



IDEAS, RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The Baha'i International Community
and the United Nations

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QUESTIONS SHAPING THE EMERGING SOCIAL ORDER

REIMAGINING MODERNITY: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF RELIGION?

AGENCY: WHO ARE THE PROTAGONISTS OF THE EMERGING SOCIAL ORDER?

BEYOND ECONOMIC MAN: WHAT VALUES WILL FOSTER JUSTICE AND HUMAN FLOURISHING IN OUR TIME?

FROM ASPIRATIONS TO ACTION: HOW DO WE COLLECTIVELY TRANSLATE IDEALS INTO ACTION IN CONTINUALLY CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES?

What is the Baha'i International Community?



The Baha'i International Community represents the worldwide Baha'i community, whose members come from every national, ethnic, religious, cultural, and socio-economic background, representing a cross-section of humanity.

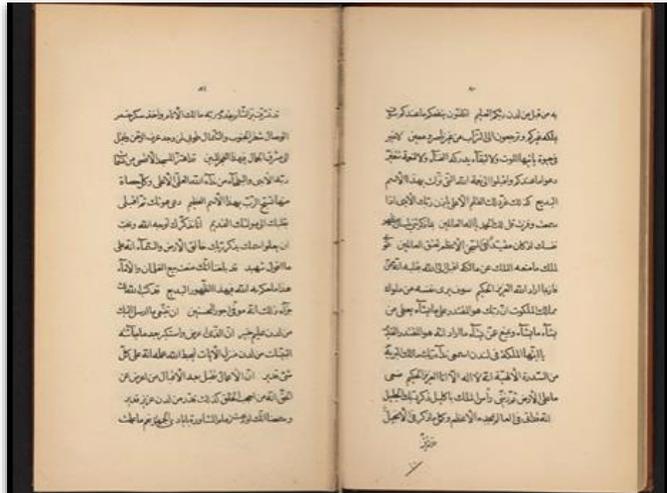
The Baha'i International Community - New York Office - collaborates with the UN and its specialized agencies, as well as member states, inter- and non-governmental organizations, academia, and practitioners.

The work of the Office can be described in terms of contributing to policy discourses at the international level. This involves collaborating with individuals, groups, and organizations in a variety of social spaces where thought, public opinion, and policy take form and evolve.



History of engagement with the pressing issues of the day

BAHA'U'LLAH | Tablets to the Kings and Rulers



"We have been informed...that you have forbidden the trading in slaves, both men and women. This truly, is what God has enjoined in this wondrous Revelation."

-Tablet to Queen Victoria

ABDU'L-BAHA | Carrying the message of peace and solidarity to the West



"The scope of Universal Peace must be such that all the communities and religions may find their highest wish realized in it."

-Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha

SHOGHI EFFENDI | Guiding Baha'i engagement with the League of Nations and the UN



Baha'i delegates to UN Conference of NGOs in New York, 1949

Elements of a framework for engagement with the United Nations



A DEVELOPMENTAL VIEW OF HISTORY | Humanity has progressed through developmental stages of childhood and stands at the threshold of its maturity. Turbulent changes can be understood as two parallel interacting processes of integration and destruction



ONENESS OF HUMANITY | Concerns itself with essential relationships making up the social order, e.g: relationships within the family; relationships among men and women; human beings and the environment; relationships between governors and the governed; economic relationships, etc.



ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER | Administrative, governing, legislative structure at local, national and international level. Universal House of Justice safeguards the unity of Baha'i community, maintains the integrity and flexibility of Baha'i teachings



1970 - 1986

Responding to
Persecution and
Mobilizing for Gender
Equality



2008 - 2020

Beyond Pluralism:
Participation in the
Discourses of Society

1945 - 1970

A Distinct View of
History, Time, and the
Emerging Global
Order



1986 - 2008

Beyond Peace: The
Greater Trajectory for
Social Development





WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

determined

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

and for these ends

to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and

to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and

to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.

Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.

UNITED NATIONS

PRELUDE TO THE CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS

MADE AT A CONFERENCE OF PEOPLES REPRESENTATIVES

“The UN is a mere beginning...if Baha’is can view the UN as an expression of the power of unity released into the world by the Bab and Baha’u’llah...they will see the UN in a different light. They can instead view it as evidence of the gradual awakening of man’s consciousness to the essential need for the unity of mankind.”

