

The Evolution of a New Society¹

Introduction

Tena koutou katoa! Alláh'u'Abhá!

Welcome friends to this the first session of summer school 2022. I am Sholeh Rowhani Ashraf and I will be presenting this session along with Sana Lavai Motlagh, Sarah and Richard Donavon.

This year's summer school program has been developed so that the sessions on each day follow on from each other. On day one we address the vision of Bahá'u'lláh for the evolution of a new society; on day two Counsellor Tessa Scrine will focus more on widening the circle of participation in the Divine Plan. Day three focuses on social transformation and Day four, the education process. Today we are looking at the Baha'ullah's vision for the evolution of a new society.

In this address we will cover the following;

- Part One: The Birth of the Concepts of a New Society addressed by Sana
- Part Two: Mega themes - The Principles of governance for a global society will be explained by Richard
- Part three: The Process of Transformation will be outlined by Sarah
- And I will conclude with Part Four: The Role of the Bahá'ís

Part One: The Birth of the Concepts for a New Society

To understand the impact and trajectory of Bahá'u'lláh's vision for a new society it is helpful to look at the conditions into which Bahá'u'lláh I was born in the early 19th century. We often look at period costume dramas on television and in the movies and are attracted to the glamour of such articulations of earlier times. However, these usually only represent a small minority of lifestyles, and for the vast majority of humanity the decades, and even centuries, leading up to the 19 century were far from glamorous.

The vast majority of humanity lived in village or rural environments, without running water, limited home heating, no flushing toilets, baths or showers and poor hygiene. Houses were often inadequate for the weather conditions and natural disasters flus and pandemics wiped out large numbers of humanity.

Most societies were highly stratified, often with tyrannical and cruel ruling classes. Slavery in one form or another was widespread. Economies based on subsistence, barter or low income and high taxation made it almost impossible for people to be socially and economically upwardly mobile and the vast majority of humanity could neither read nor write. In the words of Abdul Baha, the vast majority lacked even the ability to effectively express themselves. The ruling classes in many societies conducted feuds and wars, drawing on men particularly of younger ages and putting enormous effort into building armies and war machines.

¹ Script Drafted by Alan Wilcox and presented by Sholeh Rowhani Ashraf Sana Lavai Motlagh, Sarah and Richard Donavon

The Evolution of a New Society – December 2022

While significant wisdom and knowledge of health and the art of living was present in many indigenous societies, those societies were also affected by barbarism, often cannibalism and wars and feuds from generation to generation.

In virtually all of the societies in the position of women was subjugated and force and brutality ruled. It was also the time of European domination of vast parts of the globe with colonisation wreaking havoc in many countries. The atrocities committed in many of these countries are well known to us all.

While in early periods, largely under the influence of religion, whether it be Jew, Christian, Muslim, Hinduism, Confucian, Buddhism or other spiritual traditions, harmony and peace had developed, by the 19th century, in the majority of societies, this piece had been well shattered, and the dark side of human nature are dominated.

Suffice it to say that, for the majority of humanity, life was a significant struggle. In most societies people's lifespan was short; in fact in the 1800s the average lifespan was 40 years of age.

[Life expectancy – Wikipedia \[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_expectancy\]\(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_expectancy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_expectancy)

The history of religious revelation is replete with references to this period of time - a time of the end and also, a time of a new beginning. It is not the purpose of this session to go into these references many of which will be known to many of you. However, the following quote from the Bhagavad-Gita summarises an essential divine truth of religious revelation and a Covenant between God and humanity that humanity will never be left alone:

“Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness, O Arjun, at that time I manifest Myself on earth”

[Chapter 4, Verse 7 – Bhagavad Gita, The Song of God <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/verse>](https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/verse)

Consistent with this promise, Bahá'ís believe that a new spiritual impulse was manifest in the world of being on the night of 23 May 1844. In the upper chamber of a room in the obscure city of Shiraz Persia a young merchant proclaimed to a religious disciple to be “no less than the mouthpiece of God Himself, promised by the Prophets of bygone ages” and “that He was, at the same time, the Herald of One immeasurably greater than Himself”

In the gloomy conditions of society that we have just referred to, the Báb, on that evening drafted the first chapter of the “first, the greatest and mightiest book” he was to write. The Guardian describes the “Declaration of the Mission of the Báb on 23 May 1844, “ stating “The description of this episode by Mullá Husayn, as well as the opening pages of that Book attest the magnitude and force of that weighty Declaration. ... the dominant features of that initial contact that marked the birth, and fixed the date, of the inception of the most glorious era in the spiritual life of mankind, amongst which was to issue a challenge to the rulers of the world proclaiming the self-sufficiency of His Cause, denouncing the vanity of their ephemeral power, and calling upon them to "lay aside, one and all, their dominion," and deliver His Message to "lands in both the East and the West".

