

## 1 International Environment Forum Baha'i quotations on environment

### International Environment Forum

The IEF is a Baha'i-inspired professional organization for environment and sustainability with a membership including Baha'is and those from the wider community. The goal is to "promote the application of spiritual and ethical principles to the challenges of the environment and sustainable development." The IEF was founded in 1997, and now has more than 300 members in 57 countries on five continents. The IEF received accreditation from the United Nations to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg 2002) and the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 as a scientific and technological organization.

### Baha'i Quotations on Environment and Sustainable Development

#### SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

"Regard ye the world as a man's body, which is afflicted with divers ailments, and the recovery of which dependeth upon the harmonizing of all its component elements." (Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Haykal §152 (to Napoleon III), in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, pp. 79-80. Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2002.)

"The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVI, p. 213)

"There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them." (Universal House of Justice, [The Promise of World Peace](#), 1985. p.13)

#### THE ENVIRONMENT

##### THE ORIGINS OF THE UNIVERSE

"...the world of existence, this endless universe, has no beginning. To be sure, it is possible for some part of creation – one of the celestial globes – to be newly formed or to disintegrate, but the other countless globes would continue to exist and the world of existence itself would not be disrupted or destroyed. On the contrary, its existence is perpetual and unchanging." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*. Haifa, Baha'i World Centre, 2014. Chpt. 47, p. 207-208)

"That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today. The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*. Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 1978. p. 140)

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"...originally matter was one, and that one matter appeared in a different form in each element. Thus various forms appeared, and as they appeared, they each assumed an independent form and became a specific element.... Then these elements were composed, arranged and combined in infinite forms.... From the composition of the elements; from their combination, manner and proportion; and from their interaction with other beings countless forms and realities and innumerable beings have come to exist." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions. Haifa, Baha'i World Centre, 2014. Chpt. 47, p. 208-209)

"...this terrestrial globe came to exist, grow and develop in the matrix of the universe and assumed different forms and conditions until it gradually attained its present completeness, became adorned with countless beings, and appeared in such a consummate form." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions. Haifa, Baha'i World Centre, 2014. Chpt. 47, p. 210)

### NATURE

"Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world." (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 142)

"This nature is subject to a sound organization, to inviolable laws, to a perfect order, and to a consummate design, from which it never departs. To such an extent is this true that were you to gaze with the eye of insight and discernment, you would observe all things – from the smallest invisible atom to the largest globes in the world of existence, such as the sun or the other great stars and luminous bodies – are most perfectly organized, be it with regard to their order, their composition, their outward form, or their motion, and that all are subject to one universal law from which they never depart." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, Chpt. 1, p. 3)

"By nature is meant those inherent properties and necessary relations derived from the realities of things. And these realities of things, though in the utmost diversity, are yet intimately connected one with the other." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to Dr. Forel, in The Bahá'í Revelation, p. 223)

"If we look with a perceiving eye upon the world of creation, we find that all existing things may be classified as follows: First – Mineral – that is to say matter or substance appearing in various forms of composition. Second – Vegetable – possessing the virtues of the mineral plus the power of augmentation or growth, indicating a degree higher and more specialized than the mineral. Third – Animal – possessing the attributes of the mineral and vegetable plus the power of sense perception. Fourth – Human – the highest specialized organism of visible creation, embodying the qualities of the mineral, vegetable and animal plus an ideal endowment absolutely minus and absent in the lower kingdoms – the power of intellectual investigation into the mysteries of outer phenomena. The outcome of this intellectual endowment is science which is especially characteristic of man. This scientific power investigates and apprehends created objects and the laws surrounding them. It is the discoverer of the hidden and mysterious secrets of the material universe and is peculiar to man alone. The most noble and praiseworthy accomplishment of man therefore is scientific knowledge and attainment." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í World Faith, p. 242)

## EVOLUTION

“Just as man progresses, evolves, and is transformed from one form and appearance to another in the womb of the mother, while remaining from the beginning a human embryo, so to has man remained a distinct essence – that is the human species – from the beginning of his formation in the matrix of the world, and has passed gradually from form to form.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, Chpt. 49, p. 223)

“...the growth and development of all beings proceeds by gradual degrees. This is the universal and divinely ordained law and the natural order.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, Chpt. 51, p. 229)

“All beings, whether universal or particular, were created perfect and complete from the beginning. The most one can say is that their perfections only become apparent gradually. The law of God is one; the evolution of existence is one; the divine order is one.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, Chpt. 51, p. 229)

“The innumerable created things that are found in the world of existence – be they man, animal, plant, or mineral – must each be composed of elements. There is no doubt that the completeness seen in each and every thing arises, by divine creation, from the component elements, their appropriate combination, their proportionate measure, the manner of their composition, and the influence of other created things. For all beings are linked together like a chain; and mutual aid, assistance, and interaction are among their intrinsic properties and are the cause of their formation, development and growth.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, Chpt. 46, p. 205)

“Know that the soul which is common to all men cometh forth following the commingling of things and after their maturation, as thou dost observe in the germ: once it hath developed to its predestined stage, God manifesteth the soul that was latent within it.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Ra'ís §31, in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 153. Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2002)

## THE BAHÁ'Í ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATURE

“...to man God has given such wonderful power that he can guide, control and overcome nature.... What ignorance and stupidity it is to worship and adore nature, when God in His goodness has made us masters thereof.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 122-123)

“When... thou dost contemplate the innermost essence of all things, and the individuality of each, thou wilt behold the signs of thy Lord's mercy in every created thing, and see the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout all the realm of being.... Then wilt thou observe that the universe is a scroll that discloseth His hidden secrets, which are preserved in the well-guarded Tablet. And not an atom of all the atoms in existence, not a creature from amongst the creatures but speaketh His praise and telleth of His attributes and names, revealeth the glory of His might and guideth to His oneness and His mercy....”

“And whensoever thou dost gaze upon creation all entire, and dost observe the very atoms thereof, thou wilt note that the rays of the Sun of Truth are shed upon all things and shining within them, and telling of that Day-Star's splendours, Its mysteries, and the spreading of Its lights. Look thou upon the trees, upon the blossoms and fruits, even upon the stones. Here too wilt thou behold the Sun's rays

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shed upon them, clearly visible within them, and manifested by them." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 41-42)

"We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions." (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 February 1933, Compilation on Social and Economic Development, p. 4)

"Consider the world of created beings, how varied and diverse they are in species, yet with one sole origin. All the differences that appear are those of outward form and colour. This diversity of type is apparent throughout the whole of nature.... Let us look... at the beauty in diversity, the beauty of harmony, and learn a lesson from the vegetable creation. If you behold a garden in which all the plants were the same as to form, colour and perfume, it would not seem beautiful to you at all, but, rather, monotonous and dull. The garden which is pleasing to the eye and which makes the heart glad, is the garden in which are growing side by side flowers of every hue, form and perfume, and the joyous contrast of colour is what makes for charm and beauty. So is it with trees. An orchard full of fruit trees is a delight; so is a plantation planted with many species of shrubs. It is just the diversity and variety that constitutes its charm; each flower, each tree, each fruit, beside being beautiful in itself, brings out by contrast the qualities of the others, and shows to advantage the special loveliness of each and all." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 51-53)

"Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory...." (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, p. 44)

"The elements and lower organisms are synchronized in the great plan of life. Shall man, infinitely above them in degree, be antagonistic and a destroyer of that perfection?" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, talk at Leland Stanford Junior University, Palo Alto, California, 8 October 1912. Promulgation of Universal Peace. Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982. p. 350)

"Briefly, it is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature.... The feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast."

"Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let the children try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 158-159)

"Unless ye must, Bruise not the serpent in the dust, How much less wound a man. And if ye can, No ant should ye alarm, Much less a brother harm." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 256)

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"Bahá'u'lláh loved the beauty and verdure of the country. One day He passed the remark: 'I have not gazed on verdure for nine years. The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of bodies.'" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in J. E. Esslemont, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era. Chpt. 3, p. 35)

"Bahá'u'lláh said of His two years in the mountains: "the birds of the air were My companions and the beasts of the field My associates." (Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 120)

### ECOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

(see also compilation: Conservation of the Earth's Resources)

"In addition to the problem of how to ensure peace, and all the implications of such a step, it is clear that the economic and social development of all countries is of vital importance and is a matter on which the Teachings have much to say in principle if not in detail. In this area, agriculture and the preservation of the ecological balance of the world are of fundamental interest...." (Universal House of Justice, 31 March 1985 to an Association for Bahá'í Studies)

"As preordained by the Fountain-head of Creation, the temple of the world hath been fashioned after the image and likeness of the human body. In fact each mirroreth forth the image of the other, wert thou but to observe with discerning eyes. By this is meant that even as the human body in this world, which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together."

"Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly."

"Consider for instance how one group of created things constituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other. In other words, the growth and development of the vegetable world is impossible without the existence of the animal kingdom, and the maintenance of animal life is inconceivable without the co-operation of the vegetable kingdom. Of like kind are the relationships that exist among all created things. Hence it was stated that co-operation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness."

"In surveying the vast range of creation thou shalt perceive that the higher a kingdom of created things is on the arc of ascent, the more conspicuous are the signs and evidences of the truth that co-operation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order. For example, the evident signs of this fundamental reality are more discernible in the vegetable kingdom than in the mineral, and still more manifest in the animal world than in the vegetable." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in Compilation on Huququ'llah, p. 14-15; Compilation on Social and Economic Development, p. 12)

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“In the physical realm of creation, all things are eaters and eaten: the plant drinketh in the mineral, the animal doth crop and swallow down the plant, man doth feed upon the animal, and the mineral devoureth the body of man. Physical bodies are transferred past one barrier after another, from one life to another, and all things are subject to transformation and change, save only the essence of existence itself – since it is constant and immutable, and upon it is founded the life of every species and kind, of every contingent reality throughout the whole of creation.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 157)

### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

“Bahá'í Scriptures describe nature as a reflection of the sacred. They teach that nature should be valued and respected, but not worshipped; rather, it should serve humanity's efforts to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. However, in light of the interdependence of all parts of nature, and the importance of evolution and diversity "to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole," every effort should be made to preserve as much as possible the earth's bio-diversity and natural order.”

“As trustees, or stewards, of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity, humanity must learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability and equity into the distant reaches of time. This attitude of stewardship will require full consideration of the potential environmental consequences of all development activities. It will compel humanity to temper its actions with moderation and humility, realizing that the true value of nature cannot be expressed in economic terms. It will also require a deep understanding of the natural world and its role in humanity's collective development – both material and spiritual. Therefore, sustainable environmental management must come to be seen not as a discretionary commitment mankind can weigh against other competing interests, but rather as a fundamental responsibility that must be shouldered – a pre-requisite for spiritual development as well as the individual's physical survival.” (Bahá'í International Community, Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development. A concept paper written for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18-19 February 1998)

“It has been widely acknowledged that economic prosperity has come at a tremendous cost to our natural environment. In fact, no country has emerged as a major industrial power without a legacy of significant environmental damage, affecting the security and well-being of its own populations and, equally significantly, those of developing nations. The growth-driven economic paradigm rooted in national interests at the expense of social and environmental variables and international well-being is under increasing scrutiny. Challenging ethical questions of resource distribution and responsibility for damages force governments to develop institutional mechanisms and implement policies that consider the prosperity and health of the global community and that of future generations. On an institutional level, a global entity with a strong scientific advisory capacity is needed to streamline reporting and decision-making processes, including the voices of non-state actors. It must coherently link environmental issues to social and economic priorities, for none of these can advance in isolation. At the educational level, curricula must seek to develop a sense of responsibility towards the natural environment as well as foster a spirit of inquiry and innovation so that the diversity of human experience can be brought to bear on the challenge of creating an environmentally sustainable

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development pathway." (Bahá'í International Community, *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One*, 2008)

"A core element of a strategy of sustainable development is the reform of agricultural policies and processes. Food production and agriculture is the world's single largest source of employment; nearly 70% of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Although farming has been devalued by manufacturing and a rapidly expanding urban population, agriculture still represents the fundamental basis of economic and community life: malnourishment and food insecurity suffocate all attempts at development and progress. Despite this pivotal role, poverty is often concentrated in rural areas. Damage to natural resources, poor information and infrastructure often result in food insecurity, premature deaths and mass migration to urban areas in search of a better life. The farmer must be accorded his or her rightful place in the processes of development and civilization building: as the villages are reconstructed, the cities will follow." (Bahá'í International Community, [Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One](#), 2008)

"Until such time as the nations of the world understand and follow the admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh to whole-heartedly work together in looking after the best interests of all humankind, and unite in the search for ways and means to meet the many environmental problems besetting our planet, ...little progress will be made towards their solution..." (Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, from a letter dated 18 October 1981 to an individual believer. Quoted In "[Conservation of the Earth's Resources](#)". Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.)

Economic sustainability

### UNSUSTAINABILITY OF THE OLD WORLD ECONOMIC ORDER

"All too many of these [man-made] ideologies...callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears." (Universal House of Justice, [The Promise of World Peace](#), 1985, I, p. 6-7)

"The time has come when those who preach the dogmas of materialism, whether of the east or of the west, whether of capitalism or socialism, must give account of the moral stewardship they have presumed to exercise. Where is the "new world" promised by these ideologies?... Why is the vast majority of the world's peoples sinking ever deeper into hunger and wretchedness when wealth on a scale undreamed of by the Pharaohs, the Caesars, or even the imperialist powers of the nineteenth century is at the disposal of the present arbiters of human affairs?" (Universal House of Justice, [The Promise of World Peace](#), 1985, I, p. 7)

"That materialistic ideals have, in the light of experience, failed to satisfy the needs of mankind calls for an honest acknowledgement that a fresh effort must now be made to find the solutions to the agonizing problems of the planet." (Universal House of Justice, [The Promise of World Peace](#), 1985, 1985, I, p. 8)

"If long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human

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institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine." (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.42; quoted in Universal House of Justice, [The Promise of World Peace](#), 1985, I, p. 8)

"Early in the twentieth century, a materialistic interpretation of reality had consolidated itself so completely as to become the dominant world faith insofar as the direction of society was concerned.... For many in the West, the Divine authority that had functioned as the focal centre of guidance – however diverse the interpretations of its nature – seemed simply to have dissolved and vanished.... ...society as a whole proceeded with growing confidence to sever dependence on a conception of the universe that was judged to be at best a fiction and at worst an opiate, in either case inhibiting progress. Humanity... had solved through rational experimentation and discourse... all of the fundamental issues related to human governance and development." (Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, p. 3-4)

"Having penetrated and captured all significant centres of power and information at the global level, dogmatic materialism ensured that no competing voices would retain the ability to challenge projects of world wide economic exploitation." (Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, 2005, p. 5)

"As is well known, the dominant model of development depends on a society of vigorous consumers of material goods. In such a model, endlessly rising levels of consumption are cast as indicators of progress and prosperity. This preoccupation with the production and accumulation of material objects and comforts (as sources of meaning, happiness and social acceptance) has consolidated itself in the structures of power and information to the exclusion of competing voices and paradigms. The unfettered cultivation of needs and wants has led to a system fully dependent on excessive consumption for a privileged few, while reinforcing exclusion, poverty and inequality, for the majority. Each successive global crisis—be it climate, energy, food, water, disease, financial collapse—has revealed new dimensions of the exploitation and oppression inherent in the current patterns of consumption and production...."

