

TRUE PRACTITIONERS OF PEACE

Aotearoa New Zealand Bahá'í Summer School
December 2024 - January 2025

Workshop Material



“True practitioners of peace”

Understanding the essential prerequisites of a peaceful society and making it a reality

I. Constructing a peaceful society

1. The vision of Bahá'u'lláh (oneness of humanity, global civilisation, goal of a new world order) – *spend half an hour*

“The Great Peace towards which people of good will throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet—in the words of one great thinker, “the planetization of mankind”.

(Promise of World Peace – Universal House of Justice, October 1985)

“The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquility of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind.”

– ***Bahá'u'lláh***

“The primary question to be resolved is how the present world, with its entrenched pattern of conflict, can change to a world in which harmony and co-operation will prevail.

“World order can be founded only on **an unshakeable consciousness of the oneness of mankind**, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice—prejudice of every kind—race, class, colour, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others.

“Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.

“In the Bahá’í view, recognition of the oneness of mankind “calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.”

(Promise of World Peace – Universal House of Justice, October 1985)

Collaborative Discussion Exercise:

- 1) Explain the difference between oneness and sameness, using the analogy of the human body to show that oneness is about interdependence.
- 2) Explore together how religion showers humankind with benefits.

2. The forces of constructive change – *spend half an hour*

“‘The winds of despair,’ Bahá’u’lláh wrote, ‘are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective.’ This prophetic judgment has been amply confirmed by the common experience of humanity. Flaws in the prevailing order are conspicuous in the inability of sovereign states organized as United Nations to exorcise the spectre of war, the threatened collapse of the international economic order, the spread of anarchy and terrorism, and the intense suffering which these and other afflictions are causing to increasing millions. Indeed, so much have aggression and conflict come to characterize our social, economic and religious systems, that many have succumbed to the view that such behaviour is intrinsic to human nature and therefore ineradicable.

“With the entrenchment of this view, a paralyzing contradiction has developed in human affairs. On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing apprehensions tormenting their daily lives. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on cooperation and reciprocity.

“As the need for peace becomes more urgent, this fundamental contradiction, which hinders its realization, demands a reassessment of the assumptions upon which the commonly held view of mankind’s historical predicament is based. Dispassionately examined, the evidence reveals that such conduct, far from expressing man’s true self, represents a distortion of the human spirit. Satisfaction on this point will enable all people to set in motion constructive social forces which, because they are

consistent with human nature, will encourage harmony and cooperation instead of war and conflict.”

(From “The Promise of World Peace” – Universal House of Justice, October 1985)

“Behind so much of the turbulence and commotion of contemporary life are the fits and starts of a humanity struggling to come of age. Widely accepted practices and conventions, cherished attitudes and habits, are one by one being rendered obsolete, as the imperatives of maturity begin to assert themselves.

“Bahá’ís are encouraged to see in the revolutionary changes taking place in every sphere of life the interaction of two fundamental processes. One is destructive in nature, while the other is integrative; both serve to carry humanity, each in its own way, along the path leading towards its full maturity. The operation of the former is everywhere apparent... Though devastating in their effects, the forces of disintegration tend to sweep away barriers that block humanity’s progress, opening space for the process of integration to draw diverse groups together and disclosing new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. Bahá’ís, of course, strive to align themselves, individually and collectively, with forces associated with the process of integration, which, they are confident, will continue to gain in strength, no matter how bleak the immediate horizons. Human affairs will be utterly reorganized, and an era of universal peace inaugurated.

“Such is the view of history that underlies every endeavour pursued by the Bahá’í community.”

(From a message of the Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013)

Exercise for the group:

- 1) Can you come up with a list of underlying assumptions that are generally accepted about human nature which relate to the lower nature and which can be overcome by giving attention to the higher nature?
- 2) Discuss how to maintain composure, hope and resilience in the face of deteriorating world conditions.

How far the world has come – and looking at the needs of today.

II. Humanity's coming of age: traversing the evolving stages of peace

“To choose such a course is not to deny humanity's past but to understand it. The Bahá'í Faith regards the current world confusion and calamitous condition in human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet. The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.

“A candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.