“With this historic Declaration the dawn of an Age that signalizes the consummation of all ages had broken. ” [Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pgs. 6-10 <https://Bahá'í-library.com/writings/shoghi-effendi/gpb>](https://Bahá'í-library.com/writings/shoghi-effendi/gpb)

Bahá'u'lláh himself later states:

“Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?” *Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 240-241*

Thus, a process of the evolution of a new society had begun. While we do not want to focus on the history of the early Bahá'í Faith in this talk, for those new to the Faith's teachings, it is significant to note that such a declaration from the Báb was not taken lightly and polarised the society of Iran at the time. Thousands upon thousands became followers and many more bitter opponents of the Báb. In the cruel, tyrannical, and barbaric environment of Persia at the time, violence broke out, leading to the execution, in miraculous circumstances, of the Báb himself in 1850 in a square in Tabriz in the north of Iran; and to the death of some 20,000 of His followers.

The Guardian summarises this first chapter of this process – the dispensation of the Báb as follows:

“We behold ... the figure of its Master Hero, the Báb, arise meteor-like above the horizon of Shíráz, traverse the sombre sky of Persia from south to north, decline with tragic swiftness, and perish in a blaze of glory. We see His satellites, a galaxy of God-intoxicated heroes, mount above that same horizon, irradiate that same incandescent light, burn themselves out with that self-same swiftness, and impart in their turn an added impetus to the steadily gathering momentum of God's nascent Faith.” [Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pgs. 1-5 - Bahá'í Library Online https://Bahá'í-library.com/writings/shoghi-effendi/apb](https://Bahá'í-library.com/writings/shoghi-effendi/apb)

While providing the spiritual impulse and laying the sacrificial foundation for the establishment of a new society, the Báb, while foreshadowing some of the features of this order, left it to the One who he had proclaimed to be greater than Himself to elaborate on the overarching features of this world order.

It was Bahá'u'lláh who, over the course of some 40 years during successive banishments and prolonged imprisonment and hardship inflicted by his enemies, revealed the key features of a new society. Initial emanations from His pen were spiritual and philosophical. As his revelation progressed the laws of a new age and the key themes of this new order were unveiled. The key focus of this new society was the unity of humankind.

“Of the principles ... the most vital of them all is the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the human race, which may well be regarded as the hallmark of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and the pivot of His teachings. Of such cardinal importance is this principle of unity that it is expressly referred to in the Book of His Covenant, and He unreservedly proclaims it as the central purpose of His Faith. "We, verily," He declares, "have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth." "So potent is the light of unity," He further states, "that it can illuminate the whole earth." "At one time," He has written with reference to this central theme of His Revelation, "We spoke in the language of the lawgiver; at another in that of the truth seeker and the mystic, and yet Our supreme purpose and highest wish hath always been to disclose the glory and sublimity of this station." Unity” He states, is the goal that "excelleth every goal" and an aspiration which is "the monarch of all aspirations." "The world," He proclaims, "is but one country, and mankind its citizens." He further affirms that the unification of mankind, the last stage in the evolution of humanity towards maturity is inevitable, that "soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead." He deplores the defectiveness of the prevailing order, exposes the inadequacy of patriotism as a directing and controlling force in human society, and regards the "love of mankind" and service to its interests as the worthiest and most laudable objects of human endeavor.” Shoghi Effendi

This new spiritual impulse from Bahá'u'lláh was further articulated “by the enunciation of certain precepts and principles which lie at the very core of His Faith, ... These were recorded in unnumbered Tablets.” These have become the principles for new society. At a later time they have been codified as follows:

- Independent Investigation of Truth.
- Elimination of Prejudice of Every Kind.
- The Oneness of Humanity.
- One Essential Foundation for All Religions; the evolutionary nature of religion
- Religion as a source of unity Love, Affection, and Joy.
- The equality of men and women
- The Harmony of Science and Religion.
- A Universal Auxiliary Language.
- Universal Compulsory Education.
- The abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty
- The establishment of Universal peace
- Peaceful consultation as a means for resolving differences

To adequately understand these concepts from a Bahá'í perspective, a number of points must be appreciated.

Firstly, these principles are not simply for the Bahá'ís; they are for all mankind and universal in their application and in many respects can be seen as mega-themes of the new age.

Secondly these ideas and principles are embedded deeply in the spiritual reality of all human beings. religious revelators, philosophers, psychologists and, even more recently, scientists, have all referred to a sub-consciousness that connects all humanity. This is often referred to in the Bahá'í writings where Bahá'u'lláh himself has stated that he has left a fresh impulse in a new direction.

