



GLOBAL PROSPERITY BULLETIN

Bahá'í International Community

April 2008

Note from the United Nations Office



Dear Friends,

Please accept the warmest greetings from the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office. As you are aware, the subject of global prosperity is one of the four thematic areas outlined in the External Affairs Strategy by the Universal House of Justice. The Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office feels it is timely to advance the work in this area and hopes the launch of the statement entitled "Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One" will be of great assistance to the work of National Spiritual Assemblies and their appropriate offices in this area. To assist you further in your endeavors we have created a bulletin to share news on the work of Bahá'í communities around the world and the United Nations office. We plan to also provide highlights of events and developments from the international arena with regard to social and sustainable development.

We have a lot to share with you in this issue! We hope this bulletin will be a useful resource. Please feel free to share it with those you work with in your external affairs efforts, as well as those in the Bahá'í community. We look forward to hearing from you about your various activities and any suggestions you may have.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Tahirih Naylor
Representative

Baha'i International Community issues statement on poverty eradication

NEW YORK
15 February 2008 (BWNS)

A new statement from the Baha'i International Community calls for a coherent, principle-based approach to the eradication of global poverty.

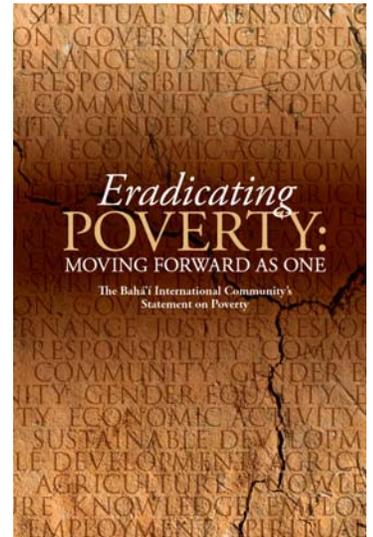
BIC representatives introduced the statement, "Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One," yesterday at a luncheon held at their offices across from the United Nations. About 40 representatives from various non-governmental organizations and UN agencies gathered for the presentation.

Tahirih Naylor, a representative of the BIC to the United Nations, said the statement was released to coincide with the 46th Commission for Social Development at the United Nations, which runs 6-15 February 2008. "This year, the Commission is focusing on the themes of promoting full employment and decent work for all," said Ms. Naylor. "These are important aspects of poverty eradication, but we wanted to advocate a more coherent approach, one that looks at the wide range of issues that must be addressed in an integrated way if global poverty is to be eliminated."

The statement calls on both institutions and individuals internationally to put essential moral principles, such as unity and justice, first. It recasts the underlying nature of poverty, saying it "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." The statement also examines a number of specific topical areas where poverty alleviation efforts can be most effectively focused. These include leadership and governance, human rights, gender, sustainable development, agriculture, employment, individual responsibility, education, and religion.

Those gathered for the presentation were addressed by Nikhil Seth, from the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and Julia Berger, senior researcher and writer for the Baha'i International Community.

Mr. Seth said the statement's "key message is that solidarity of action is what we need. If we can galvanize that spirit, we'll have won the battle." Mr. Seth, who is director of the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination at DESA, shared his experience in developing nations, including his native India, and recommended an additional focus



on country-specific solutions. "Generic solutions are not sufficient," he said, noting that land issues and culture play strong roles. "A community-specific analysis is needed to tackle poverty."



Among those present at the 14 February 2008 presentation of the statement "Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One" were, from left, Bani Dugal, principal representative of the Baha'i International Community to the United Nations; Nikhil Seth, director of the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination and special assistant and chief of office to the undersecretary in the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Julia Berger, senior researcher and writer at the BIC; and Tahirih Naylor, a BIC representative to the U.N.

Mr. Seth also stressed the related problem of hunger. "The problem of malnourishment requires a whole different set of interventions," he said, saying that in his country more than 40 percent of children under 5 are malnourished. Mr. Seth also noted that international agencies sometimes place too much emphasis on measuring poverty rather than doing something about it. "Macroeconomic aggregates do not really capture the indignities of poverty the way your statement has done so beautifully," he said.