"The narrowly materialistic worldview underpinning much of modern economic thinking has contributed to the degradation of human conduct, the disruption of families and communities, the corruption of public institutions, and the exploitation and marginalization of large segments of the population—women and girls in particular. Unarguably, economic activity and the strengthening of the economy (a process that may include, but is not synonymous with, economic growth) have a central role to play in achieving the prosperity of a region and its people. Yet the shift towards a more just, peaceful and sustainable society will require attention to a harmonious dynamic between the material and non-material (or moral) dimensions of consumption and production. The latter, in particular, will be essential for laying the foundation for just and peaceful human relations; these include the generation of knowledge, the cultivation of trust and trustworthiness, eradication of racism and violence, promotion of art, beauty, science, and the capacity for collaboration and the peaceful resolution of conflicts." (Bahá'í International Community, [Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism](#), 2010)

“The fate of what the world has learned to call social and economic development has left no doubt that not even the most idealistic motives can correct materialism's fundamental flaws. Born in the wake of the chaos of the Second World War, "development" became by far the largest and most ambitious collective undertaking on which the human race has ever embarked. Its humanitarian motivation matched its enormous material and technological investment. Fifty years later, while acknowledging the impressive benefits development has brought, the enterprise must be adjudged, by its own standards, a disheartening failure. Far from narrowing the gap between the well-being of the small segment of the human family who enjoy the benefits of modernity and the condition of the vast populations mired in hopeless want, the collective effort that began with such high hopes has seen the gap widen into an abyss.” (Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, 2005, p.9)

“[The first World War] signaled the opening of the Age of Frustration destined to precede the establishment of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.” (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 171)

#### PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW ECONOMIC ORDER

“In cycles gone by, though harmony was established, yet, owing to the absence of means, the unity of all mankind could not have been achieved. Continents remained widely divided, nay even among the peoples of one and the same continent association and interchange of thought were well nigh impossible. Consequently intercourse, understanding and unity amongst all the peoples and kindreds of the earth were unattainable. In this day, however, means of communication have multiplied, and the five continents of the earth have virtually merged into one. And for everyone it is now easy to travel to any land, to associate and exchange views with its peoples, and to become familiar, through publications, with the conditions, the religious beliefs and the thoughts of all men. In like manner all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. For none is self-sufficiency any longer possible, inasmuch as political ties unite all peoples and nations, and the bonds of trade and industry, of agriculture and education, are being strengthened every day. Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 15, pp. 31-32)

“And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that although material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind, yet until it becomes combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained. Consider! ...all these weapons of war are the malignant fruits of material civilization. Had material civilization been combined with Divine civilization, these fiery weapons would never have been invented. Nay, rather, human energy would have been wholly devoted to useful inventions and would have been concentrated on praiseworthy discoveries. Material civilization is like a lamp-glass. Divine civilization is the lamp itself and the glass without the light is dark. Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit, otherwise it becomes a corpse. It has thus been made evident that the world of mankind is in need of the breaths of the Holy Spirit. Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless, and without this light the world of mankind is in utter darkness. For the world of nature is an animal world. Until man is born again from the world of nature, that is to say, becomes detached from the world of nature, he is essentially an animal, and it is the teachings of God which convert this animal into a human soul.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 227, pp. 303-304)

“Central to the task of reconceptualizing the organization of human affairs is arriving at a proper understanding of the role of economics. The failure to place economics into the broader context of humanity's social and spiritual existence has led to a corrosive materialism in the world's more economically advantaged regions, and persistent conditions of deprivation among the masses of the world's peoples. Economics should serve people's needs; societies should not be expected to reformulate themselves to fit economic models. The ultimate function of economic systems should be to equip the peoples and institutions of the world with the means to achieve the real purpose of development: that is, the cultivation of the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness.”

“Society must develop new economic models shaped by insights that arise from a sympathetic understanding of shared experience, from viewing human beings in relation one to another, and from a recognition of the central role that family and community play in social and spiritual well-being. Within institutions and organizations, priorities must be reassessed. Resources must be directed away from those agencies and programs that are damaging to the individual, societies and the environment, and directed toward those most germane to furthering a dynamic, just and thriving social order. Such economic systems will be strongly altruistic and cooperative in nature; they will provide meaningful employment and will help to eradicate poverty in the world.” (Bahá'í International Community, [Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development](#). A concept paper written for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18-19 February 1998)

“Today, much of economic activity and its institutional context is at odds with environmental sustainability, the advancement of women, the well-being of the family, the engagement of young people, the availability of employment, and the expansion of knowledge.... The economic theories of impersonal markets, promoting self-centred actions of individuals, have not helped humanity escape the extremes of poverty on the one hand and over-consumption on the other. New economic theories for our time must be animated by a motive beyond just profit. They must be rooted in the very human and relational dimension of all economic activity, which binds us as families, as communities and as citizens of one world. They must be animated by a spirit of innovation rather than blind imitation, ennoblement rather than exploitation, and the full and confident participation of women.”

“...it is the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few that is in urgent need of attention. Indeed, the tremendous wealth generated by transnational corporations could be an integral part of the solution to tackle poverty, through strict regulation to ensure good global citizenship, adherence to human rights norms and the distribution of wealth for the benefit of the larger society. Where a nation's wealth is concerned, the question becomes one of social value rather than gross dollar measures. The Gross Domestic Product, for example, aggregates the sum total of all economic activity – including the production of guns, cigarettes, etc. – regardless of its social worth or environmental impact. New measures that account for pollutants and economic ills and add unmeasured, unremunerated benefits are needed for a more accurate picture of a nation's economic health and wealth.” (Bahá'í International Community, *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One*, 2008)

## JUSTICE

“The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice.... By its aid thou shalt see with thy own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor.” (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Arabic))

“And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are justice and right. Until these are realized on the plane of existence, all things shall be in disorder and remain imperfect. The world of mankind is a world of oppression and cruelty, and a realm of aggression and error.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 227, p. 304)

“Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected. An age that sees the people of the world increasingly gaining access to information of every kind and to a diversity of ideas will find justice asserting itself as the ruling principle of successful social organisation. With ever greater frequency, proposals aiming at the development of the planet will have to submit to the candid light of the standards it requires.” (Bahá'í International Community, [The Prosperity of Humankind](#), Office of Public Information, Haifa, 1995)

“Concern for justice protects the task of defining progress from the temptation to sacrifice the well-being of the generality of humankind — and even of the planet itself — to the advantages which technological breakthroughs can make available to privileged minorities.... Above all, only development programmes that are perceived as meeting their needs and as being just and equitable in objective can hope to engage the commitment of the masses of humanity, upon whom implementation depends. The relevant human qualities such as honesty, a willingness to work, and a spirit of co-operation are successfully harnessed to the accomplishment of enormously demanding collective goals when every member of society — indeed every component group within society — can trust that they are protected by standards and assured of benefits that apply equally to all.” (Bahá'í International Community, [The Prosperity of Humankind](#), Office of Public Information, Haifa, 1995)

## POVERTY

“Issues of food, nutrition, health and shelter are central to the challenge of providing an adequate standard of living for all members of the human family. These issues cannot, however, be tackled solely as technical or economic problems. Eliminating hunger and malnutrition; establishing food security; providing adequate shelter; and achieving health for all will require a shift in values, a commitment to equity, and a corresponding reorientation of policies, goals and programs.”