“Whatever suffering and turmoil the years immediately ahead may hold, however dark the immediate circumstances, the Bahá'í community believes that humanity can confront this supreme trial with confidence in its ultimate outcome. Far from signaling the end of civilization, the convulsive changes towards which humanity is being ever more rapidly impelled will serve to release the 'potentialities inherent in the station of man' and reveal 'the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality.'”

(Promise of World Peace – Universal House of Justice, October 1985)

“The ages of its infancy and childhood are past, never again to return, while the Great Age, the consummation of all ages, which must signalize the coming of age of the entire human race, is yet to come. The convulsions of this transitional and most turbulent period in the annals of humanity are the essential prerequisites, and herald the inevitable approach, of that Age of Ages, 'the time of the end,' in which the folly and tumult of strife that has, since the dawn of history, blackened the annals of mankind, will have been finally transmuted into the wisdom and the tranquillity of an undisturbed, a universal, and lasting peace, in which the discord and separation of the children of men will have given way to the worldwide reconciliation, and the complete unification of the divers elements that constitute human society.”

(Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day Is Come, p. 192.)

“The principle of the oneness of humankind implies, then, an organic change in the very structure of society. What should be stated plainly here is that Bahá'ís do not believe the transformation thus envisioned will come about exclusively through their own efforts. Nor are they trying to create a movement that would seek to impose on society their vision of the future. Every nation and every group—indeed, every

individual—will, to a greater or lesser degree, contribute to the emergence of the world civilization towards which humanity is irresistibly moving. Unity will progressively be achieved, as foreshadowed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in different realms of social existence, for instance, “unity in the political realm”, “unity of thought in world undertakings”, “unity of races” and the “unity of nations”. As these come to be realized, the structures of a politically united world, which respects the full diversity of culture and provides channels for the expression of dignity and honour, will gradually take shape.”

(2 March 2013 to the Bahá’ís of Iran – Universal House of Justice)

“How much the Bahá’í world has achieved! How much remains to be done! The Nine Year Plan outlines the tasks that lie immediately ahead. Among the areas of focus are the multiplication and intensification of programmes of growth in clusters worldwide and increased coherence in the work of community building, social action, and participation in prevalent discourses through the concerted efforts of the Plan’s three protagonists. The training institute will be further strengthened and will continue to evolve as an educational organization that develops capabilities for service. The seeds it sows within the hearts of succeeding cohorts of young people will be nurtured by other educational opportunities to empower each soul to contribute to social progress and well-being. The movement of youth will be complemented worldwide by the unprecedented advancement of women as full partners in community affairs. The capacity of Bahá’í institutions will be fostered at all levels, with particular attention to the establishment and development of Local Assemblies and to enhancing their engagement with the wider society and its leaders. The intellectual life of the community will be cultivated to provide the rigour and clarity of thought required to vindicate to a sceptical humanity the applicability of the healing remedy of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings. And all these efforts will continue through a series of Plans comprising a challenge, spanning no less than a generation, that will carry the Bahá’í world across the threshold of its third century.

The determined efforts to gain a fuller understanding of, and to live in accordance with, Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings take place within the larger context of the twofold process of disintegration and integration described by Shoghi Effendi. Attaining the objective of the current series of Plans—the release of ever-increasing measures of the society-building power of the Faith—calls for an ability to read the reality of society as it responds to, and is shaped by, these twin processes.”

(28 November 2023 to the Bahá’ís of the World – Universal House of Justice)

Exercise for the group:

- 1) Discuss how tumult and conflict can be avoided by the elimination of prejudices. Give examples.
- 2) How do the series of Plans in the Faith, each building on the previous one, contribute to a positive force for peace?

Every individual has agency and capacity to play a part

III. Building a refuge for mankind: the individual and social transformation

“So it is that the individual, with no regard for ‘personal benefits and selfish advantages,’ comes to see him- or herself as ‘one of the servants of God, the All-Possessing,’ whose only desire is to carry out His laws. So it is that the friends come to recognize that ‘wealth of sentiment, abundance of goodwill and effort’ are of little avail when their flow is not directed along proper channels, that ‘the unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice,’ and that ‘the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.’ And so it is that all come to discern with ease those areas of activity in which the individual can best exercise initiative and those which fall to the institutions alone. ‘With heart and soul’, the friends follow the directives of their institutions, so that, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, ‘things may be properly ordered and well arranged’. This, of course, is not a blind obedience; it is an obedience that marks the emergence of a mature human race which grasps the implications of a system as far-reaching as Bahá’u’lláh’s new World Order.”