In his articulation of these principles he also stated in his book of laws that the book and the concepts therein are not to be weighed by the standards current amongst men. “....Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring balance established amongst men. In this most perfect balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed.”

“The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.” – Bahá'u'lláh, *The Most Holy Book*, p. 85.

The universal establishment of these principles as not only the aim of the Bahá'í Faith but the very essence of humanity's affairs in this millennium. All of us are affected by these principles in our lives and in society as a whole and they are the themes of academic enquiry and serious news media the world over.

Part two: Progress on the Mega-themes of the Age

Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity is broad and encompasses a wide range of subjects relating to the transformation of society and the building of a world civilisation. Above some key themes are mentioned. It is interesting to see how far we have come to building this new society. In this section we will look at a few key indicators of humanity's progress. Because of limited time we will only focus on progress made in a handful of these:

- Universal peace
- The elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty
- The advancement of women
- Universal Education

Universal peace

The establishment of universal peace is a key theme, not only of the Bahá'í Faith but is now recognised as critical for social and economic prosperity for the world as a whole. The 19th century was one of almost continuous conflict, the 20th century had some of the worst wars in human history. As a result of these wars however humanity is gradually learning that war poses no solution to its problems.

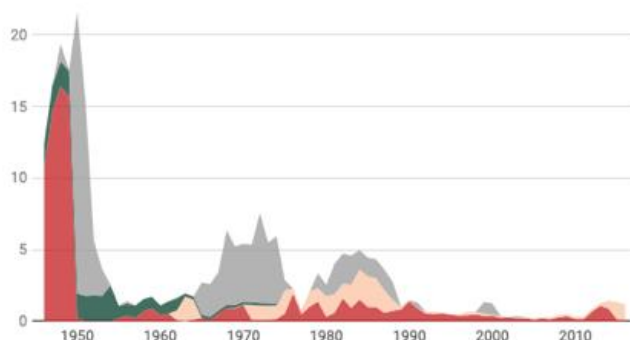
One only has to compare the reaction of people to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 when the Cambridge University scholars, on hearing that war had been declared, universally cheered, congratulating each other and throwing their hats in the air with glee. Recently the announcement of war in the Ukraine has more appropriately, and in most societies, been associated with fear, loathing and concern.

One need not recount the faltering progress of establish institutions to maintain world peace. However even without effective institutions the world has become a more peaceful place. The attached graph shows how in the 21st-century the number of battle related deaths per hundred thousand people has significantly reduced, as has the conflicts between states.

The 21st century has been more peaceful

Number of battle-related deaths per 100,000 people

■ Civil conflicts ■ Civil conflicts with foreign interference ■ Colonial/imperial conflicts
■ Conflict between states



Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Peace Research Institute Oslo, ourworldindata.org • [Get the data](#)
• Created with Datawrapper

However in its letter to the Bahá'ís in 2019 Universal House of Justice made the following comments:

“There have been at least three historical moments in the last one hundred years when it seemed as if the human race was reaching for real, lasting peace, albeit always falling short because of weaknesses it could not overcome. The first moment, .., was the establishment of the League of Nations, ...” the second the united nations and a range of International institutions after the Second World War.

The termination of the Cold War, “towards the end of the twentieth century, was an occasion for relief, giving rise to explicit calls for the establishment of a new global order. This was the third moment when universal peace seemed to be within grasp...”

