles generated and, therefore, any required change in behaviour would have to start with the reconsideration of our values.

Values, or the application of spiritual principles, according to Dr Dahl, have been the missing ingredient in most past approaches to sustainable development. Grand declarations and detailed action plans, even when approved by all governments, do not go far if people are not motivated to implement them in their own lives, and if institutions are not made responsible to carry them out. The exciting thing about addressing sustainability at the level of values is the potential to create self-generating human systems building on a more sustainable and thus ever-advancing civilization: the WSSD should include this dimension in its agenda.

A statement released by the Bahá'í International Community to the first session of the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, April 30 –

May 2, 2001, New York, said that A“The BahA_jA’A International Community is convinced that unless and until spiritual issues become central to the development process, the establishment of sustainable global civilization will not prove possible. For the vast majority of the world’s people the idea that human nature is fundamentally spiritual is an incontrovertible truth. Indeed, this perception of reality is the defining cultural experience for most of the world’s people and is inseparable from how they perceive themselves and the world around them. It is therefore, only by bringing a focus on the spiritual dimensions of human reality that development policies and programs can truly reflect the experiences, conditions and aspirations of the planet’s inhabitants and elicit their heartfelt support and active participation.”

Maxwell A. Ayamba

The Destiny of America and The Promise of World Peace

CITING THE current atmosphere of A“world turmoil”, the Bah’_j’ community of the United States has issued a major statement offering a perspective on the destiny of America as A“the promoter of world peace”.

Published on December 23, 2001 as a full-page advertisement in The New York Times, the statement says that Bah’_j’_s believe the American nation A“will evolve, through tests and trials to become a land of spiritual distinction and leadership, a champion of justice and unity among all peoples and nations, and a powerful servant of the cause of everlasting peace”.

The full text of the message is printed below:

At this time of world turmoil, the United States Bah’_j’_s community offers a perspective on the destiny of America as the promoter of world peace. More than a hundred years ago, Bah’_j’_u’_{ll}’_h, the founder of the Bah’_j’_s Faith, addressing heads of state, proclaimed that the age of maturity for the entire human race had come. The unity of humankind was now to be established as the foundation of the great peace that would mark the highest stage in humanity’s spiritual and social evolution. Revolutionary and worldshaking changes were therefore inevitable.

The Bah’_j’_s writings state:

The world is moving on. Its events are unfolding ominously and with bewildering rapidity. The whirlwind of its passions is swift and alarmingly violent. The New World is insensibly drawn into its vortex... Dangers, undreamt of and unpredictable, threaten it both from within and from without. Its governments and peoples are being gradually enmeshed in the coils of the world’s recurrent crises and fierce controversies... The world is contracting into a neighborhood. America, willingly or unwillingly, must face and grapple with this new situation. For purposes of national security, let alone any humanitarian motive, she must assume the obligations imposed by this newly created neighborhood. Paradoxical as it may seem, her only hope of extricating herself from the perils gathering around her is to become entangled in that very web of international association which the Hand of an inscrutable Providence is weaving.

The American nation, Bah’_j’_s believe, will evolve, through tests and trials to become a land of spiritual distinction and leadership, a champion of justice and unity among all peoples and nations, and a powerful servant of the cause of everlasting peace. This is the peace promised by God in the sacred texts of the world’s religions.

Establishing peace is not simply a matter of signing treaties and protocols; it is a complex task requiring a new level of commitment to resolving issues not customarily associated with the pursuit of peace.

Universal acceptance of the spiritual principle of the oneness of humankind is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to peace. The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality of the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged, prerequisites of peace. The inordinate disparity between rich and poor keeps the world in a state of instability, preventing the achievement of peace. Unbridled nationalism, as

state of instability, preventing the achievement of peace. Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole.

Religious strife, the cause of innumerable wars and conflicts throughout history, is a major obstacle to progress. The challenge facing the world's religious leaders is to contemplate, with hearts filled with compassion and the desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their God, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.

Bahá'ís pray, "May this American Democracy be the first nation to establish the foundation of international agreement. May it be the first nation to proclaim the unity of mankind. May it be the first to unfurl the standard of the Most Great Peace."

During this hour of crisis, we affirm our abiding faith in the destiny of America. We know that the road to its destiny is long, thorny and tortuous, but we are confident that America will emerge from her trials undivided and undefeatable.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