“The technologies and resources exist to meet the basic needs of humanity and to eliminate poverty. Equity in the use of these technologies and resources, however, will come about only with certain understandings and commitments. While individuals must do their utmost to provide for themselves and their dependents, the community must accept responsibility, when necessary, to help meet basic needs. Access to development programs and their benefits must be ensured for all. The economics of food production and distribution will have to be reoriented and the critical role of the farmer in food and economic security properly valued. With regard to health — the physical, spiritual, mental and social well-being of the individual — access to clean water, shelter, and some form of cheap energy would go a

long way toward eradicating the problems that currently plague vast numbers of individuals and communities.” (Bahá'í International Community, Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development. A concept paper written for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18-19 February 1998)

“It is now increasingly acknowledged that such conditions as the marginalization of girls and women, poor governance, ethnic and religious antipathy, environmental degradation and unemployment constitute formidable obstacles to the progress and development of communities. These evidence a deeper crisis—one rooted in the values and attitudes that shape relationships at all levels of society. Viewed from this perspective, poverty can be described as the absence of those ethical, social and material resources needed to develop the moral, intellectual and social capacities of individuals, communities and institutions. Moral reasoning, group decision-making and freedom from racism, for example, are all essential tools for poverty alleviation. Such capacities must shape individual thinking as well as institutional arrangements and policy-making. To be clear, the goal at hand is not only to remove the ills of poverty but to engage the masses of humanity in the construction of a just global order.” (Bahá'í International Community, Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One, 2008)

“And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is man's freedom, that through the ideal Power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature; for as long as man is captive to nature he is a ferocious animal, as the struggle for existence is one of the exigencies of the world of nature. This matter of the struggle for existence is the fountain-head of all calamities and is the supreme affliction.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 227, p. 302)

#### POVERTY AND WEALTH

“Know ye in truth that wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire, the lover and his beloved. The rich, but for a few, shall in no wise attain the court of His presence nor enter the city of content and resignation....” (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words (Persian) 53)

“Be not troubled in poverty or confident in riches, for poverty is followed by riches, and riches are followed by poverty. Yet to be poor in all save God is a wondrous gift, belittle not the value thereof, for in the end it will make thee rich in God...” (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words (Persian) 51)

“O SON OF PASSION! Cleanse thyself from the defilement of riches and in perfect peace advance into the realm of poverty; that from the well-spring of detachment thou mayest quaff the wine of immortal life.” (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words (Persian) 55)

“[The true seeker] should succour the dispossessed, and never withhold is favour from the destitute. (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Iqán, p. 193-194)

“O CHILDREN OF DUST! Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.” (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words (Persian) 49)

“Service to the friends is service to the Kingdom of God, and consideration shown to the poor is one of the greatest teachings of God.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 11, p. 27)

“Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches. Take heed that your words be purged from idle fancies and worldly desires and your deeds be cleansed from craftiness and suspicion.”

“Dissipate not the wealth of your precious lives in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection, nor let your endeavours be spent in promoting your personal interest. Be generous in your days of plenty, and be patient in the hour of loss.... Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. 1978, p. 138)

“Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor – in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society – its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 24-25)

“No deed of man is greater before God than helping the poor.... Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase in poverty. The greatest means for prevention is that whereby the laws of the community will be so framed and enacted that it will not be possible for a few to be millionaires and many destitute. One of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is the adjustment of means of livelihood in human society. Under this adjustment there can be no extremes in human conditions as regards wealth and sustenance. For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and laborer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent; each in his function according to ability; but justness of opportunity for all.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 36)

“...it is the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few that is in urgent need of attention. Indeed, the tremendous wealth generated by transnational corporations could be an integral part of the solution to tackle poverty, through strict regulation to ensure good global citizenship, adherence to human rights norms and the distribution of wealth for the benefit of the larger society.” (Bahá'í International Community, Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One, 2008)

#### CONTENTMENT

“[The true seeker] should be content with little, and be freed from all inordinate desire.... He should succour the dispossessed, and never withhold his favour from the destitute.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Iqán, p. 193-194)

“Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forego that which exceedeth them. Observe equity in all your judgements, and transgress not the bounds of justice, nor be of them that stray from its path.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Mulúk §19, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 193. Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2002)

“How complex is the life of the present age and how much more complex we are making it daily! The needs of humanity seem never to come to an end. The more men accumulate the more they want. There is only one way of freedom and that is by shutting one's eyes and heart to all these things which distract the mind.” (Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from the *Diary of Ahmad Sohrab*, September 21, 1913. *Star of the West*, Vol. 8 (April 9, 1917) no. 2, p. 17. Quoted in *The Wisdom of the Master: The Spiritual Teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. Los Angeles, Kalimát Press, 2002)

#### DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

“Overstep not the bounds of moderation, and deal justly with them that serve thee. Bestow upon them according to their needs, and not to the extent that will enable them to lay up riches for themselves, to deck their persons, to embellish their homes, to acquire the things that are of no benefit to them, and to be numbered with the extravagant. Deal with them with undeviating justice, so that none among them may either suffer want, or be pampered with luxuries. This is but manifest justice.”

“Allow not the abject to rule over and dominate them who are noble and worthy of honor, and suffer not the high-minded to be at the mercy of the contemptible and worthless, for this is what We observed upon Our arrival in the City (Constantinople), and to it We bear witness. We found among its inhabitants some who were possessed of an affluent fortune and lived in the midst of excessive riches, while others were in dire want and abject poverty. This ill beseemeth thy sovereignty, and is unworthy of thy rank.”

“Let My counsel be acceptable to thee, and strive thou to rule with equity among men, that God may exalt thy name and spread abroad the fame of thy justice in all the world. Beware lest thou aggrandize thy ministers at the expense of thy subjects. Fear the sighs of the poor and of the upright in heart who, at every break of day, bewail their plight, and be unto them a benignant sovereign. They, verily, are thy treasures on earth. It behoveth thee, therefore, to safeguard thy treasures from the assaults of them who wish to rob thee. Inquire into their affairs, and ascertain, every year, nay every month, their condition, and be not of them that are careless of their duty.” (Bahá'u'lláh [to the Sultan of Turkey], *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXIV, pp. 235-236)

“And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is voluntary sharing of one's property with others among mankind. This voluntary sharing is greater than equality, and consists in this, that man should not prefer himself to others, but rather should sacrifice his life and property for others. But this should not be introduced by coercion so that it becomes a law and man is compelled to follow it. Nay, rather, man should voluntarily and of his own choice sacrifice his property and life for others, and spend willingly for the poor, just as is done in Persia among the Bahá'ís.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 227, p. 302)

“... the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the equalization of wealth. For equalization must be imposed from without, while sharing is a matter of free choice.”

“Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honour upon humankind.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 79, p. 115)

“The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil. All must be producers. Each person in the community whose income is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds he will pay no tax; if his necessities exceed his production he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production and there will be no poor in the community.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 37)

“First and foremost is the principle that to all the members of the body politic shall be given the greatest achievements of the world of humanity. Each one shall have the utmost welfare and well-being. To solve this problem we must begin with the farmer; there will we lay a foundation for system and order because the peasant class and the agricultural class exceed other classes in the importance of their service. In every village there must be established a general storehouse which will have a number of revenues.”

- The first revenue will be that of the tenth or tithes.
- The second revenue (will be derived) from the animals.
- The third revenue, from the minerals, that is to say, every mine prospected or discovered, a third thereof will go to this vast storehouse.
- The fourth is this: whosoever dies without leaving any heirs all his heritage will go to the general storehouse.
- Fifth, if any treasures shall be found on the land they should be devoted to this storehouse.

All these revenues will be assembled in this storehouse.

As to the first, the tenths or tithes: we will consider a farmer, one of the peasants. We will look into his income. We will find out, for instance, what is his annual revenue and also what are his expenditures. Now, if his income be equal to his expenditures, from such a farmer nothing whatever will be taken. That is, he will not be subjected to taxation of any sort, needing as he does all his income. Another farmer may have expenses running up to one thousand dollars we will say, and his income is two thousand dollars. From such an one a tenth will be required, because he has a surplus. But if his income be ten thousand dollars and his expenses one thousand dollars or his income twenty thousand dollars, he will have to pay as taxes, one-fourth. If his income be one hundred thousand dollars and his expenses five thousand, one third will he have to pay because he still has a surplus since his expenses are five

thousand and his income one hundred thousand. If he pays, say, thirty-five thousand dollars, in addition to the expenditure of five thousand he still has sixty thousand left. But if his expenses be ten thousand and his income two hundred thousand then he must give an even half because ninety thousand will be in that case the sum remaining. Such a scale as this will determine allotment of taxes. All the income from such revenues will go to this general storehouse."