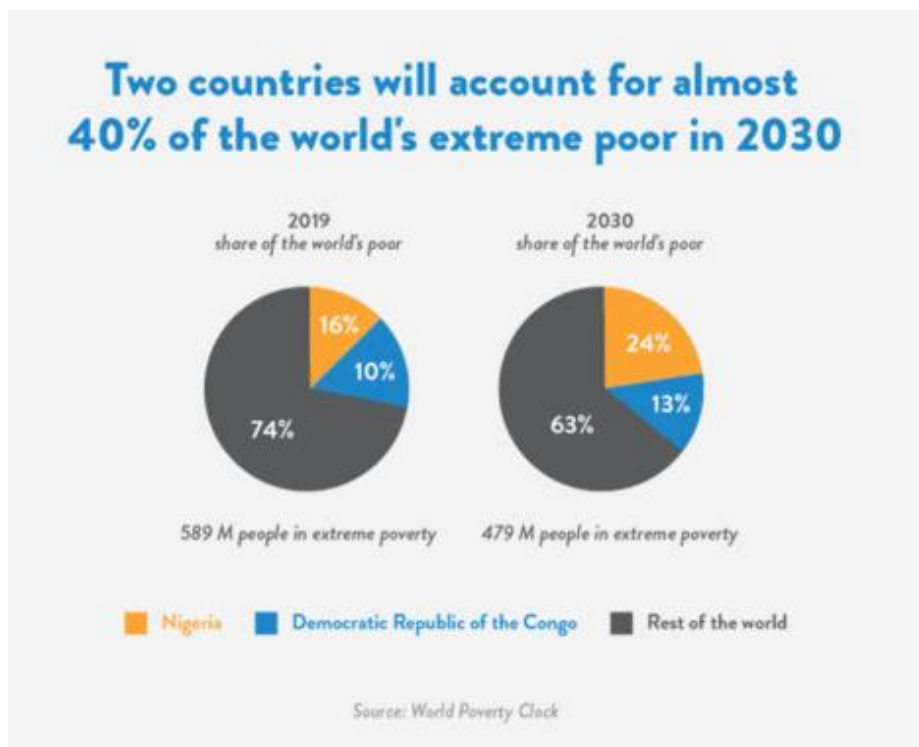
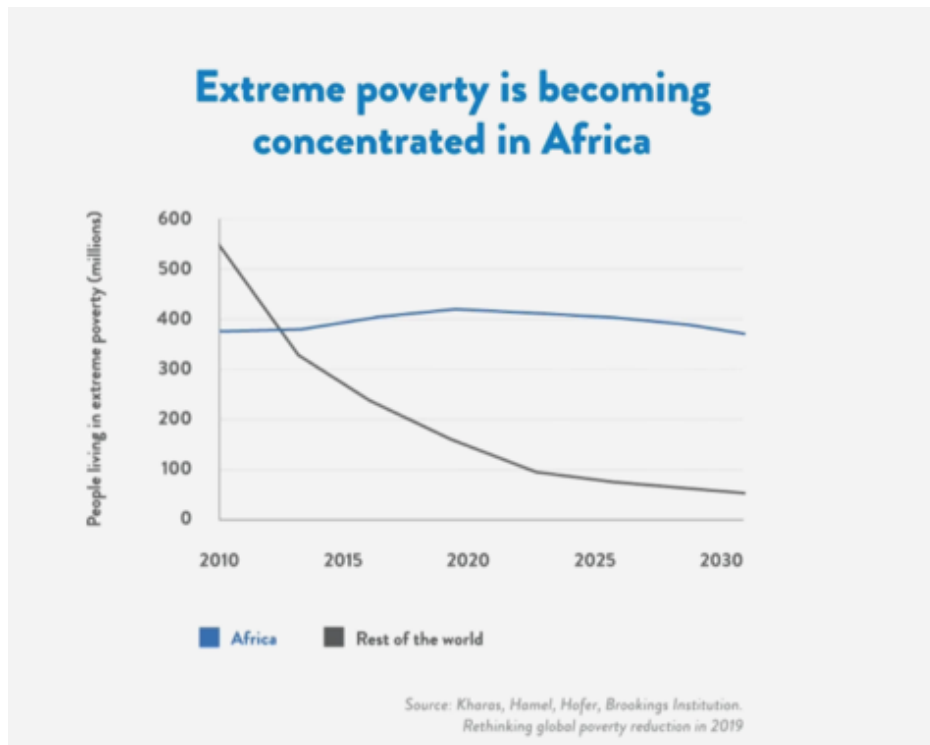
However they further comment “Certain shared ethical principles, which seemed to be in the ascendant at the start of this century, are eroded, threatening the prevailing consensus about right and wrong that, in various arenas, had succeeded in holding humanity’s basest tendencies in check. And the will to engage in international collective action, which twenty years ago represented a powerful strain of thinking among world leaders, has been cowed, assailed by resurgent forces of racism, nationalism, and factionalism.”

“The tumult raised by the contending peoples of the earth threatens to drown out the voices of those noble-minded souls in every society who call for an end to conflict and struggle. As long as that call goes unheeded, there is no reason to doubt that the world’s current state of disorder and confusion will worsen—possibly with catastrophic consequences—until a chastened humanity sees fit to take another significant step, perhaps this time decisive, towards enduring peace.”