(28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors – Universal House of Justice)

“From its inception, the community raised by Bahá’u’lláh, though small in numbers and geographically circumscribed, was galvanized by His lofty teachings and arose to share them liberally with all those seeking a spiritual path to personal and social transformation. In time, the friends learned to work closely with like-minded people and organizations to uplift the human spirit and contribute to the betterment of families, communities, and society as a whole. Receptivity to Bahá’u’lláh’s message was found in every land, and through devoted and sacrificial efforts over many generations, Bahá’í communities emerged around the globe, in far-flung cities and villages, to encompass the diversity of the human race.”

(28 November 2023 to the Bahá’ís of the World – Universal House of Justice)

“Parallel with the systematic unfoldment of the processes of expansion and consolidation and of social and economic development, another major area of action emerged: greater participation in the prevalent discourses of society. In an increasing number of social settings where deliberations on human problems occur, Bahá’ís seek to share relevant insights drawn from the ocean of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. It was Bahá’u’lláh Himself Who initially proclaimed His healing remedy directly to the world’s leaders and appealed for its adoption by all humanity. Notwithstanding the failure of the kings and rulers to respond affirmatively to the divine nature of His claim, He called upon them to apply His principles for the establishment of world peace: “Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Writings such as the Tablets to The Hague, and especially in talks delivered during His travels to the

West, unceasingly proclaimed His Father's teachings to the powerful and the masses grappling with the myriad difficulties facing humanity.

(28 November 2023 to the Bahá'ís of the World – Universal House of Justice)

The below excerpt from 2 March 2013 message to the Bahá'ís of Iran lists some of what has been widely recognized by people as underpinning prerequisites for a peaceful world:

“...that the rational soul has no gender, race, ethnicity or class, a fact that renders intolerable all forms of prejudice, not the least of which are those that prevent women from fulfilling their potential and engaging in various fields of endeavour shoulder to shoulder with men; that the root cause of prejudice is ignorance, which can be erased through educational processes that make knowledge accessible to the entire human race, ensuring it does not become the property of a privileged few; that science and religion are two complementary systems of knowledge and practice by which human beings come to understand the world around them and through which civilization advances; that religion without science soon degenerates into superstition and fanaticism, while science without religion becomes the tool of crude materialism; that true prosperity, the fruit of a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life, will recede further and further out of reach as long as consumerism continues to act as opium to the human soul; that justice, as a faculty of the soul, enables the individual to distinguish truth from falsehood and guides the investigation of reality, so essential if superstitious beliefs and outworn traditions that impede unity are to be eliminated; that, when appropriately brought to bear on social issues, justice is the single most important instrument for the establishment of unity; that work performed in the spirit of service to one's fellow human beings is a form of prayer, a means of worshipping God. Translating ideals such as these into reality, effecting a transformation at the level of the individual and laying the foundations of suitable social structures, is no small task, to be sure. Yet the Bahá'í community is dedicated to the long-term process of learning that this task entails, an enterprise in which increasing numbers from all walks of life, from every human group, are invited to take part.”

(2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran – Universal House of Justice)

Exercise for the group:

- 1) Identify some key ways in which an individual has agency and capacity to play a part in building a better world.
- 2) If individual and social transformation go hand in hand with one another, what are some of the most effective ways that an individual can transform themselves spiritually while also contributing to the transformation of the locality or neighbourhood in which they live?

Building of
Communities

IV. Becoming true practitioners of peace

“In looking back over a century of efforts to execute the provisions of the Divine Plan, it becomes apparent that the Bahá’í world has experienced a significant advance at the level of culture. Ever greater numbers have become engaged in a process of consciously learning to apply the Teachings pertaining to growth and development within a framework for action that evolves through the experience of the friends and the guidance of the House of Justice. The rise in capacity for engaging in this process of learning is evident in characteristics that are increasingly manifest in the Bahá’í community: maintaining a humble posture of learning, whether celebrating successes or persevering in the face of obstacles and setbacks; strengthening Bahá’í identity while preserving an orientation welcoming to all; and acting in ever-wider spheres of endeavour while continuing to foster an approach to the work of the Cause that is systematic and coherent. In thousands of clusters, growing numbers of people have come to view themselves as protagonists in the acquisition, generation, and application of knowledge for their own development and progress. They are engaging in discussions as families, friends, and acquaintances on elevated spiritual themes and matters of social import; initiating activities that shape a pattern of life distinguished by its devotional character; providing education for young people and increasing their capacity for service; and contributing to the material and social progress of their communities. They are empowered to contribute to the betterment of their local community and to the world as a whole. As they think and act in this way, they have gained a deeper appreciation of the purpose of religion itself.”