"Then there must be considered such emergencies as follows: a certain farmer whose expenses run up to ten thousand dollars and whose income is only five thousand, he will receive necessary expenses from the storehouse. Five thousand dollars will be allotted to him so he will not be in need."

"Then the orphans will be looked after, all of whose expenses will be taken care of. The cripples in the village – all their expenses will be looked after. The poor in the village – their necessary expenses will be defrayed. And other members who for valid reasons are incapacitated – the blind, the old, the deaf – their comfort must be looked after. In the village no one will remain in need or in want. All will live in the utmost comfort and welfare. Yet no schism will assail the general order of the body politic."

"Hence the expenses or expenditures of the general storehouse are now made clear and its activities made manifest. The income of this general storehouse has been shown. Certain trustees will be elected by the people in a given village to look after these transactions. The farmers will be taken care of and if after all these expenses are defrayed any surplus is found in the storehouse it must be transferred to the national treasury."

"This system is all thus ordered so that in the village the very poor will be comfortable, the orphans will live happily and well; in a word, no one will be left destitute. All the individual members of the body politic will thus live comfortably and well."

"For larger cities, naturally, there will be a system on a larger scale. Were I to go into that solution the details thereof would be very lengthy." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 39-41)

#### CAPITAL AND LABOUR

"The question of socialization is very important. It will not be solved by strikes for wages. All the governments of the world must be united and organize an assembly the members of which should be elected from the parliaments and the nobles of the nations. These must plan with utmost wisdom and power so that neither the capitalists suffer from enormous losses nor the laborers become needy. In the utmost moderation they should make the law; then announce to the public that the rights of the working people are to be strongly preserved. Also the rights of the capitalists are to be protected. When such a general plan is adopted by the will of both sides, should a strike occur, all the governments of the world collectively should resist it. Otherwise the labor problem will lead to much destruction, especially in Europe. Terrible things will take place."

"For instance, the owners of properties, mines and factories should share their incomes with their employees and give a fairly certain percentage of their products to their workingmen in order that the employees may receive, beside their wages, some of the general income of the factory so that the employee may strive with his soul in the work."

“No more trusts will remain in the future. The question of the trusts will be wiped away entirely. Also, every factory that has ten thousand shares will give two thousand shares of these ten thousand to its employees and will write the shares in their names, so that they may have them, and the rest will belong to the capitalists. Then at the end of the month or year whatever they may earn after the expenses and wages are paid, according to the number of shares, should be divided among both. In reality, so far great injustice has befallen the common people. Laws must be made because it is impossible for the laborers to be satisfied with the present system. They will strike every month and every year. Finally, the capitalists will lose.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 43-44)

#### EMPLOYMENT

“ O MY SERVANT! Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits, that ye yourselves and others may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on everyone to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you. Trees that yield no fruit have been and ever will be for the fire.” (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words (Persian) 80)

“O MY SERVANT! The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.” (Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words (Persian) 82)

“O people of Baha! It is incumbent upon each one of you to engage in some occupation – such as a craft, a trade or the like. We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God.... Waste not your hours in idleness and sloth, but occupy yourselves with what will profit you and others.... The most despised of men in the sight of God are they who sit and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of means and place your trust in God, the Provider of all means.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 33, p. 30)

“It is obligatory for men and women to engage in a trade or profession. Bahá'u'lláh exalts "engagement in such work" to the "rank of worship" of God. The spiritual and practical significance of this law, and the mutual responsibility of the individual and society for its implementation are explained in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

“With reference to Bahá'u'lláh's command concerning the engagement of the believers in some sort of profession: the Teachings are most emphatic on this matter, particularly the statement in the Aqdas to this effect which makes it quite clear that idle people who lack the desire to work can have no place in the new World Order. As a corollary of this principle, Bahá'u'lláh further states that mendacity should not only be discouraged but entirely wiped out from the face of society. It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also the means of utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood. Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, especially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Bahá'u'lláh a form of worship. It has not only a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.”

"In one of His Tablets, Abdu'l-Bahá states that "if a person is incapable of earning a living, is stricken by dire poverty or becometh helpless, then it is incumbent on the wealthy or the Deputies to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence.... By 'Deputies' is meant the representatives of the people, that is to say the members of the House of Justice."

"In response to a question concerning whether Bahá'u'lláh's injunction requires a wife and mother, as well as her husband, to work for a livelihood, the Universal House of Justice has explained that Bahá'u'lláh's directive is for the friends to be engaged in an occupation which will profit themselves and others, and that homemaking is a highly honourable and responsible work of fundamental importance to society."

"Concerning the retirement from work for individuals who have reached a certain age, Shoghi Effendi in a letter written on his behalf stated that "this is a matter on which the International House of Justice will have to legislate as there are no provisions in the Aqdas concerning it". (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, note 56 to para. 33 "to engage in some occupation", p. 192-193)

"The provision of meaningful work represents an essential component of poverty alleviation efforts. The meaningful engagement of young people becomes even more important as urban populations swell and, with them, the increase of slums, rising crime rates, use of drugs, unemployment, breakdown of family structures and social isolation. Today, young people between the ages of 15-29 account for nearly half of all adults in 100 economically disadvantaged nations. Lack of meaningful employment only feeds their hopelessness and frustration. Yet it is not only the quantity but also the quality and meaning of work that needs to be reconsidered. Whether tilling the soil or selling goods, one's work should not be reduced to a means for acquiring more goods or as an expendable cost of production. One's work is the means of developing one's craft, of refining one's character, and contributing to the welfare and progress of society. Indeed, the fight against underemployment must begin with the dignity and value of all human labor, even if it is humble, insecure, unprofitable or unremunerated." (Bahá'í International Community, *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One*, 2008)

"...it is... important to emphasize the relationship between production and employment as a critical dimension of a strong economy. Too often, increases in productivity have been accompanied by delocalization or a transition to automation and thus, rising levels of unemployment. A single-minded focus on profit-maximization has also valued workforce reduction wherever possible. Under the present system, unemployment and underemployment are soaring and the majority of the world's population does not earn enough to meet their basic needs. Those living in poverty have no means by which to express themselves in such a system. Sustainable production is not simply about 'greener' technology but rather, should involve systems that enable all human beings to contribute to the productive process. In such a system, all are producers, and all have the opportunity to earn (or receive, if unable to earn) enough to meet their needs. More than simply the means of generating wealth and meeting basic needs, work provides a role in the community and developing one's talents, refining one's character, rendering service and contributing to the advancement of society."(Bahá'í International Community, [Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism](#), 2010)

TRANSFORMATION – A NEW WORLD ORDER

"All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization." (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 215)

"It is certain that momentous undertakings cannot be brought to a successful conclusion in haste; that in such cases haste would only make waste.... ...the political world...cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of rightness and perfection. Rather, qualified individuals must strive by day and by night, using all those means which will conduce to progress, until the government and the people develop along every line from day to day and even from moment to moment. ...when the pure intentions and justice of the ruler, the wisdom and consummate skill and statecraft of the governing authorities, and the determination and unstinted efforts of the people, are all combined; then day by day the effects of the advancement, of the far-reaching reforms, of the pride and prosperity of government and people alike, will become clearly manifest." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 107-108)

"Against the backdrop of climate change, environmental degradation, and the crippling extremes of wealth and poverty, the transformation from a culture of unfettered consumerism to a culture of sustainability has gained momentum in large part through the efforts of civil society organizations and governmental agencies worldwide. Beyond informed policies and 'greener technologies' it is a transformation that will require an earnest examination of our understanding of human nature and of the cultural frameworks driving institutions of government, business, education, and media around the world. Questions of what is natural and just will need to be critically re-examined. The issue of sustainable consumption and production... will need to be considered in the broader context of an ailing social order—one characterized by competition, violence, conflict and insecurity—of which it is a part." ."(Bahá'í International Community, [Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism](#), 2010)

"The... transition to sustainable consumption and production [is] part of a global enterprise which enables all individuals to fulfill their dual purpose, namely to develop their inherent potentialities and to contribute to the betterment of the wider community. It is not enough to conceive of sustainable consumption and production in terms of creating opportunities for those living in poverty to meet their basic needs. Rather, with the understanding that each individual has a contribution to make to the construction of a more just and peaceful social order, these processes must be arranged in a way that permits each to play his or her rightful role as productive member of society. Within such a framework, sustainable consumption and production could be characterized as processes that provide for the material, social and spiritual needs of humanity across generations and enable all peoples to contribute to the ongoing advancement of society."