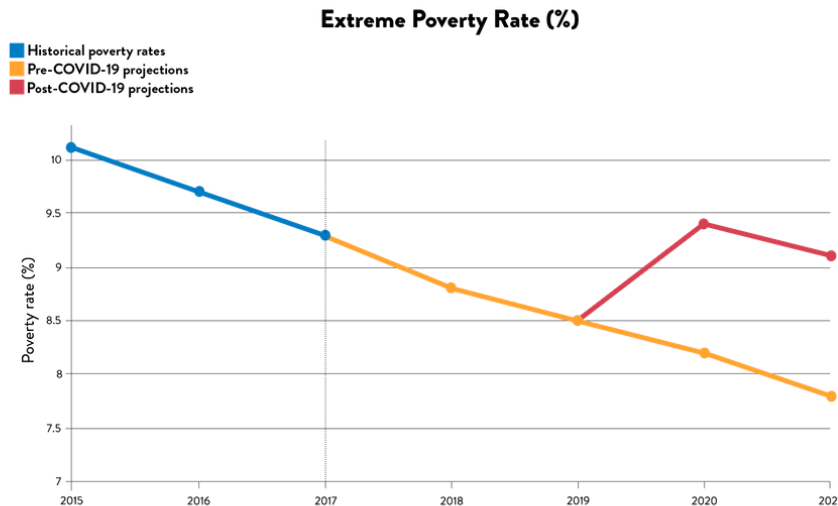
Thus while progress has been made, firmly established peace based on Bahá'u'lláh’s vision of collective security is still some way off.

The elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty

News media is full of statements and voyeurism on the lifestyles and the wealth of the rich and famous. However over successive decades they have also focused on extreme poverty, malnutrition and the suffering of the masses, particularly children, in those parts of the world often ravaged by famine, war or pestilence. Humanitarian efforts as well as international cooperation and government initiatives have moved to address the issues surrounding gross poverty. In 2019 the following graphs were developed showing that gross poverty was being more concentrated in two countries and the rest of the world was making some progress in this respect.

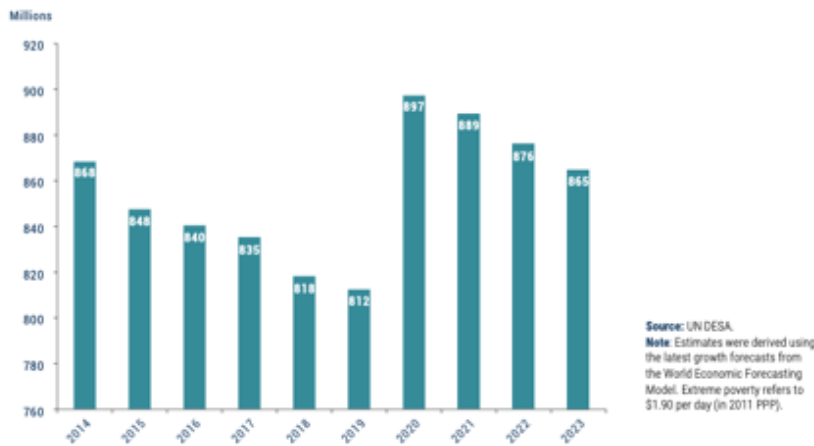


However the recent global pandemic over the last three years has halted and reversed the downward trend as shown in the following graphs:



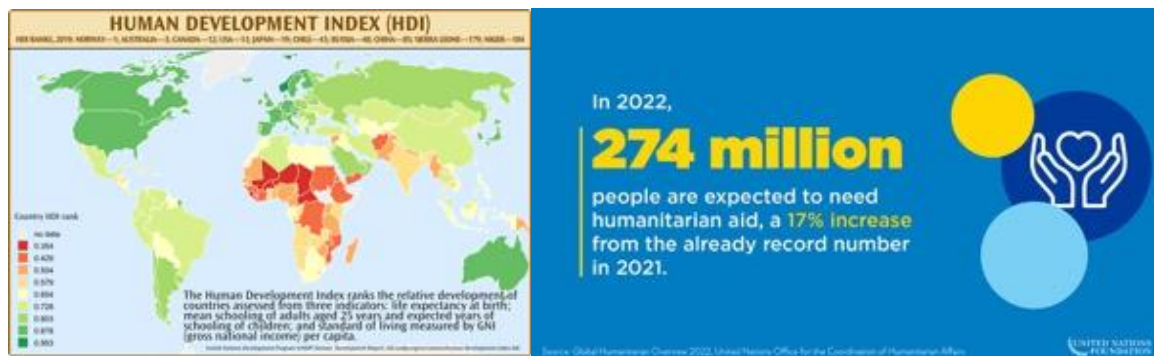
Source: PovcalNet via the World Bank Group

Figure 1.8
Global number of people living in extreme poverty



A further measure of poverty as people living in slums. Although the proportion of the urban population living in slums worldwide fell from 28% in 2000 to 23% in 2014, the number of people living in slums rose from 792 million to an estimated 880 million over the same period. In Least Developed Countries, nearly two-thirds (62%) of urban dwellers live in slum conditions.

