

Creating a Universal Culture of Human Rights

Statement to the forty-fifth session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights

Agenda item 11: Further promotion and encouragement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the question of the programme and methods of work of the Commission; alternative approaches and ways and means within the United Nations system for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms; national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights

Geneva, Switzerland

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The Bahá'í International Community welcomes the creation by the General Assembly of a world-wide educational and public information Campaign for Human Rights. Moreover, we are eager to support it. In our view, it is the logical next step toward the creation of a stable, peaceful world.

The Secretary-General, in his report to the forty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights (document number E/CN.4/1989/21) has articulated, as a major objective of this campaign, the creation of a "universal culture of human rights." Rooted as it is in the recognition of the organic oneness of mankind, a "universal culture of human rights" would form the very foundation for a world in which all could feel safe and secure -- a world in which a violation of the rights of one would be felt as a violation of the rights of all.

If respect for the rights of all were assured, then the leaders of the world could move toward the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united.

We also welcome the World Campaign for Human Rights because the Bahá'í community has benefited directly from United Nations human rights legislation and its implementation machinery. Now, through the World Campaign for Human Rights, we can contribute to the United Nations what we and many other NGOs do best: education.

The time is ripe for a World Campaign for Human Rights. The world is coming to realize that progress demands cooperation. The global interrelatedness of communications, transportation, trade, and finance has become obvious. National leaders recognize more and more that their local problems are symptomatic of global problems. Increasingly groups of nations are formalizing relationships that allow them to collaborate in matters of mutual interest. Moreover, ordinary people all over the world, recognizing that no-one would escape the effects of a nuclear war, have rightly asserted that peace is everyone's concern.

We have come to understand, however, that peace demands more than the elimination of weapons. But what else? The Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states clearly one prerequisite for peace: (and I quote) "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." (end quote)

The United Nations has worked tirelessly for forty years to establish that foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world. The work begun with the adoption by the General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been carried forward by the creation of related instruments, spelling out the specific provisions for implementation. The General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights and the committees monitoring adherence to these measures must continue and expand their efforts to extend the influence of these instruments.

Now is the time to win the support of the generality of mankind for these standards of human conduct.

We welcome the efforts of both the Centre for Human Rights and the Department of Public Information to increase their cooperation with NGOs. These efforts will, no doubt, assist those involved with the United Nations human rights work to share with their constituencies and the public the universal nature of human rights and the importance of securing those rights for everyone.

We recommend, however, that the specialized agencies of the United Nations also find ways to participate in the Campaign. After all, each agency owes its mandate in one way or another to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. UNESCO is, among other things, promoting the right to education; UNICEF the rights of the child; ILO the right to work; FAO the right to food; and WHO the right to adequate health care. Each of these agencies could, as its contribution to the World Campaign for Human Rights, articulate the link between its efforts to assist the people of the world and their right to that assistance under the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In conjunction with all these efforts, we believe the cooperation of NGOs is essential if a "universal culture of human rights" is to reach all strata of society. The Bahá'í International Community is one such international organization which is uniquely motivated and qualified to assist in this campaign.

We are both motivated and qualified by our close involvement with the human rights work of the United Nations over the years. Members of the Bahá'í community have been protected by the actions of this Commission and the General Assembly in implementing the standards of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Bahá'í institutions have encouraged their governments to ratify the various Conventions; and the Bahá'í International Community has contributed to the process of setting standards.

More important, we bring to this work a long-standing commitment to kindling in individuals a devotion to human rights. In addition to promoting the work of the United Nations, we pledge to continue and to expand our efforts in over 20,000 communities world-wide to eliminate all forms of prejudice, to reduce the inordinate disparity between rich and poor, to achieve full equality between men and women, to promote religious tolerance, to nurture a sense of world citizenship and to contribute, thereby, to the creation of a "universal culture of human rights."