"Progress at the technical and policy levels now needs to be accompanied by public dialogue—among rural and urban dwellers; among the materially poor and the affluent; among men, women and young persons alike—on the ethical foundations of the necessary systemic change. A sustainable social order is distinguished, among other things, by an ethic of reciprocity and balance at all levels of human organization. A relevant analogy is the human body: here, millions of cells collaborate to make human life possible. The astounding diversity of form and function connects them in a lifelong process of giving and receiving. It represents the highest expression of unity in diversity. Within such an order, the concept of justice is embodied in the recognition that the interests of the individual and of the wider

community are inextricably linked. The pursuit of justice within the frame of unity (in diversity) provides a guide for collective deliberation and decision-making and offers a means by which unified thought and action can be achieved.”

“Ultimately, the transformation required to shift towards sustainable consumption and production will entail no less than an organic change in the structure of society itself so as to reflect fully the interdependence of the entire social body—as well as the interconnectedness with the natural world that sustains it. Among these changes, many of which are already the focus of considerable public discourse, are: the consciousness of world citizenship; the eventual federation of all nations through an integrated system of governance with capacity for global decision-making; the establishment of structures which recognize humanity’s common ownership of the earth’s resources; the establishment of full equality between men and women; the elimination of all forms of prejudice; the establishment of a universal currency and other integrating mechanisms that promote global economic justice; the adoption of an international auxiliary language to facilitate mutual understanding; and the redirection of massive military expenditures towards constructive social ends.” .”(Bahá'í International Community, [Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism](#), 2010)

“The movement to redefine cultural norms in light of the exigencies of justice and sustainability is well underway. In different measures, leading cultural institutions, including governments, education and media, as well as businesses, religious organizations and civil society are bringing the values of sustainability to the forefront of public consciousness. Broader visions of human purpose and prosperity are moving from the periphery to the center of public discourse. It is becoming clear that the pathway to sustainability will be one of empowerment, collaboration and continual processes of questioning, learning and action in all regions of the world. It will be shaped by the experiences of women, men, children, the rich, the poor, the governors and the governed as each one is enabled to play their rightful role in the construction of a new society. As the sweeping tides of consumerism, unfettered consumption, extreme poverty and marginalization recede, they will reveal the human capacities for justice, reciprocity and happiness.” .”(Bahá'í International Community, [Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism](#), 2010)

“The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world intercommunication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. A world language will either be invented or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in the schools of all

the federated nations as an auxiliary to their mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind. In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop. The press will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples. The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.”

“National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and cooperation. The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely abolished, and the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to increase the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.”

“A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation – such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.” (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203-204)

#### Social sustainability

##### NATURE AND PURPOSE OF HUMAN LIFE

“Bahá'ís believe that the crucial need facing humanity is to find a unifying vision of the nature and purpose of human life. An understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural environment is an integral part of this vision.” (Bahá'í International Community's Seven Year Plan of Action on Climate Change, 2009)

“The question of human nature has an important place... as it prompts us to reexamine, at the deepest levels, who we are and what our purpose is in life. The human experience is essentially spiritual in nature: it is rooted in the inner reality—or what some call the ‘soul’—that we all share in common. The culture of consumerism, however, has tended to reduce human beings to competitive, insatiable consumers of goods and to objects of manipulation by the market. Commonly held views have assumed the existence of an intractable conflict between what people really want (i.e. to consume more) and what humanity needs (i.e. equitable access to resources). How, then, can we resolve the paralyzing

contradiction that, on the one hand, we desire a world of peace and prosperity, while, on the other, much of economic and psychological theory depicts human beings as slaves to self-interest? The faculties needed to construct a more just and sustainable social order—moderation, justice, love, reason, sacrifice and service to the common good—have too often been dismissed as naïve ideals. Yet, it is these, and related, qualities that must be harnessed to overcome the traits of ego, greed, apathy and violence, which are often rewarded by the market and political forces driving current patterns of unsustainable consumption and production.” (Bahá'í International Community, [Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism](#), 2010)

“...the life of man proceedeth from the spirit, and the spirit turneth to wheresoever the soul directeth it. ...the soul is endowed with two wings: should it soar in the atmosphere of love and contentment, then it will be related to the All-Merciful, and should it fly in the atmosphere of self and desire, then it will pertain to the Evil One...” (Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Ra'ís §33-34, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 154. Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2002)

#### UNITY

“Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for the reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind.” (Universal House of Justice, [The Promise of World Peace](#), 1985, p. 13-14)

“...all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. For none is self-sufficiency any longer possible, inasmuch as political ties unite all peoples and nations, and the bonds of trade and industry, of agriculture and education, are being strengthened every day. Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved.” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 15, p. 32)

“The bedrock of a strategy that can engage the world's population in assuming responsibility for its collective destiny must be the consciousness of the oneness of humankind. Deceptively simple in popular discourse, the concept that humanity constitutes a single people presents fundamental challenges to the way that most of the institutions of contemporary society carry out their functions. Whether in the form of the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, a glorification of the struggle between classes and other social groups, or the competitive spirit dominating so much of modern life, conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction. It represents yet another expression in social organisation of the materialistic interpretation of life that has progressively consolidated itself over the past two centuries....”

“Laying the groundwork for global civilization calls for the creation of laws and institutions that are universal in both character and authority. The effort can begin only when the concept of the oneness of humanity has been wholeheartedly embraced by those in whose hands the responsibility for decision making rests, and when the related principles are propagated through both educational systems and the media of mass communication. Once this threshold is crossed, a process will have been set in motion through which the peoples of the world can be drawn into the task of formulating common goals and committing themselves to their attainment. Only so fundamental a reorientation can protect them, too, from the age-old demons of ethnic and religious strife. Only through the dawning consciousness that they constitute a single people will the inhabitants of the planet be enabled to turn away from the patterns of conflict that have dominated social organisation in the past and begin to learn the ways of

collaboration and conciliation. "The well-being of mankind," Bahá'u'lláh writes, "its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." (Bahá'í International Community, [The Prosperity of Humankind](#), Office of Public Information, Haifa, 1995)

"Since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the race is born into the world as a trust of the whole." (Bahá'í International Community, [The Prosperity of Humankind](#), Office of Public Information, Haifa, 1995)

"Unity is a condition of the human spirit. Education can support and enhance it, as can legislation, but they can do so only once it emerges and has established itself as a compelling force in social life. A global intelligentsia, its prescription largely shaped by materialistic misconceptions of reality, clings tenaciously to the hope that imaginative social engineering, supported by political compromise, may indefinitely postpone the potential disasters that few deny loom over humanity's future.... As unity is the remedy for the world's ills, its one certain source lies in the restoration of religion's influence in human affairs." (Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith*, 2005, p. 42-43)

"...the principle of the oneness of humankind must become the ruling principle of international life. This principle does not seek to undermine national autonomy or suppress cultural or intellectual diversity. Rather, it makes it possible to view the climate change challenge through a new lens – one that perceives humanity as a unified whole, not unlike the cells of the human body, infinitely differentiated in form and function yet united in a common purpose which exceeds that of its component parts. This principle constitutes more than a call for cooperation; it seeks to remould anachronistic and unjust patterns of human interaction in a manner that reflects the relationships that bind us as members of one human race. The earnest consideration of the place of this principle in international relations should not be seen as an abstract exercise; it is precisely this level of analysis that must be undertaken and this level of commitment secured in order to forge a coherent ethic for the resolution of the climate change crisis. In order to progress beyond a world community driven by a largely economic and utilitarian calculus, to one of shared responsibility for the prosperity of all nations, such a principle must take root in the conscience of the individual. In this way, we come to recognize the broader human agenda – which subsumes those of climate change, poverty eradication, gender equality, development, and the like – and seeks to use both human and natural resources in a way that facilitates the progress and well-being of all people." (Bahá'í International Community, [Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change](#), 2008)

#### HUMANITY'S PLACE IN THE NATURAL WORLD

"The human body is like animals subject to nature's laws. But man is endowed with a second reality, the rational or intellectual reality; and the intellectual reality of man predominates over nature."