The UN defines a slum household as a group of individuals living under the same roof with one or more of the following conditions: lack of access to improved water; lack of access to improved sanitation; insufficient living area; and lack of durability of housing.



Extremes of wealth and poverty also affect our own nation in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2022 those in the poorest 20% have median net worth of \$11,000. The top 20% have a median net worth of \$2.024 million. In New Zealand Approximately 150,400 children (13.1%) are living in severe income poverty. Initially, these include children going hungry and living in cold, damp housing. Being socially excluded results in poor school achievements. In the longer-term, child poverty correlates with unemployment, poor physical and mental health, and higher rates of criminality.

So again, on a global scale, while progress is being made, the elimination of poverty and is far from overcome. There are some ways to go before Bahá'u'lláh's vision of relative equality is realised.

The Advancement of Women

The advancement of woman is another theme in Bahá'u'lláh's vision which has many dimensions. Undoubtably since the 19th century significant progress has been made. Universal suffrage has grown since 1993 when New Zealand first legally recognised voting status of women. Gradually Tahirih's bold assertion to her executioners that she may be killed but you cannot stop the emancipation of women, is being gradually unfurled. The Bahá'í vision is for women to enter capably and confidently competently into all areas of society – law, politics government and commerce is progressing, but not at the rate or at the extent that it is even near completion.

The following figures show recent trends relating to women in management positions, woman living in poverty, secondary school enrolment for women, employment for women and government participation.





Thus, while some advancement has clearly been made and it still a significant pathway to travel before the vision of equality is realised.

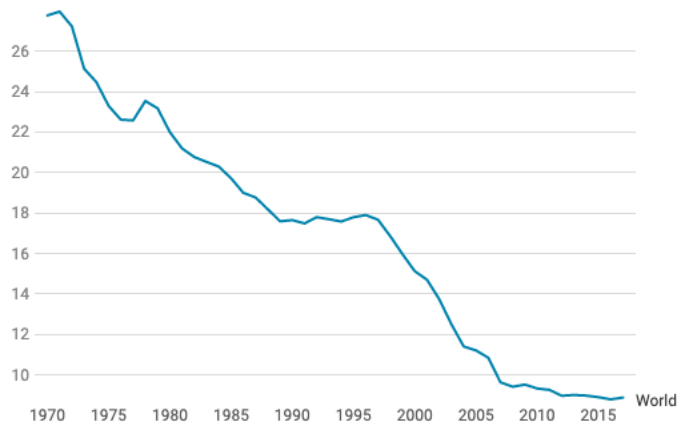
Universal Education

One of the aforementioned themes is that all people should have access to education. At the beginning of the 19 century the vast majority of humanity was illiterate. The following two graphs

show how this has changed significantly. One shows that by 2015 only 5% of the world's children do not have access to primary school and the other shows how the access to the Internet - a critical medium for economic participation and advancement - has grown.

Nearly all young children around the world are now in school

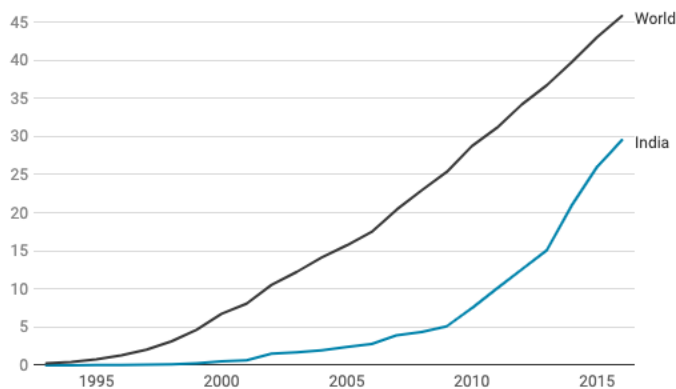
% of primary school-age children out of school



Source: World Bank · [Get the data](#) · Created with Datawrapper

Access to internet took off at the turn of the 21st Century

% of population with access to internet



Source: World Bank · [Get the data](#) · Created with Datawrapper

However even in this area, millions upon millions are not able to progress their education beyond primary school nor do they have the means to have access to ongoing study, research and information.

Part three: A Vision of a new Society and the Process of Transformation

So what does an insight into the new world order look like?

“God’s purpose,” Shoghi Effendi assures us, “is none other than to usher in, in ways He alone can bring about, and the full significance of which He alone can fathom, the Great, the Golden Age of a long-divided, a long-afflicted humanity. Its present state, indeed even its immediate future, is dark, distressingly dark. Its distant future, however, is radiant, gloriously radiant—so radiant that no eye can visualize it.” Excerpt From Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1963 - 1988

While we cannot envision the radiance of the future civilisation, we do have an insight from the pen of Shoghi Effendi:

“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 inter-communication 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 the increase of 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: World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

So how will this unfold?