- Letter from BIC representative to NSAs



A delegation signing the UN Charter, June 26, 1945



Baha'i delegates to the UN International Conference of NGOs in New York - (left to right) Dr. Amin Banani, Mildred Mottahedeh, Hilda Yen, Matthew Bullock | April 1949

“The true destiny of the national state is to build the bridge from local autonomy to world unity. It can preserve its moral heritage and function only as it contributes to the establishment of a sovereign world. Both state and people are needed to serve as the strong pillar supporting the new institutions reflecting the full and final expression of human relationships in an ordered society.”

Baha'i community, “Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights” addressed to the UN Commission on Human Rights, 1947



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Period of intense persecution of the Baha'i community



Development of new instruments of international law

Development of new human rights machinery, e.g. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief (1981); Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment (1984)



Development of the Baha'i Administrative Order (1963-1983)

Growing capacity for coordinated action

1963 | Election of the Universal House of Justice

1. THE HISTORIC ELECTION OF THE FIRST UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

OCCASION WORLDWIDE CELEBRATIONS MOST GREAT JUBILEE COMMEMORATING CENTENARY ASCENSION BAHAU'LLAH THIRONE HIS SOVEREIGNTY WITH HEARTS OVERFLOWING GRATITUDE HIS UNFAILING PROTECTION OVERFLOWING BOUNTIES JOYOUSLY ANNOUNCE FRIENDS EAST WEST ELECTION SUPREME LEGISLATIVE BODY ORDAINED BY HIM IN HIS MOST HOLY BOOK PROMISED BY HIM RECEIVE HIS INFALLIBLE GUIDANCE STOP MEMBERS FIRST HISTORIC HOUSE JUSTICE DULY ELECTED BY DELEGATES COMPRISING MEMBERS FIFTY SIX NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES ARE CHARLES WOLCOTT ALI NAKHJAVANI H BORRAH KAVELIN IAN SEMPLE LUTFULLAH HAKIM DAVID HOFMAN HUGH CHANCE AMOZ GIBSON HUSHIMAND FATHAZAM STOP TO JUBILATION ENTIRE BAHAI WORLD VICTORIOUS COMPLETION BELOVED GUARDIANS UNIQUE CRUSADE NOW ADDED HUMBLE GRATITUDE PROFOUND THANKSGIVING FOLLOWERS BAHAU'LLAH FOR ERECTION UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE AUGUST BODY TO WHOM ALL BELIEVERS MUST TURN WHOSE DESTINY IS TO GUIDE UNFOLDMENT HIS EMBRYONIC WORLD ORDER THROUGH ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS PRESCRIBED BY BAHAU'LLAH ELABORATED BY ABDULBAHA LABORIOUSLY ERECTED BY SHOQHI EFFENDI AND ENSURE EARLY DAWN GOLDEN AGE FAITH WHEN THE WORD OF THE LORD WILL COVER THE EARTH AS THE WATERS COVER THE SEA
HAIFA 22 APRIL 1963
HANDS/FAITH



The members of the Universal House of Justice assembled in the gardens surrounding the Shrine of the Báb on Mt. Carmel. From left to right: Charles Wolcott, Amoz Gibson, Hushimand Fathezam, Hugh Chance, H. Borrah Kavelin, Ian Semple, Lutfulah Hakim, David Hofman, Ali Nakhjavani.

1972 | Constitution of the Universal House of Justice

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Declaration of Trust

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE ONE, THE INCOMPARABLE, THE ALL-POWERFUL, THE ALL-KNOWING, THE ALL-WISE.

The light that is shed from the heaven of bounty, and the benediction that shineth from the dawning-place of the will of God, the Lord of the Kingdom of Names, rest upon Him Who is the Supreme Mediator, the Most Exalted Pen, Him Whom God hath made the dawning-place of His most excellent names and the dayspring of His most exalted attributes. Through Him the light of unity hath shone forth above the horizon of the world, and the law of oneness hath been revealed amidst the nations, who, with radiant faces, have turned towards the Supreme Horizon, and acknowledged that which the Tongue of Utterance hath spoken in the Kingdom of His knowledge: "Earth and heaven, glory and dominion, are God's, the Omnipotent, the Almighty, the Lord of grace abounding!"