"Yet there is a third reality in man, the spiritual reality.... That celestial reality... delivers man from the material world. Its power causes man to escape from nature's world. Escaping, he will find an illuminating reality, transcending the limited reality of man and causing him to attain to the infinitude of God, abstracting him from the world of superstitions and imaginations, and submerging him in the sea of the rays of the Sun of Reality." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 51)

"...to man God has given such wonderful power that he can guide, control and overcome nature." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 122)

"[Man] should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature; for as long as man is captive to nature he is a ferocious animal, as the struggle for existence is one of the exigencies of the world of nature." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 302)

#### MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

"The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities..."(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLXIV, p. 342-343, and Bahá'í World Faith, p. 138-139)

"Strange and astonishing things exist in the earth but they are hidden from the minds and the understanding of men. These things are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the earth and their contamination would prove lethal." (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 69)

"Consumer culture, today's inheritor by default of materialism's gospel of human betterment, is unembarrassed by the ephemeral nature of the goals that inspire it. For the small minority of people who can afford them, the benefits it offers are immediate, and the rationale unapologetic. Emboldened by the breakdown of traditional morality, the advance of the new creed is essentially no more than the triumph of animal impulse, as instinctive and blind as appetite, released at long last from the restraints of supernatural sanctions. Its most obvious casualty has been language. Tendencies once universally castigated as moral failings mutate into necessities of social progress. Selfishness becomes a prized commercial resource; falsehood reinvents itself as public information; perversions of various kinds unabashedly claim the status of civil rights. Under appropriate euphemisms, greed, lust, indolence, pride – even violence – acquire not merely broad acceptance but social and economic value. Ironically, as words have been drained of meaning, so have the very material comforts and acquisitions for which truth has been casually sacrificed." (Universal House of Justice, One Common Faith, 2005, p. 10)

"A challenge of similar nature faces economic thinking as a result of the environmental crisis. The fallacies in theories based on the belief that there is no limit to nature's capacity to fulfil any demand made on it by human beings have now been coldly exposed. A culture which attaches absolute value to expansion, to acquisition, and to the satisfaction of people's wants is being compelled to recognise that such goals are not, by themselves, realistic guides to policy. Inadequate, too, are approaches to economic issues whose decision-making tools cannot deal with the fact that most of the major challenges are global rather than particular in scope."

"The earnest hope that this moral crisis can somehow be met by deifying nature itself is an evidence of the spiritual and intellectual desperation that the crisis has engendered. Recognition that creation is an organic whole and that humanity has the responsibility to care for this whole, welcome as it is, does not represent an influence which can by itself establish in the consciousness of people a new system of values. Only a breakthrough in understanding that is scientific and spiritual in the fullest sense of the terms will empower the human race to assume the trusteeship toward which history impels it." (Bahá'í International Community, [The Prosperity of Humankind](#), Office of Public Information, Haifa, 1995)

“However, until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions are imminent.... Progress and barbarism go hand in hand, unless material civilization be confirmed by Divine Guidance... and be reinforced by spiritual conduct...” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 225, p. 283-284)

“Such a chaste and holy life... involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations.... It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures.... It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age.” (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 30)

“Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it.” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 37)

#### GOVERNANCE

“While it is acknowledged that any effective climate change policy needs to be rooted in a global perspective, even this enlargement of the sphere of responsibility has not sufficiently moved governments to act. This perspective must now evolve to reflect the essential connectedness and common fate of humanity that for too long has struggled against a worldview that emphasized sovereignty, ascendancy and competition. Efforts to reconceptualize sovereignty, from an absolute right to a responsibility, signal that a shift in consciousness towards greater degrees of global solidarity is already underway. To be sure, the solution to climate change exceeds the capacities and resources of any one nation and requires the full cooperation of all nations, each according to their means.”

“Much has been said about the need for cooperation to solve a climate challenge that no nation or community can solve alone. The principle of the oneness of humankind... seeks to move beyond utilitarian notions of cooperation to anchor the aspirations of individuals, communities and nations to those of the progress of humanity. In practical terms, it affirms that individual and national interests are best served in tandem with the progress of the whole. As children, women, men, religious and scientific communities as well as governments and international institutions converge on this reality, we will do more than achieve a collective response to the climate change crisis. We will usher in a new paradigm by means of which we can understand our purpose and responsibilities in an interconnected world; a new standard by which to evaluate human progress; and a mode of governance faithful to the ties that bind us as members of one human race.” (Bahá'í International Community, [Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change](#), 2008)

#### GENDER

“On the community rests the challenge of providing the setting in which decision-making can occur peacefully and individual capabilities can be channeled through collective action. One of the most pervasive social challenges besetting communities around the world is the marginalization of girls and

women – a condition further exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. Around the world, 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. Moreover, natural disasters exact a heavier toll on women given their lack of access to information and resources, and, in some cases, their inability to swim, drive or even leave the house alone. It would be a mistake, however, to cast women as the victims or simply as under-resourced members of society; they represent perhaps the greatest source of untapped potential in the global effort to overcome the challenges of climate change. Their responsibilities in families, in communities, as farmers and as stewards of natural resources make them uniquely positioned to develop strategies for adapting to changing environmental conditions. Women's distinct knowledge and needs complement those of men, and must be duly considered in all arenas of community decision-making. It is in relationship and consultation with one another that the most effective strategies for mitigation and adaptation can be devised.” (Bahá'í International Community, [Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change](#), 2008)

#### KNOWLEDGE, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

“The third Tajallí is concerning arts, crafts and sciences. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world.... In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him.” Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 51-52)

“...Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation of the central role that knowledge plays in human life and human society: that it is the process of generating and applying knowledge that lies at the heart of civilization.... ...social advancement, including economic, political, and social change, flows from it.” (External Affairs Strategy, 19 September 1994, prepared by an Ad Hoc Committee and approved by the Universal House of Justice, page 4)

“Reality is one, and when truth is investigated and ascertained, it will lead to individual and collective progress. In the quest for truth, science and religion – the two systems of knowledge available to humankind – must closely and continuously interact. The insights and skills that represent scientific accomplishment must look to the force of spiritual commitment and moral principle to ensure their appropriate application.” (Bahá'í International Community, [Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development](#). A concept paper written for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18-19 February 1998)

“...the majority of technological development is driven by market forces that do not reflect the basic needs of the world's peoples. Furthermore, the emphasis on the transfer of technology without accompanying efforts to increase participation in the generation and application of knowledge can only serve to widen the gap between the rich and the poor—the ‘developers’ and the ‘users’ of technology. Developing the capacity for identifying technological need and for technological innovation and adaptation—in light of societal needs and environmental constraints—will be vital to social progress. The transformation of complex social realities will require the development of institutional capacity within local populations to create and apply knowledge in ways that address the specific needs of that population. This question of institutional capacity (e.g. the establishment of regional centers of research

and training) constitutes a major challenge to sustainable development. If successfully met, however, the result will be to break the present unbalanced flow of knowledge in the world and dissociate development from ill-conceived processes of modernization. "Modern" technologies will be characterized by an orientation towards addressing locally defined needs and by priorities that take into account both the material and moral prosperity of society as a whole." (Bahá'í International Community, [Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism](#), 2010)

## EDUCATION

"The development of a global society calls for the cultivation of capacities far beyond anything the human race has so far been able to muster. The challenges ahead will require an enormous expansion in access to knowledge on the part of individuals and organizations alike. Universal education will be an indispensable contributor to this process of capacity building, but the effort will succeed only to the extent that both individuals and groups in every sector of society are able to acquire knowledge and to apply it to the shaping of human affairs."