(28 November 2023 to the Bahá’ís of the World – Universal House of Justice)

“Involvement at all these levels of society becomes more pressing as the process of the disintegration of the old world order intensifies and discourse becomes increasingly coarsened and polarized, leading to the recrudescence of conflict among the competing factions and ideologies that divide humanity. In keeping with their understanding that the transformation envisioned by Bahá’u’lláh calls for the participation of everyone, Bahá’ís seek to work with the many sympathetic individuals and organizations who pursue common objectives. In such collaborative efforts, the friends share insights from the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh as well as practical lessons gained in their own community-building efforts, while at the same time learning from the experience of their collaborating partners. In working with individuals, communities, and organizations both civic and governmental, the friends maintain awareness that the discourse on many social issues may become contentious or entangled with political ambitions. In all settings where Bahá’ís become more deeply engaged with the wider society, they seek to foster consensus and unity of thought, and to promote collaboration and a common search for solutions to humanity’s pressing problems. To them, the means by which the end is attained is as important as the end itself.”

(28 November 2023 to the Bahá’ís of the World – Universal House of Justice)

“At its heart, the challenge presented by the interplay of the processes of integration and disintegration is the challenge of holding fast to Bahá’u’lláh’s description of reality and to His teachings, while resisting the pull of controversial and polarizing debates and beguiling prescriptions that reflect futile attempts to define human identity and social reality through limited human conceptions, materialist philosophies, and competing passions. “The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy”, Bahá’u’lláh states. “We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions.” Yet, He adds, “They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices.” If Bahá’ís become entangled in the delusory notions of contending peoples, if they emulate the values, attitudes, and practices that define a self-absorbed and self-serving age, the release of those forces necessary to redeem humanity from its plight will be delayed and obstructed. Rather, as the Guardian explains, “The champion builders of Bahá’u’lláh’s rising World Order must scale nobler heights of heroism as humanity plunges into greater depths of despair, degradation, dissension, and distress. Let them forge ahead into the future serenely confident that the hour of their mightiest exertions and the supreme opportunity for their greatest exploits must coincide with the apocalyptic upheaval marking the lowest ebb in mankind’s fast-declining fortunes.”

(28 November 2023 to the Bahá’ís of the World – Universal House of Justice)

“He promised, however, that the time would come when they would be called upon to engage their fellow citizens in a process of working for the healing and betterment of their nation. That time has now come. And it has come not only for the Bahá’ís of America, but for the Bahá’ís of the world, as the society-building power inherent in the Faith is released in ever-greater measures.

“Releasing such power has implications for the decades to come. Every people and every nation has a part to play in the next stage in the fundamental reconstruction of human society. All have unique insights and experiences to offer for the building of a unified world. And it is the responsibility of the friends, as the bearers of Bahá’u’lláh’s restorative message, to assist populations to release their latent potentialities to achieve their highest aspirations. In this effort, the friends share this precious message with others, strive to demonstrate the efficacy of the divine remedy in the lives of individuals and communities, and work together with all those who appreciate and share the same values and aspirations. As they do so, Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of a unified world will offer a hopeful and clear direction to peoples whose perception has been distorted by the confusion prevailing in the world, and a constructive path for cooperation in the search for solutions to long-standing social maladies. As the spirit of the Faith increasingly permeates the hearts to enkindle love and reinforce the shared identity of humanity as one people, it instils a sense of loyal and conscientious civic responsibility and, in place of the pursuit of worldly power, redirects energies towards disinterested service in the pursuit of the common good. Populations increasingly adopt the method of

consultation, action, and reflection to displace endless contest and conflict. Individuals, communities, and institutions across diverse societies increasingly harmonize their efforts in common purpose to overcome sectarian rivalries, and spiritual and moral qualities foundational to humanity's progress and well-being take root in human character and social practice.