1973 | Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

3. A Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

PREFACE TO THE PUBLISHED EDITION

THIS *Synopsis and Codification* offers a concise and comprehensive presentation of the laws, ordinances, exhortations and other subjects which appear in both the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* itself and in the *Questions and Answers* which forms an appendix to that Book. Not all details are included, nor is it possible to give in such a circumscribed form an impression of the loftiness and magnificence of the language of Bahá'u'lláh. In order to provide readers with at least some intimation of this splendour of theme and language, there are included as a prelude to the *Synopsis and Codification*, and in the order in which they appear in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, those passages which have been translated into English by the Guardian of the Faith.¹ It will be the formidable task of future translators to match the beauty and accuracy of Shoghi Effendi's rendition.

A number of additional details, explanations and references are given in notes.

¹ See pp. 7-14.

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

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| I. THE APPOINTMENT OF 'ABDUL-BAHÁ AS THE SUCCESSOR OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND INTERPRETER OF HIS TEACHINGS | IV. LAWS, ORDINANCES AND EXHORTATIONS |
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| B. Refer to Him | B. Fasting |
| II. ANTICIPATION OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE GUARDIANSHIP | C. Laws of Personal Status |
| III. THE INSTITUTION OF THE HOUSE OF JUSTICE | D. Miscellaneous Laws, Ordinances and Exhortations |
| | V. SPECIFIC ADMONITIONS, REPROOFS AND WARNINGS |
| | VI. MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS |

1983 | Completion of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice



Expansion of the Baha'i community (1970 - 1986)



First NSA of Tuvalu



First LSA of Piaget, Bermuda

148 NSAs

Number of National Spiritual Assemblies increases from 101 to 148



Baha'i gathering, St. Lucia

Baha'i conference in Korbonbou, Togo



Baha'i study group, SIERRA LEONE

Baha'i study group, Sierra Leone



Focus on the Advancement of Women

1975 | First UN World Conference on Women

1975 | Universal House of Justice designates this as International Women's Year

New insights about women's participation in Baha'i community life



Baha'i delegates to the 1985 Second UN World Conference on Women

A growing global movement for women's rights



VIDEO: [Glimpses into the Spirit of Gender Equality](#)
Start at 3:00 min
End at 5:05 min



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Defining peace

“Peace is widely referred to but rarely defined.”

-Reclaiming Peace in International Relations

Peace | evolution of a concept

1945 | “We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...”

1992 | Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping

2004 | Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change

2005 | Peacebuilding Commission

2015 | Sustainable Development Goal: peace, justice, and strong institutions



3. Promote peace and prevent conflicts

- **New agenda for peace** to:
 - Reduce strategic risks (nuclear weapons, cyberwarfare, autonomous weapons)
 - Strengthen international foresight
 - Reshape responses to all forms of violence
 - Invest in prevention and peacebuilding, including Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Commission
 - Support regional prevention
 - Put women and girls at the centre of security policy
- **Peaceful, secure and sustainable use of outer space**, including through a multi-stakeholder dialogue on outer space

United Nations International Year of Peace (1986)



Rúhíyyih Khánúm presents the Baha'i community's *Promise of World Peace* statement to UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar | 1995

“Permanent peace among nations is an essential stage, but not, Bahá’u’lláh asserts, the ultimate goal of the social development of humanity.

Beyond the initial armistice forced upon the world by the fear of nuclear holocaust, beyond the political peace reluctantly entered into by suspicious rival nations, beyond pragmatic arrangements for security and coexistence...lies the crowning goal:

the unification of all the peoples of the world in one universal family.”

~ The Promise of World Peace

Elements of a Baha'i conception of peace



IDENTITY | fosters a sense of belonging to and concern for the well being of the human race

UNIFICATION | of political machinery, trade, finance, script, language, spiritual aspiration

DIVERSITY | Rooted in diversity of culture, climate, history, language, thought

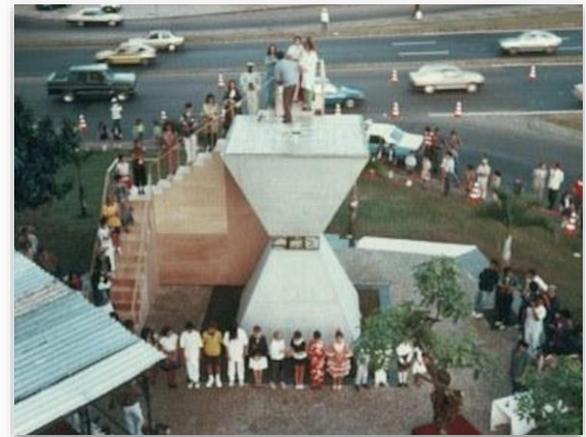
INSTITUTIONAL REFORM | to enable justice, collaboration and governance at a global level; rejection of excessive centralization and uniformity