"Education must be lifelong. It should help people to develop the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary to earn a livelihood and to contribute confidently and constructively to shaping communities that reflect principles of justice, equity and unity. It should also help the individual develop a sense of place and community, grounded in the local, but embracing the whole world. Successful education will cultivate virtue as the foundation for personal and collective well-being, and will nurture in individuals a deep sense of service and an active commitment to the welfare of their families, their communities, their countries, indeed, all mankind. It will encourage self-reflection and thinking in terms of historical process, and it will promote inspirational learning through such means as music, the arts, poetry, meditation and interaction with the natural environment." (Bahá'í International Community, [Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development](#). A concept paper written for the World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18-19 February 1998)

"Underlying the meaningful participation in the advancement of society and the higher aims of civilization is the bulwark of education. While many poverty eradication programs have focused on increasing enrollment in primary and secondary education – which is the first step – the long-term goal must also be articulated: namely to create a society in which the production, diffusion and application of knowledge infuses all facets of human activity. This requires interventions at all levels including child-rearing practices that foster questioning; equal educational opportunities for boys and girls; development of independent media sources; translation of texts from other cultures and the promotion of innovation and scientific research. In order to be free to innovate, to devise solutions to complex problems, the human mind must be free to know." (Bahá'í International Community, *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One*, 2008)

"...if [education and institutional capacity building] are to effect the profound changes in the minds of people and in the structures of society (needed to shift towards sustainability), the nature of the educational processes will need to be rethought. As a starting point, the program of education must be based on a clear vision of the kind of society that we wish to live in; and the kind of individuals that will bring this about. It needs to help learners reflect on the purpose of life and help them to step out of their cultural realities to develop alternative visions and approaches to the problems at hand and to understand the manifold consequences of their behaviors and to adjust these accordingly."

“Schools themselves must become participants in the social transformation processes. The curriculum cannot simply aim to impart relevant knowledge and skills; rather it should aim to develop the vast potential inherent in the human being. Individuals must be assisted to channel this potential towards the betterment of their communities and the advancement of society as a whole. The level of consciousness and the deep spirit of service and collaboration required to transform individual behaviors and institutional forces in the direction of sustainability will require a transformation of educational processes commensurate with the task at hand.” (Bahá'í International Community, [Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism](#), 2010)

#### RELIGION

“Given their tremendous capacity to mobilize public opinion and their extensive reach in the most remote communities around the world, religious communities and their leaders bear an inescapable and weighty role in the climate change arena. By many measures, increasing numbers of religious communities are consistently lending their voice and resources to efforts to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change – they are educating their constituencies, providing a scriptural basis for ethical action and leading or participating in efforts at the national and international levels. This role, however, must now unfold in the context of an emerging conversation – a rapprochement – between the discourses of science and religion. The time has come for the entrenched dichotomy between these two systems of knowledge to be earnestly re-examined. Both are needed to mobilize and direct human energies to the resolution of the problem at hand: methods of science facilitate a more objective and systematic approach to problem solving while religion concerns itself with those moral inclinations that motivate action for the common good. In an age yearning for justice and equality, religious doctrines will need to be carefully examined. Those that encourage social exclusion, passivity or inequality between the sexes will fail to engage the peoples of the world while qualities of justice, compassion, trustworthiness, humility and generosity – common to all religious traditions – will be even more urgently needed to forge the patterns of progressive community life.” (Bahá'í International Community, *Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change*, 2008)

#### CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION – THE BAHAI APPROACH

“Cultural transformation involves deliberate changes in individual choices and in institutional structures and norms. For over a decade, the worldwide Baha'i community has been endeavoring systematically to effect a transformation among individuals and communities around the world—to inspire and build the capacity for service. The framework for action guiding these activities has been rooted in a dynamic of learning—characterized by action, reflection, and consultation. In thousands of communities, Baha'is have set into motion neighborhood-level processes that seek to empower individuals of all ages to recognize and develop their spiritual capacities and to channel their collective energies towards the betterment of their communities. Aware of the aspirations of the children of the world and their need for spiritual education, they have started children's classes that focus on laying the foundations of a noble and upright character. For youth aged 11-14, they have created a learning environment which helps them to form their moral identity at this critical time in their life and to develop skills which empower them to channel their constructive and creative energies toward the betterment of their communities. All are invited to take part in small groups of participatory learning around core concepts and themes which encourage individuals to become agents of change in their communities within a

dynamic of learning and an orientation towards service.” (Bahá'í International Community, [Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism](#), 2010)

“Bahá'ís believe that progress in the development field depends on and is driven by stirrings at the grass roots of society rather than from an imposition of externally developed plans and programmes. This plan, then seeks to increase local communities' and individuals' awareness of the needs and possibilities and of their capacity to respond. Different communities will likely devise different approaches and solutions in response to similar needs. It is for each community to determine its goals and priorities in keeping with its capacity and resources. Given the diversity of communities around the world, the plan encourages innovation and a variety of approaches to the environment appropriate to the rhythm of life in the community.” ([Bahá'í International Community's Seven Year Plan of Action on Climate Change](#), 2009)

“The commitment to preserve the autonomy and diversity of Bahá'í communities does not take away from the unity of the worldwide Bahá'í community. In fact, Bahá'ís all over the world are engaged in a coherent framework of action that promotes the spiritual development of the individual and channels the collective energies of its members towards service to humanity. Thousands upon thousands of Bahá'ís, embracing the diversity of the entire human family, are engaged in certain core activities. These activities promote the systematic study of the Bahá'í Writings in small groups in order to build capacity for service. They respond to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker by carrying out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character. They provide for the needs of the children of the world and offer them lessons that develop their spiritual faculties and lay the foundations of a noble and upright character. They also assist junior youth to navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and to become empowered to direct their energies toward the advancement of civilization. As Bahá'ís and their friends gain experience with these initiatives, an increasing number are able to express their faith through a rising tide of endeavours that address the needs of humanity in both their spiritual and material dimensions.” ([Bahá'í International Community's Seven Year Plan of Action on Climate Change](#), 2009)

“The approach to curriculum development followed... is not the traditional one of design, field-testing and evaluation, carried out in a linear fashion. The first step in writing any set of materials is taken, rather, when an experience is created at the grassroots in performing some act of service in response to the exigencies of the development of a community. Materials emerge out of this experience and become an expression of it. They are, on the one hand, a record of the learning that occurs in applying the Bahá'í Writings in a particular area of service and, on the other, an instrument for the systematization of that learning. These materials are used and then further refined and revised based on experience.”

“[The...] courses are not arranged according to a series of subject matters, with the specific aim of increasing individual knowledge. The content and order are based, rather, on a series of acts of service, the practice of which creates capacity in the individual to meet the exigencies of dynamic, developing communities. The enhancement of such capacity is viewed in terms of “walking a path of service”. On such a path individuals are assisted first in accomplishing relatively simple tasks and then in performing more complex and demanding acts of service.” ([Bahá'í International Community's Seven Year Plan of Action on Climate Change](#), 2009)

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