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STATEMENT BY THE BAHA'I INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

"BUILDING A UNIFIED COMMUNITY"

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BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

345 EAST 46TH STREET • NEW YORK, N. Y. 10017 U. S. A.

Cable: BAHAINCOM NEWYORK

(212) 867-2930

Representative
to the United Nations
Dr. Victor de Araujo

BUILDING A UNIFIED COMMUNITY

A human settlement must first answer the question, "What is the purpose of our lives, as human beings, on this planet?" Without this answer, we cannot be clear about the action we must take to mold our behaviour as individuals and build a society in which we can interact to achieve basic human happiness. How we define the nature of the person and the potentialities he must fulfill to be happy will determine the spiritual and physical environment which each human being needs for full development.

Related, of course, to the nature of the person is the nature of society and of civilization. At the same time that we question the purpose of the individual, we cannot avoid asking about the fundamental aim of the family, and beyond that, of the local, national and world community.

Widespread realization of the failure of human settlements today, rural or urban, in poor or wealthy countries, to fulfill human needs and to provide happiness for members of the human race, is a testimony to an awakening of human consciousness leading to the development of new patterns of living as well as to new concepts of an environment conducive to growth. Central to this approach is the recognition of the spiritual nature of man. It is not only the physical body that must be sheltered and fed. The rational and spiritual qualities which are the source and foundation of man's growth, as well as the tools for his mature and willing co-operation with his fellow men, these, too, must be nourished. The settlement is the physical environment in which develop these three facets of man's nature, the physical, the rational, and the spiritual.

The community should reflect the basic purpose of human life, which in essence is to know and to worship God, and to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. Prayer, meditation, and work done in the spirit of service to humanity are all, we maintain, expressions of worship of a Supreme Source, Whose essence and nature are beyond human comprehension, but Whose plan and guidance are manifested in the lives and teachings of the Founders of the world's revealed religions. These faiths are seen as stages in the unfoldment of a divine plan; and human communities as the physical expression of a unity established by religion in each age. Thus we have seen communities reflecting unity of family, tribe, and nation. Within this perspective human happiness in our time requires that all people recognize the fundamental oneness of the human race and strive to bring mankind into unity - a unity which is the spiritual law and supreme necessity of our age. Through close relationship to their Creator and to their fellow beings, men and women, children and youth, whether in city, town or village, can become welded by a spiritual bond that brings them together not only within their immediate environment, but, transcending the limitations of place, embraces all peoples on the planet. Only within this framework can a settlement fulfill the needs of its inhabitants.

To awaken in each person a sincere desire to seek true happiness and to discharge his high responsibility towards himself and to all others in the human family, life in the community should encourage the fulfillment of certain essential requirements. To cite a few:

1. The fostering of good character, and the development of spiritual qualities such as honesty, trustworthiness, compassion and justice.
2. The gradual education of all persons toward the eradication of divisive prejudices of race, creed, class, nationality and sex.
3. The elimination of all forms of superstition hampering human progress, through an understanding of the harmony of science and religion as two facets of truth.
4. The development of the unique talents and abilities of every individual, through the pursuit of knowledge and the acquisition of skills for practice of a trade or a profession, not only for personal satisfaction, but as a contribution to the enrichment of the life of the whole community.
5. The full participation of both sexes in the elective and administrative processes of the community, including decision-making.

In such an environment, individuals and the community will interact continually in their mutual concern for the happiness of all human beings. The family, for instance, as a basic unit of society, and often the strongest link between the individual and the community, is not only responsible for the physical well-being of its members, but also for their spiritual development. Marriage should take place, with free choice of partners, the approval of parents and the supervision of the community's governing body, and be based on a commitment to the true equality of men and women, to the rearing of children in an atmosphere of love and universality, and to the recognition of the rights and responsibilities of each member of the family.

A pattern of administration, local, national and international, should provide for the energy generated from the faith of individuals to be channelled into institutions that will use this collective power, in a systematic way, to create a new level of social behavior. The local administrative body, as an illustration, should be elected by all members of the community by secret ballot and without nominations or electioneering. Free from vested interests, it will be entrusted with the welfare of its community. It will be guided always, however, in its decisions and actions, by a concern for the whole of humanity. Its aim will be to act, within its resources, to educate, care for, and counsel not only the members of its community, but any others who need and seek its assistance. It will strive always to promote harmony, progress and justice. It will be linked to members of the community through consultation with them on both individual and community needs and goals, in regular meetings where all can contribute their ideas.

The central position of prayer and meditation in individual and community life will reinforce the role of places of worship in the heart of villages, towns, and cities, and relate them to a global society. These houses of prayer should be open to all people, of every background and conviction, and be enlarged and developed to serve as the seat round which the scientific, educational, humanitarian and administrative institutions of each local community will revolve. Here members of the community will come for prayer and meditation at the beginning of each day. In this way, the day's activities, whether at home, at school, or at work - in office, farm, factory, etc., will flow from a spiritual source and become the outer expression of faith.

Although the ultimate richness of an organically united humanity and the character of individual and collective life within a future world community can now be only dimly imagined, the pattern upon which such a development can take place, and the immediate steps that the responsible leaders of a needy humanity should now adopt, can be clearly discerned, and should be pursued with faith, courage, and determination.

THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE UNITED NATIONS

The Bahá'í International Community is accredited as an international non-governmental organization in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and has official affiliation with the United Nations Office of Public Information (OPI). It has representatives at the United Nations in New York and in Geneva, and with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi.

In its work with the United Nations programmes in the areas of social and economic development, the Bahá'í International Community has worked closely with ECOSOC, its functional commissions, committees, and associated bodies. In this co-operation, it has furnished information, submitted statements, and published brochures on many issues: human rights, social development, status of women, world food, science and technology, population, drug abuse, environment, the United Nations University, the family, youth, and new human settlements.

The Bahá'í International Community has also participated in United Nations years and major world conferences concerned with the socio-economic problems of our planet, as well as in preparatory and follow-up meetings and activities.