COHERENCE | between the means and the ends of social transformation

PROTAGONISTS | individuals, communities, institutions - “all men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization”



UN Conference on Environment and Development (“Earth Summit”) | Agenda 21 | 1992
108 heads of state | 172 nations | 17,000 NGO representatives | 10,000 journalists



Peace Monument | Earth Summit | 1992

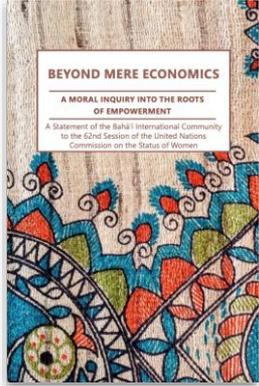


Platform for Action signed by 189 countries | 30,000 women from 189 countries attend the NGO forum | 12,000 attend official conference



UN World Summit for Social Development | 1995 | 177 heads of state
“For the first time in history...we gather as heads of State...to recognize the significance of social development and human well-being for all...”

Approaches to Pursuing Peace



Sharing a new interpretive frame | global orientation, relational ontology, developmental perspective



Building capacity for collective action | internally (within the Baha'i community) and with/within wider society (civil society, UN and agencies)



Sharing insights from Baha'i efforts around the world | striving to build more just and unified communities



Fostering a culture of principled deliberation | striving to discover the "precious point of unity" where contrasting perspectives overlap and around which contending peoples can coalesce

GLOBAL ANALYSIS |
Elected officials at all
levels should consider
themselves responsible
for the welfare of
humankind.

NEW SOCIAL ORDER |
Fundamental redefinition
of relationships between
individual, community,
institutions is needed; new
notions of power

**COLLECTIVE
DELIBERATION** | Ability to
deliberate together
constructively is
fundamental to all facets
of progress and well-
being.

AGENCY | The
protagonists of
change will be
individuals,
communities,
institutions.

**JUSTICE AND
HUMAN RIGHTS** |
Reaches its highest
expression in the
context of promoting
the unity of
humankind.

A NEW EPISTEMOLOGY OF PEACE

Focus on Process: Bringing attention to the girl child



“It was just the beginning...”

Mary Power

Representative of the Baha’i
International Community to the UN
1975 - 1997

VIDEO: [Glimpses into the Spirit of
Gender Equality](#)

Start at 37:06 min

End at 38:05 min



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New Terms of Engagement: Participation in the discourses of society

Attitudes, thoughts, and conceptions of fundamental issues need to be reshaped as a truly global community emerges and develops in its understanding of the nature of human flourishing as well as the social and material conditions required for such flourishing. We believe, then, that a key part of the transformation that is required must occur at the level of thought.

-Baha'i International Community, Quadrennial Report to the United Nations, 2013

We must acknowledge that none of us—no group, no individual, no country, no leader—actually knows what a society that is truly based on the principles of gender equality looks like.

Such a society has never existed. Therefore, while we may be able to identify some of the obstacles stymying gender equality in our current paradigm, we have to learn our way towards a new paradigm where gender equality is the norm...

-Bani Dugal, "Women, Faith, and Human Rights" (2017)



Participation in the discourses of society



But, whether through deeds or words, the merit of your every contribution to social well-being lies, first, in your resolute commitment to discover that precious point of unity where contrasting perspectives overlap and around which contending peoples can coalesce.

-Universal House of Justice, 25 November 2020

Selected appointed and elected leadership roles held by BIC representatives in the New York office (2008 - 2020)

Faith and Feminism Working Group to the United Nations, Convener
Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, Civil society representative

Multifaith Advisory Council to the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development, Co-chair

NGO Committee on the Status for Women, Executive Committee

NGO Committee on the Status of Women - Young Professionals, Co-Chair

NGO Committee on UNICEF, Executive Committee

NGO Forum (for the UN Commission on the Status of Women Planning Committee, Co-Chair)

NGO Major Group, Global Organizing Partner

NGO Committee for Social Development, Chair

NGO Working Group on the Security Council, Co-chair

Working Group on Girls to the United Nations, Chair

66th UN Department of Public Information-NGO Conference - Youth Steering Committee, Co-chair