Bahá'u'lláh foresaw the state of the world during his lifetime:

“The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then, and only then, will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody.” *Excerpt From Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*

The Guardian further elaborated on this.

“Bahá'u'lláh further wrote: “Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.” “After a time,” He further wrote, “all the governments on earth will change. Oppression will envelop the world. And following a universal convulsion, the sun of justice will rise from the horizon of the unseen realm.” *Excerpt From Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1963 - 1988*

Part Four: Role of the Bahá'ís

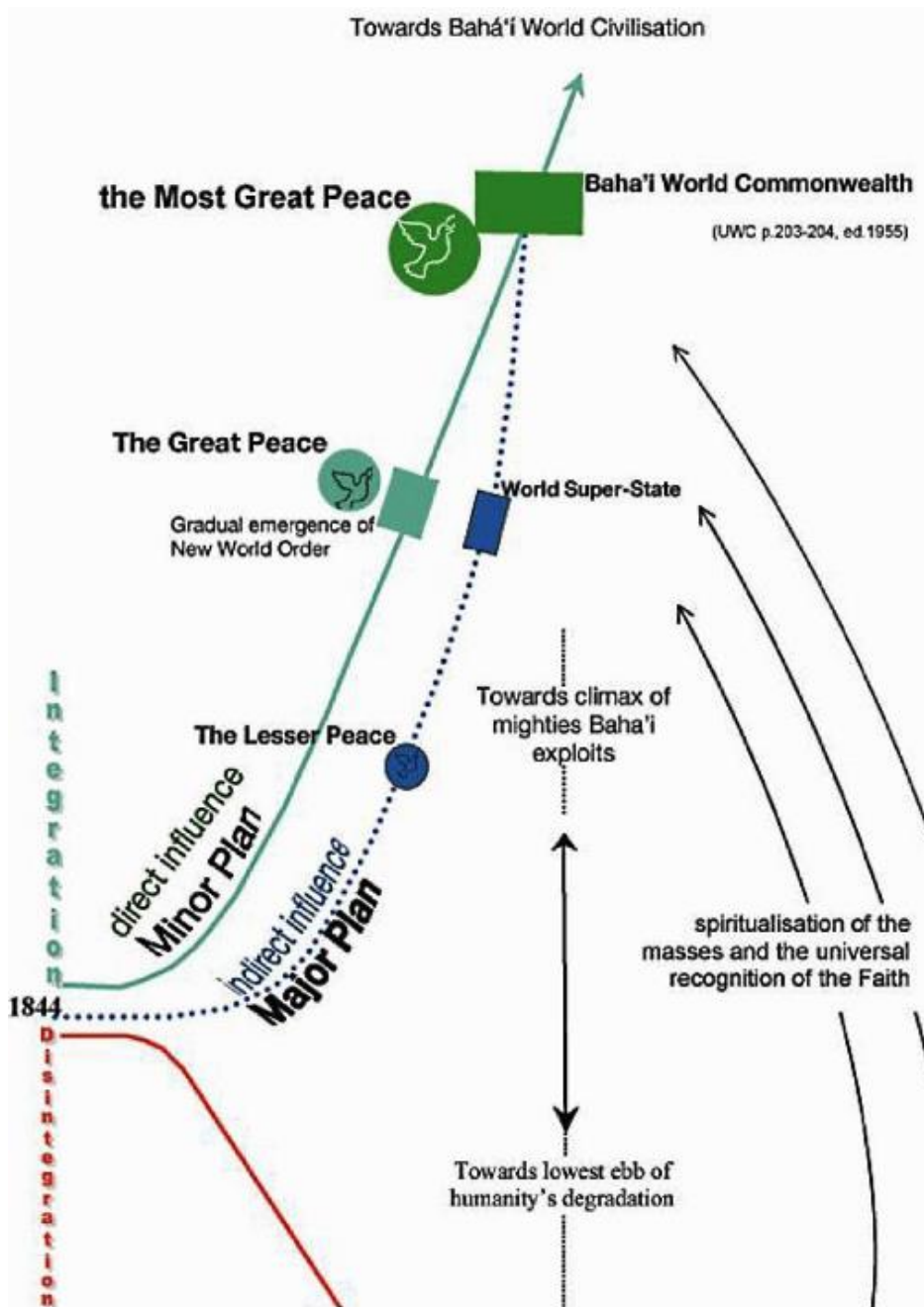
“We are told by Shoghi Effendi that two great processes are at work in the world: the great Plan of God, tumultuous in its progress, working through mankind as a whole, tearing down barriers to world unity and forging humankind into a unified body in the fires of suffering and experience. This process will produce in God’s due time, the Lesser Peace, the political unification of the world. Mankind at that time can be likened to a body that is unified but without life. The second process, the task of breathing life into this unified body—of creating true unity and spirituality culminating in the Most Great Peace—is that of the Bahá'ís, who are laboring consciously, with detailed instructions and continuing divine guidance, to erect the fabric of the Kingdom of God on earth, into which they call their fellowmen, thus conferring upon them eternal life.”

