



## The Role of Education, Media and the Arts in Social Development

*Comments on the Draft Declaration and Draft Programme of Action for Social Development (A/CONF.166/PC/L.13) presented at the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development.*

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### I. Education

Education -- formal, non-formal, and informal -- is indisputably the most effective way to shape the values, attitudes, behaviors and skills which will make it possible to function effectively in an integrated world society. The role of education in promoting social development, especially *social integration*, should, therefore, be addressed in a substantive manner in the *Declaration* and, most particularly, in the *Programme of Action*.

The details of educational programs and activities aimed at promoting social integration will vary a great deal from the local to the national and international levels. However, in our increasingly interdependent world, all programs and initiatives must have certain aspects in common. Among other things, they should

- teach *unity in diversity* as the foundation principle for social integration both for nations and for the world community;
- cultivate tolerance, love, brotherhood, equality, compassion, understanding, sacrifice, humility, and an active commitment to justice;
- nurture an appreciation for the richness and importance of the world's diverse cultural, religious and social systems, in as much as they contribute to social integration, justice and unity;
- build on the country's positive efforts and highlight its tangible successes with social integration, including models of racial, religious, national and ethnic unity;
- have at their heart the moral development of the individual, emphasizing virtue as the foundation for actions that foster individual and collective spiritual and material well-being;
- convey an understanding of the rights and corresponding responsibilities of all people;
- be free of stereotyping based on religion, culture, gender, race, class, nationality and ethnicity;
- raise genuine support at the grass roots for the work of the United Nations by emphasizing the importance of the UN in promoting global cooperation and understanding; explaining its universal goals, objectives and programs; demonstrating its immediate relevance to the peoples and nations of the world; and clarifying the role that it must increasingly assume in our ever-contracting world; and
- foster an ethic of service to the entire human race, including one's family, neighbors, community, and nation; and provide the practical means for its expression in the education process through service-oriented programs.

The values, attitudes, and skills taught through the various educational programs must also be translated into action. As one concrete means of doing this, the Bahá'í International Community strongly supports a form of *Youth Volunteer Service to the Community*, such as that suggested in the draft *Programme of Action* (A/CONF.166/PC/L.13, #199), and recommends that it be adopted by the World Summit for Social Development. If properly organized and initiated, and if universally accessible, such a *Youth Service* would offer a very important means of putting into action the ideal of service to humanity and preparing youth for a lifetime of active concern for others. *Youth Service* would also enable young people to gain a first-hand knowledge of the world. Such an experience will help them see beyond the differences -- whether cultural, religious, social, ethnic or national -- that divide and recognize the commonalities that unite the world's diverse peoples.

Illustrative experiences from *Youth Service* could be incorporated into curricula, and role models -- youth, with humility, struggling to learn and serve -- could be highlighted in courses. Not only would this help make *Youth Service* known to future participants, but it would also provide inspirational stories of youth, discovering their common humanity, breaking down barriers to understanding, and building a world of peace and justice.

A special committee or working group should be set up to develop both guidelines for promoting social integration, based on the principle of *unity in diversity*, and proposals for incorporating this principle into existing formal and non-formal educational programs. This committee/working group might begin by analyzing the proposals found in such documents as UNESCO's 1974 *Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*; UNESCO's 1993 *World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy*; and the Bahá'í International Community's *World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development*.

## II. Public Awareness: the Role of Media and the Arts

The *Declaration* and the *Programme of Action* should call for public awareness campaigns to focus attention on the challenges of social integration and promote the principle of *unity in diversity*. These campaigns should make use of the arts and the full range of media, including television, video, film, radio, electronic networks, books, magazines, posters, flyers, theater and music. They should enlist the support of the advertising and entertainment industries, the media -- both traditional and non-traditional -- the entire UN system, all member states, NGOs, and popular personalities. They should reach homes, the work place, public areas and schools. The guidelines recommended above for educational programs would also serve these campaigns for social integration.

The media have both a powerful influence on people's attitudes and perceptions and a weighty responsibility to contribute to social integration. Currently, a great deal of media attention is focussed on the seemingly insurmountable differences that divide peoples and nations, and little attention is given to evidence that these differences can be overcome. A serious, global discourse must be undertaken to explore the use of existing and rapidly emerging media technologies to foster hope and promote social integration and development. The media have a responsibility to help people understand that diversity, often a source of conflict, can also be a powerful resource for social development. An important beginning would be to eliminate stereotyping based on religion, culture, gender, race, class, nationality and ethnicity from media programming. Then by focussing on constructive, unifying and cooperative undertakings, the media could demonstrate humanity's capacity to work together to meet the enormous challenges facing it.

The media should highlight the importance and honor of serving humankind. Through service, the essential principles of social integration -- including compassion, tolerance, love, understanding, sacrifice, humility, and commitment to justice -- are manifested in society. Not only does service provide immediate benefits to the community, but it also creates bonds of solidarity and common purpose among those involved. According to the Bahá'í Writings, peace, justice and security will only be firmly established in the world when all people "*become united and coordinated in service to the world of humanity.*"

*Unity in diversity*, the foundation principle for social integration, could also be promoted -- internationally, nationally and locally -- through the holding of contests and the presentation of awards by the popular media, schools, civic organizations and governments. The services of the advertising industry should also be enlisted to promote the fundamental values of social development.

### III. Conclusion

Each country should be encouraged to earmark resources for promoting social integration through the foundation principle of *unity in diversity*. Consideration should also be given to including the promotion of this principle among the indicators of social development. Countries could, for example, be encouraged to report efforts to foster tolerance, understanding and appreciation of other cultures, equality of the sexes, the concept of one human family, and service to the community, the nation and the world.

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