"The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. As the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh advances into the second century of the Formative Age, let all take inspiration from the words of the beloved Guardian, whose guiding hand immutably shaped the century past. Writing in 1938 about the execution of the first stage of the Divine Plan, he said: 'The potentialities with which an almighty Providence has endowed it will no doubt enable its promoters to achieve their purpose. Much, however, will depend upon the spirit and manner in which that task will be conducted. Through the clearness and steadiness of their vision, through the unvitiated vitality of their belief, through the incorruptibility of their character, through the adamant force of their resolve, the matchless superiority of their aims and purpose, and the unsurpassed range of their accomplishments, they who labour for the glory of the Most Great Name ... can best demonstrate to the visionless, faithless, and restless society to which they belong their power to proffer a haven of refuge to its members in the hour of their realized doom. Then and only then will this tender sapling, embedded in the fertile soil of a Divinely appointed Administrative Order, and energized by the dynamic processes of its institutions, yield its richest and destined fruit'."

(28 November 2023 to the Bahá'ís of the World – Universal House of Justice)

Exercise for the group:

- 1) Identify together some advances at the level of culture that have already arisen from community-building endeavours.
- 2) The House of Justice has indicated in this year's Ridván Message that "the urgency of the present hour must not obscure the special joy that comes from service. The call to service is an uplifting, all-embracing summons. It attracts every faithful soul, even those weighed down by cares and obligations." Together in your group identify some of the sweetest moments that can be experienced in working alongside others "tending to a society in need of spiritual nourishment."

Additional extracts for personal study

Extracts from 28 November 2023 message from the Universal House of Justice – “Reflections on the first century of the Formative Age”

“History has amply demonstrated that religion can serve either as a powerful instrument for cooperation to propel the advancement of civilization, or as a source of conflict that yields incalculable harm. The unifying and civilizing power of religion begins to decline as the followers come to disagree on the meaning and application of the divine teachings, and the community of the faithful eventually becomes divided into contending sects and denominations. The purpose of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation is to establish the oneness of humanity and unite all peoples, and this last and highest stage in the evolution of society cannot be achieved if the Bahá’í Faith succumbs to the malady of sectarianism and the dilution of the divine Message witnessed in the past. If Bahá’ís “cannot unite around one point”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá observes, “how will they be able to bring about the unity of mankind?” And He affirms: “Today the dynamic power of the world of existence is the power of the Covenant which like unto an artery pulsateth in the body of the contingent world and protecteth Bahá’í unity.”

“Foremost among the achievements of the past century is the victory of the Covenant, which both protected the Faith from division and propelled it to embrace and contribute to the empowerment of all peoples and nations. Bahá’u’lláh’s penetrating question that lies at the heart of religion—“Where shalt thou secure the cord of thy faith and fasten the tie of thine obedience?”—takes on a new and vital significance for those who recognize Him as the Manifestation of God for this Day. It is a call for firmness in the Covenant. The response of the Bahá’í community has been unyielding adherence to the provisions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament. Unlike relationships of worldly power in which a sovereign entity compels obedience, the relationship between the Manifestation of God and the believers, and between the authority designated by the Covenant and the community, is governed by conscious knowledge and love. In recognizing Bahá’u’lláh, a believer enters voluntarily into His Covenant as an act of free conscience and, out of love for Him, remains steadfast in adherence to its requirements.”

“Over a century, then, the Covenant established by Bahá’u’lláh and perpetuated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was attacked in various ways by internal and external opponents, but ultimately to no avail. While, each time, some individuals were misled or became disaffected, the attacks failed to divert or redefine the Cause or to make a permanent breach in the community. In each instance, by turning to the designated centre of authority at the time—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Guardian, or the Universal House of Justice—questions were answered and problems resolved. As the body of believers grew in its understanding of and firmness in the Covenant, it learned to become impervious to the types of attacks and misrepresentations...”

“Beyond its perpetuation of the Covenant, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament laid the foundation for another of the most significant achievements of the first century of the Formative Age: the emergence and development of the Administrative Order, the child of the

Covenant. In a single century, the administration, which began with a focus on the establishment of elected institutions, grew in breadth and complexity, unfolding throughout the world until it linked all peoples, countries, and regions. The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá that called these institutions into being also provide the vision and spiritual mandate for these institutions to assist humanity in constructing a just and peaceful world."