Ms. Berger said that the issue of poverty is inextricably linked to other complex factors such as human rights, development, and environmental circumstances. It is a positive indication, she said, that the UN community is beginning to realize the interconnectedness of all these factors and focusing on ways to formulate an integrated approach. "Not to overstate the case, but the change in thought required to get to this point is like the Copernican revolution of recognizing that the earth revolves around the sun, and not the other way around," Ms. Berger said.

Ms. Naylor said the statement was initially drafted in response to a call from the UN Human Rights Council for a consultation on "draft guiding principles" to help focus the discussion on the link between human rights and extreme poverty. As part of that process, the BIC contacted selected members of the Baha'i community

around the world and asked them to organize discussions on poverty and human rights involving individuals from the local level. "These discussions took place in six countries - - Brazil, Guyana, Haiti, India, Namibia and Turkey -- and the consultations there provided first-hand experiences and impressions from individuals who are most affected by poverty."

Multi-Country Consultations on Poverty and Human Rights

After five years of research and drafting, an expert working group under the former United Nations Sub Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (SCHR) in Geneva released on 11 September 2006 a draft that outlines certain guiding principles in regards to the unique relationship between human rights and poverty. Human Rights Council requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to "circulate the draft guiding principles, in order to obtain the views of States, relevant United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations treaties bodies, special procedures including the independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations, especially those in which people in situations of extreme poverty express their views, and other relevant stakeholders, and to report to the Council at its seventh session."

The Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office conducted informal consultations with Bahá'í communities in six different countries, including Brazil,



Guyana, Haiti, India, Namibia, and Turkey. During the consultations, those living in poverty were encouraged to express their perspectives on human rights and extreme poverty. Participants described poverty as a state of mind, a "violation of human rights and an utter injustice", and stressed their own willingness to participate in the eradication of poverty. Summaries of these consultations are available at www.bic.org.

These consultations resulted in the BIC's comment on the Draft Guiding Principles, also available at www.bic.org. In the BIC's comments on the guiding principles, the United Nations was encouraged to expand its definition of poverty

by casting poverty as a problem for all of humanity, not just for the poor; and by acknowledging a 'meaning' and 'purpose' dimension that is central to human life. Along with the deprivation of resources and opportunities, poverty was described primarily in non-material terms: among the economically disadvantaged, it was described as "a state of mind"; the degree to which a person is unaware of her potential and of "what her dignity might be"; the deprivation of the capacity to reflect on one's own condition; a lack of knowledge; and as the lack of capacity to claim one's rights. Among the economically advantaged, participants described a "poverty of the spirit" – a blindness to the needs of those living next to us; a loss of "capacity to be indignant, to be ashamed" of the surrounding "wretched conditions" and "absolute penury." Being "wealthy" was not only characterized as improving one's own condition but also helping others to survive, to live in dignity, with a view to promoting the well-being of all mankind.

For more information, please refer to the resources provided on the BIC website, www.bic.org.

National Reports on the Commemoration of October 17th

The Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office received exciting reports from external affairs representatives on the initiatives they took to commemorate October 17th, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Here are excerpts from a few reports:



Brazil

The Office of External Affairs and the Human Rights Commission of the Federal Chamber of Brazil broadcast a televised discussion on the eradication of poverty,

after the seminar on the same issue held at the Bahá'í National Centre on June 16th 2007.

Three Bahá'í representatives participated in the debate along with two Federal Deputies, a member of the Council on the Rights of the Black Population and two men who live in the streets of Brasília. The programme was broadcast on October 17th, will also be shown on future dates and is available online.



Canada

The Bahá'í Community of Canada issued a press release for the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, presenting

the consultations and comment of the Bahá'í International Community on human rights and extreme poverty. The press release welcomed the submission of the BIC to the Human Rights Council on the subject. The release quoted Ms. Karen Mckye, Secretary-General of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada as saying: "The linking of poverty reduction to human rights and justice, rather than to charity, provides an important framework for any effort to address this global scourge, in Canada or elsewhere."