VIDEO: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_RIKfSKnZU&t=2s

Examples: civil society, global governance, equality of women and men



CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE UN WE NEED

TOGETHER FIRST
A GLOBAL SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL

**UN75 PEOPLE'S DECLARATION
&
PLAN FOR GLOBAL ACTION**

**Humanity at a Crossroads:
Global Solutions for Global Challenges**



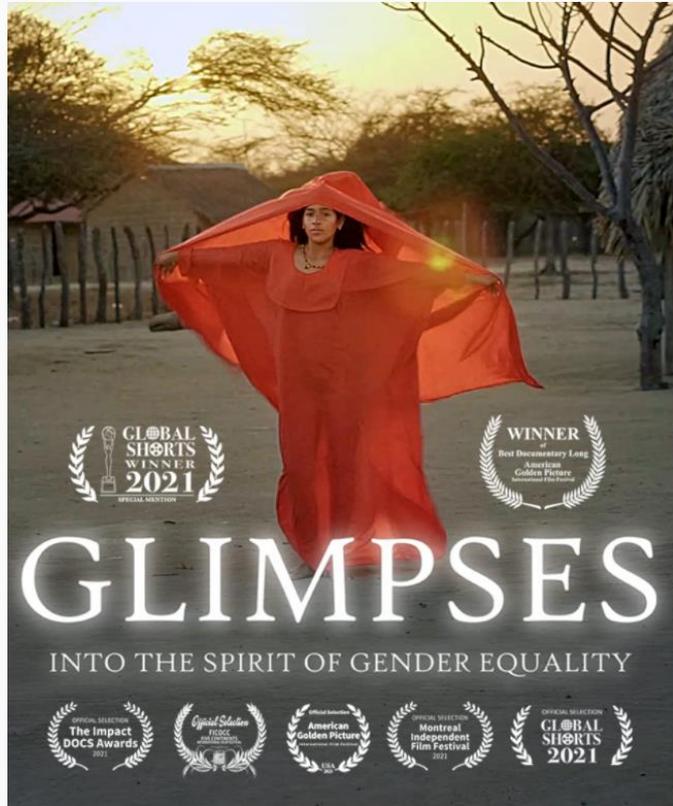
UN75 PEOPLE'S FORUM FOR THE UN WE NEED
14 & 15 MAY 2020

Finding consensus, building unity, capacity for collective action, trust:

- BIC was invited to lead the drafting process of civil society's position for the 75th anniversary of the UN
- Multi-month process, paralleled member states' development of political declaration
- Hundreds of civil society organizations engaged - perspectives from indigenous populations, women, youth, etc.)
- Challenge: How to find points of unity? How to ensure people feel heard and represented in the process/ document?
- Focus on the interests and needs of humanity as a whole
- Document:
 - Shift from "interest group" to human identity
 - Tone: open rather than prescriptive
 - Inclusion of commitments of civil society (not only "asks" from governments)

"Confronting global challenges requires a fundamental shift in thinking about humanity's relationship to the earth, true wealth, progress, development, the role and nature of power and governance, and the essential values of humanity. Solutions will be found through commitment to a new posture of collaboration, innovation, and action. We must rebuild the bonds of trust at all levels..."

Participation in the discourse on equality of women and men



On the 25th anniversary of the historic Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the film reflects on global advances toward gender equality, and draws on examples from Baha'i inspired community building efforts around the world.



VIDEO: <https://bit.ly/3rWCdnG>

Mwinilunga, ZAMBIA | Kejau, MALAYSIA | New York, USA | Hasankheda, INDIA



REIMAGINING MODERNITY: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF RELIGION?

- Expanding the moral imagination, vision
- Demonstrating alternative and unifying approaches to social change at all levels

AGENCY: WHO ARE THE PROTAGONISTS OF THE EMERGING SOCIAL ORDER?

- Religious communities are not passive actors in the existing social order, co-creators of the emerging social order

BEYOND ECONOMIC MAN: WHAT VALUES WILL FOSTER HUMAN FLOURISHING IN OUR TIME?

- Reconceptualization of human identity, justice, peace, and collective action in light of the oneness of humanity

FROM ASPIRATIONS TO ACTION: HOW DO WE COLLECTIVELY TRANSLATE IDEALS INTO ACTION IN CONTINUALLY CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES?

- We are learning our way forward, with a growing diversity of collaborators