"In order to prevent the contest of competing ideologies, He set out the means for cooperation in the search for truth and the pursuit of human well-being. In place of the quest for power over others, He introduced arrangements that would cultivate the individual's latent powers and their expression in service to the common good. Trustworthiness, truthfulness, rectitude of conduct, forbearance, love, and unity are among the spiritual qualities that form the basis of association between the three protagonists of a new way of life, while efforts for social advancement are all shaped by Bahá'u'lláh's vision of the oneness of humanity."

"Today, although the administration has not yet reached its full maturity, the system inaugurated by Bahá'u'lláh evinces a new pattern of interactions and a marked dynamism in the relationships among the three protagonists as they engage in the common purpose of working for the organic development of the Faith and the betterment of the world. In the company of like-minded co-workers and in the various settings of study, of reflection, and of numerous other social interactions, individuals express their views and seek out the truth through a process of consultation, without insisting upon the correctness of their own ideas. Together, they read the reality of their surroundings, explore the depths of available guidance, draw relevant insights from the Teachings and from accumulating experience, create cooperative and spiritually uplifting environments, build capacity, and initiate action that grows in effectiveness and complexity over time. They attempt to differentiate those areas of activity in which the individual can best exercise initiative from those which fall to the institutions alone, and with heart and soul they welcome the guidance and direction of their institutions."

"Experience and insight are shared throughout the world, from the grassroots to the international level. The pattern of life created by this dynamic engagement encompasses millions of souls from all walks of life, animated by Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a united world. In country after country, it has drawn the attention of parents, educators, traditional leaders, officials, and leaders of thought to the power of His system to address the world's pressing needs. Naturally, not every community exhibits the characteristics of the most advanced; indeed, in Bahá'í history this has ever been so. Nevertheless, the appearance of new capacities in any one place signals an evident advance and serves as an augury that others will surely follow in that path."

"Early in his ministry, Shoghi Effendi, cognizant of the vital importance of making known to the peoples and leaders of the world the insights and wisdom enshrined in the Bahá'í teachings, fostered initiatives for this purpose. These included, among others, the opening in 1925 of a Bahá'í information bureau in Geneva, the publication of the volumes of *The Bahá'í World*, and the call for knowledgeable Bahá'ís to correlate the Teachings with contemporary thought in relation to the manifold pressing problems of the world. After the founding of the United Nations, the Bahá'í International Community was established in 1948 as a non-governmental organization representing Bahá'í communities throughout the world and became increasingly

engaged in aspects of the work of that international body. This opened a new chapter in the Faith's continuing relationship with governments, global institutions, and agencies of civil society in the international sphere. While never allowing this area of endeavour to overshadow the primary importance of the teaching work, the Guardian encouraged the friends to acquaint the wider society with the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. "Collateral to this process of reinforcing the fabric of the Administrative Order and of widening its basis," he wrote to one national community, "a resolute attempt should be made" for the establishment of closer contact with, among others, "the leaders of public thought". Stressing association rather than affiliation, and urging the believers to remain untainted by any participation in political affairs, he encouraged them to engage with kindred organizations concerned with social issues and to acquaint them with the aims and purposes of the Faith and the nature of its teachings on such matters as the establishment of world peace."

"Over a quarter century this process of learning about growth gave rise to a range of concepts, instruments, and approaches which continually enhanced the community's evolving framework for action. Among the most prominent of these features was the creation of a network of training institutes—offering educational programmes for children, junior youth, and youth and adults—for empowering the friends in large numbers and enabling them to enhance their capabilities for service. Another was the construct of clusters, which facilitated the systematization of the teaching work in manageable geographic areas through the initiation and gradual strengthening of programmes of growth, and accelerated the spread and development of the Faith within each country and across the world. Within such programmes of growth, a new pattern of community life emerged, beginning with the multiplication of four core activities that served as portals for the entry of large numbers, combined with a range of other efforts, including individual and collective teaching, visiting homes, hosting social gatherings, observing Feast and Holy Days, administering community affairs, and promoting activities for social and economic development—all of which together would effect a change in the spiritual character of the community and strengthen social ties among individuals and families."

NOTES

NOTES