

Bahá'ís and Social Action

The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is a single race and that the day has come for its unification into a global society. "*The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens,*" wrote Bahá'u'lláh. As the process of global integration intensifies, the traditional barriers of race, class, creed, and nation are breaking down. This process will, in time, give birth to a universal civilization.

Promoting the Emergence of World Peace

Bahá'í communities around the world work to advance the processes leading to world peace, particularly in the areas of human rights, the advancement of women, moral education, and sustainable development, by working with their governments, the United Nations, national and international non-governmental organizations. Bahá'ís also operate more than one thousand grassroots social and economic development projects and work to develop their own unique pattern of community life.

Social Activism While Avoiding Partisan Politics

In all their individual and community activities, Bahá'ís are enjoined to uphold high standards of honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, and justice and to be loyal and law-abiding citizens of the countries where they reside. Bahá'ís abstain from any involvement in partisan politics. The Bahá'í community is a worldwide organization seeking to establish true universal peace on earth. By becoming involved in political disputes they would find themselves arousing antagonism instead of love. Bahá'ís may accept non-partisan government posts or appointments and may vote in civil elections as long as they are not required to declare a party affiliation.

Human Rights

From the time of the Bahá'í Faith's birth in mid-19th century Persia (now Iran), when tens of thousands of early adherents were killed for the sake of freedom of conscience and belief, the Bahá'í community has worked energetically to defend and promote fundamental human rights. Both in their own community life and in advocacy work involving civil society and government partners, Bahá'ís have endeavored to put into practice key principles of Bahá'í belief, such as freedom of conscience, the equality of men and women, the elimination of prejudice, and the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth. Ultimately, Bahá'ís believe, the realization of these principles depends on the emergence of a culture of human rights, which, in turn, can only be safeguarded through the full recognition of the oneness of humanity and the establishment of a just and peaceful world order. Current efforts include advocacy to encourage U.S. ratification of UN human rights treaties and to build U.S. support for the International Criminal Court.

Advancement of Women

Bahá'ís see the achievement of equality between the sexes and the integration of women into every field of human endeavor—in government, academia and professional life—as an essential prerequisite to peace and human progress. Inequality retards not only the advancement of women, but also the progress of civilization itself. For more than a century, the Bahá'ís of the United States have worked to give full expression to the principle of the equality of women and men both in their own community life and in the public policy arena.

Inequality Retards the Progress of Civilization

The Promise of World Peace

"The Great Peace towards which people of good will throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations..."

"Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth."

The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

**Material
Advancement
Must Be Balanced
With a Spiritual
and Ethical
Orientation**

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States—the community's elected governing body—has appointed an NGO Liaison on Women's Issues who works with networks and coalitions of non-governmental organizations on such initiatives as the development of legislation against domestic violence, advocacy for the International Marriage Broker's Act, and advocacy and education on the health implications of violence against women. In addition, representatives of the Bahá'ís of the United States have been active members, including as co-chairs for 10 years, of the U.S.-based CEDAW Working Group, a group of more than 190 national organizations advocating U.S. ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (see www.womenstreaty.org for more information).

Sustainable Development

Beginning with the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the Bahá'ís of the United States have been vitally engaged with civil society efforts to promote a sustainable and environmentally conscious approach to development. Ultimately, Bahá'ís believe, human society can only live in harmony with the Earth's natural environment by balancing material progress and prosperity with a spiritual and ethical orientation. The pivotal challenge is the recognition of the necessity of global unity and interdependence. Current efforts include supporting the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014), an effort to raise awareness of sustainable development principles and to translate that awareness into related changes in human behavior. The Bahá'í NGO Liaison in Washington, D.C. helped to found and serves as a member of the executive committee of the U.S. Partnership for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (see www.uspartnership.org for more information).

**Religion Has a
Crucial Role to
Play in Building a
Peaceful World**

Interfaith Relations

Bahá'ís believe that religion has a crucial role to play in building a peaceful world and resolving conflict. Thus Bahá'ís have historically been active in promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding. In April 2002, the Universal House of Justice addressed a message "To the World's Religious Leaders" to initiate a dialogue on the grave responsibility held by religious leaders at a time when religious prejudice has become a major barrier to resolving conflict. The message pointed to religious fanaticism, as exemplified by increasing terrorist attacks, attacks on houses of worship, and civil wars spurred by religious differences, as a dominant source of conflict in the world.

In response to this challenge, Bahá'ís promote the understanding that all the world's principal religions are valid and can be seen as progressive stages in the unfoldment of humanity's relationship with God.

Social and Economic Development

At the local and national levels of the Bahá'í community, efforts to promote social and economic development play an important role. Most of these are small-scale educational, health, economic, and environmental projects. They range from simple tutorial schools to college-level courses, and from village agricultural and health education projects to participation in major reforestation programs. The majority of these projects operate at the grassroots level, relying on local resources and coordination.

In all, Bahá'í communities have started more than 1,500 such development projects over the last decade. Bahá'ís operate more than 600 schools and seven radio stations broadcasting educational, health and agricultural programs, as well as information about Bahá'í community activities. These undertakings are managed or supervised by democratically elected local or national Bahá'í assemblies. They represent a global effort to learn about approaches to social and economic development that harmonize the scientific and technological aspects of development with the spiritual and moral aspects. The Bahá'í Office of Social and Economic Development, an agency of the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, monitors their progress, provides advice and support, and facilitates collaborative undertakings with like-minded organizations.

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