Excerpt From Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1963 - 1988

In a letter written in July 1953 Shoghi Effendi, referring to the influx of new Bahá'ís wrote:

"This flow, moreover, will presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, will witness the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world—a day which, viewed in its proper perspective, will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh." [Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, US Bahá'í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, 1980 \(3rd Printing\), p 117](#)

The alignment of the two processes mentioned has been developed into a diagram by Mr Nakhjavani, former member of the Universal House of Justice.



The role of Bahá'ís in progressing humanity towards its inevitable unity has been outlined on many occasions by the central institutions of the Faith. Currently we are working in what the institutions have called the formative age of the era. This is an age characterised by several epochs, each divided into several plans. We are currently working in a nine-year plan. In brief, Bahá'ís the world over working to establish these principles at local, national and international levels working with the transformation of individuals, communities and institutions that govern these communities. Primarily Bahá'ís are working at the grassroots in neighbourhoods, establishing processes that lead to the spiritualisation of communities, the education of children, junior youth and adults; and the translation of lessons learned into discourses in society and social action.

Our actions ... “Together, ... are means of releasing what the Guardian described as “the society-building power” of the Faith.” We will not dwell at length on these as other sessions of this Summer School will address this in more detail. However, we will finish on an articulation from the message of the Universal House of Justice that sets the approach that Bahá'ís are expected to take in evolving not only the Bahá'í community but the society around them to the greatest heights of spirituality:

“...capacities and qualities that must be developed qualities of cooperation and mutual assistance are manifested by a people, “the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity”

“They are committed to the prosperity of all, recognizing that the welfare of individuals rests in the welfare of society at large. They are loyal citizens who eschew partisanship and the contest for worldly power. Instead, they are focused on transcending differences, harmonizing perspectives, and promoting the use of consultation for making decisions. They emphasize qualities and attitudes—such as trustworthiness, cooperation, and forbearance—that are building blocks of a stable social order. They champion rationality and science as essential for human progress. They advocate tolerance and understanding, and with the inherent oneness of humanity uppermost in their minds, they view everyone as a potential partner to collaborate with, and they strive to foster fellow feeling even among groups who may traditionally have been hostile to one another.

“They are conscious of how the forces of materialism are at work around them, and their eyes are wide open to the many injustices that persist in the world, yet they are equally clear sighted about the creative power of unity and humanity’s capacity for altruism. They see the power that true religion possesses to transform hearts and overcome distrust, and so, with confidence in what the future holds, they labour to cultivate the conditions in which progress can occur. They share their beliefs liberally with others, remaining respectful of the freedom of conscience of every soul, and they never impose their own standards on anyone. And while they would not pretend to have discovered all the answers, they are clear about what they have learned and what they still need to learn. Their efforts advance to the alternating rhythm of action and reflection; setbacks leave them unfazed. In places where growing numbers are helping to build communities of this character, the power of the Cause to transform people’s social existence, as well as their inner lives, is becoming increasingly visible. Earnest pursuit of the Plan’s central aim will, we are sure, cause many, many such communities to emerge.

“Across different cultures and social environments, they must assist the friends to face different kinds of challenges: to help previously antagonistic groups find unity through pursuit of a common goal; to learn to put aside inherited customs and attitudes that belong to humanity’s period of adolescence, and to overcome prejudices of all kinds; to guard against any tendency to view matters with cynicism or an eye for faults, and instead sustain an eager and constructive outlook; to put the equality of women and men into practice; to cast off inertia and apathy through the exercise of individual initiative; to put one’s support of plans for collective action before feelings of personal preference; to harness the power of modern technologies without succumbing to their potentially enervating effects; to prize the sweetness of teaching the Faith and the joy of serving humankind above worldly interests; to reject the opiate of consumerism; to turn away from materialist ideologies and the worldviews they aggressively promote, and fix one’s gaze upon the bright beacon that is the laws and principles of God. These, and many more besides, constitute a formidable set of responsibilities for the company of the faithful to fulfil as they navigate what are sure to be tumultuous years in the life of humanity.” The Universal House of Justice Message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors 30 December 2021