France

In Paris, where the main celebration for October 17th is held every year, the NSA of France was represented in a gathering with

other NGOs and associations. A Bahá'í representative also attended the three debates on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights organized on the same day in Paris. Following October 17th, the NSA planned to send a letter to the main NGO coordinating the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in France (ATD Fourth World). External affairs representatives also planned to make an appointment with ATD Fourth World's President to share the Bahá'í perspective on extreme poverty and human rights. The NSA of France planned to share the BIC perspective, with a press release sent to national newspapers, an article on its website and a radio broadcast. The NSA will provide Bahá'ís in local communities with information on global prosperity through the Nineteen Day Feast Letter, the official French Baha'í website and magazine, urging the local communities to act with other local organizations and integrate this International Day into their core activities.



Greece

For the first time external affairs representatives sent the BIC comment on human rights and extreme poverty to over 400 Greek NGOs by email. According to a

search of the internet thereafter, five web sites had published the BIC's comment.



Tonga

The National Spiritual Assembly asked its National Youth Committee to host a special program for the International Day

for the Eradication of Poverty. A public meeting was prepared with two invited speakers: the Director of the Department of Youth and Sport and a Bahá'í who presented the BIC's comment on human rights and extreme poverty. The program consisted of devotions,

speeches, and artistic performances prepared specially on the theme. A junior youth gave a talk on the Baha'i view of the subject with quotations from Baha'u'llah and Abdul-Bahá. The program was well received and approximately 70 people attended. The Media Committee also prepared a 15-minute radio program on the subject based on the BIC document and it was aired on October 17th.



Uganda

External affairs representatives circulated the document to Members of Parliament and several civil society organizations.

The Bahá'í International Community Participates in CSocD

The Commission on Social Development (CSocD) is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. Since the convening of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, the Commission has been the key United Nations body in charge of the follow-up and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. It meets once a year in New York, usually in February. Each year the Commission has taken up key social development themes as part of its follow-up to the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit.

The Bahá'í International Community (BIC) participated in the Forty-Sixth Session of the CSocD held in New York, from 6-15 February 2008. This year the Commission followed-up the first of its two-year action-oriented implementation cycles on "promoting full employment and decent work for all," aiming to devise policy options and practical measures that States could use to implement internationally agreed goals for full employment and productive work. This session dealt with employment, aging, disability and youth, with discussions focused squarely on 'jobless growth'. Many delegations expressed the belief that jobless growth is a phenomenon that is becoming more pronounced as world economies expand but fail to generate enough decent employment to lift people out of extreme poverty.

Based on the recent statement entitled "Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One" the Bahá'í International Community prepared and delivered an oral intervention to the CSocD. The statement highlighted the purpose of employment as a means to secure an individual's and family's basic needs, but also as a channel to developing one's craft, refining one's character, and contributing to the welfare and progress of society.

The BIC contributed to different phases of the Commission's development by playing a central role in the planning of NGO involvement in the Commission. The Civil Society Forum, co-sponsored by the department of Economic and Social Affairs and the NGO Committee on Social Development, was held one day prior to the Commission on 5 February 2008. Civil Society Forums aim to promote cooperation among civil society organizations in different fields of activity worldwide; to facilitate cooperation between organizations of civil society and the United Nations system, including its specialized agencies and other international organizations; and to create a space for



"Full Employment and Decent Work for All: Where Are the Youth?" Panel presentation during the Commission for Social Development at which Bahá'í International Community delegate Mr. Neissan Besharati presented.

dialogue between different stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, the UN and other international organizations, governments and the private sector. This year, the Forum's theme was "Making Copenhagen Work: Decent Work, For a Decent Life." A representative of the BIC served on the Executive Committee of the NGO Committee for Social Development and the Civil Society Forum Task Force to organize the program and logistics of the Civil Society Forum, coordinate daily briefings for NGOs and facilitate NGO input to the Commission.

During the Commission, Mr. Neissan Besharati was invited to be a presenter at a side event entitled: "Full Employment and Decent Work for All: Where Are the Youth?" The Bahá'í International Community co-hosted this event with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Programme on Youth and the Christian Children's Fund. Mr. Besharati's presentation, largely inspired by the Bahá'í International Community's recent statement entitled "Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One", was very well received by the representatives of government, United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations present.

The youth delegate to the Commission, Mr. Nadim Sobhani actively contributed to the oral statement produced by the youth participants and co-presented it at the Commission.

You can read more about the BIC's involvement at the Commission as well as read the BIC's oral intervention at: www.bic.org

Bahá'í International Community Involvement at CSD 15

The Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) is designed to offer an open and participatory intergovernmental process on sustainability issues and is responsible for reviewing progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, by providing policy guidance. CSD, a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, has 53 member States and is the high level forum for sustainable development within the United Nations system.

The Fifteenth session of the Commission in 2007 was the policy year, of the second implementation cycle, and encompassed the following thematic areas: Energy for Sustainable Development, Industrial Development, Air Pollution/Atmosphere, and Climate Change.

At last year's Commission, the Bahá'í International Community (BIC), focused on the ethical dimensions of climate change—climate change being both a topical issue and the subject of continuing deliberations at the UN.

An official side event on "The Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change" sponsored by the BIC proved to be

the Mission of Tuvalu; former Deputy Assistant Director of UNEP and Bahá'í delegate to the CSD; a member of the UN Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Developing Islands; Professors of Columbia University and Penn State University; and the Fellowship Program Director of GreenFaith, an inter-faith environmental organization.

The response to this approach was overwhelming, with government delegates, UN staff and NGO colleagues expressing their appreciation to the BIC for initiating such a discussion at the Commission. Not only did individuals express their wish for the BIC to take a leadership role in the area, but the BIC was the only individual NGO asked to formally present to the European Union delegation and the daily newsletters of the Commission published major articles on the event.

With regard to the impact and outcomes of the panel, one of the audience members inquired if she could digitally record the panel, and did so, posting the presentation on "YouTube," a popular video-sharing website. To date, the video has been viewed over 3500 times. We estimate that over twenty other websites have picked up the video clips, many of which note that the panel was organized by the Bahá'í International Community. A number of blogs also posted video clips and references to the side event with enthusiastic endorsement.

Bahá'í delegates also actively participated in the activities of the Major Groups, which are civil society partners active in the Commission. The Bahá'ís worked closely with the



Panel Discussion "The Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change" from the left: Mr. Enele Sosene Sopoaga, former Ambassador of the Mission of Tuvalu; Mr. Om Pradhan, UN Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Developing Islands; Mr. Tony Barnston, Professor of the International Research Institute for Climate and Society of Columbia University; Ms. Tahirih Naylor, BIC Representative; Mr. Don Brown, Project Coordinator of the Collaborate Program on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change at the Rock Ethics Institute, Penn State University; Dr. Arthur Dahl, former Deputy Assistant Director of UNEP and Baha'í delegate at CSD; Rabbi Troster, Fellowship Program Director of GreenFaith.

highly effective in bringing the question of ethical principles to the Commission. The panel discussion was held on the first day of the Commission and attended by over 100 people. It was chaired by Ms. Tahirih Naylor, and included six panelists, including the former Ambassador of

NGO, children and youth, indigenous peoples, women's, and the science and technology Major Groups. Delegates worked with these groups to draft statements to be presented to the Commission and proposed lobbying points, with a focus on the ethical dimensions of the issues at stake.

Bahá'í delegates also approached and contacted various government representatives to propose amendments to the official outcome document of the Commission and to talk about the importance of the ethical and moral dimensions of sustainable development.

The Bahá'í International Community will continue to participate actively at this year's Commission, with a delegation comprised of individuals who can engage each of the Major Groups and contribute their expertise to the consideration of themes for 2008: agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa.



List of 2008 Events Related to Social and Sustainable Development

April 21- May 2:

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 7th Session

April 23 - 29:

Education for All Week

May 5- 16:

Commission on Sustainable Development
16th session, New York

June 20 -25:

Economic and Social Council, substantive session
New York

August 3 - 8:

International AIDS Conference - Mexico City

September 4:

Twenty-sixth Meeting of States Parties to the
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
New York

September 25:

Special United Nations Summit on the Millennium
Development Goals

October 16:

World Food Day

October 17:

International Day for Eradication of Poverty

December 1:

World AIDS Day

December 10:

Human Rights Day