



Global Action Plan for Social Development

Contribution to the first substantive session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations World Summit for Social Development

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On the threshold of the new millennium, the drive toward world unity has become one of the dominant, pervasive features of life on the planet. Perceptibly now, a global consciousness is emerging. Increasing numbers of people are becoming convinced that constructing a peaceful and just planetary society is not only possible, but, in fact, essential to humanity's very survival.

At the same time, significant sections of the world community -- including many social theorists, economists, and religious and secular leaders -- cling to the view that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a peaceful and progressive, world-embracing social order. Such a cynical view of human nature, with its attendant attitudes and behaviors, has contributed enormously to the ills plaguing society today, including poverty, unemployment, social strife, over-consumption, chauvinistic nationalism, war, and moral and spiritual apathy.¹

If the World Summit for Social Development is to "lay the foundations of the work of the United Nations in the social development sphere for generations to come," as the United Nations Secretary-General has² it must recognize both of these world-views, understanding that while the former provides the inspiration and impetus for unprecedented social progress, the latter only encourages suspicion and division.

Fresh thinking and a unified spirit must be brought to bear on the Summit's core issues. Appeals to narrow material and national self-interest, from whatever quarter they may be raised and however they may be couched, must not be allowed to derail the Summit process. Constant vigilance will be required.

To move beyond parochialism and particularism will necessitate bold initiatives and unprecedented courage on the part of the Preparatory Committee (PREPCOM). The responsibility to foster the well-being of all members of a society³ -- the basic tenet of modern social welfare -- must now be expanded to include all the peoples of the earth. Only by embracing the principle of the oneness of humanity can the PREPCOM ensure that deliberations throughout the preparatory process will center on the well-being of the entire human family, there by extending the concept of social welfare beyond national boundaries to the whole world.⁴ We, therefore, urge the PREPCOM to make the principle of the oneness of humanity the "central unifying theme of the Summit,"⁵ to explore its ramifications for the peoples and nations of the earth, and to translate it into workable programs and practical commitments.⁶

The oneness of humanity, with its corollary of unity in diversity, is applicable both to the peoples and to the nations of the world.⁷ It is a practical, indeed, essential standard for ordering humankind's collective life on the planet. The oneness of humanity is at once a statement of principle and the ultimate goal of human existence. It implies more than a willingness to cooperate; it speaks to the longing of people everywhere for a world infused with such a spirit of community, fellowship and compassion that human misery and degradation, violence and oppression will become intolerable and eventually unthinkable. In such a world, peace, social and economic justice, prosperity and liberty will become the order of the day. The growing acceptance of the oneness of humanity is the single most powerful force impelling the world toward unity.

In our increasingly interdependent world, it is no longer possible for a people or a nation to achieve lasting prosperity at the expense of other peoples and nations. Thus, real progress on the Summit's core issues -- achieving durable social integration, alleviating the root causes of poverty, and expanding sustainable productive employment -- can only be achieved through those strategies and actions that foster unity both within and among the nations of the world.⁸ A strong commitment to the principle of the oneness of humanity will greatly assist the PREPCOM in crafting an effective "global strategy and action-plan"⁹ to address these core issues.

Undoubtedly, a significant component of this global strategy and action-plan will be education and training programs. These programs must promote the principle of the oneness of humanity and nurture an understanding of the inexorable, albeit turbulent, progress of civilization toward global integration and world unity.¹⁰ Only as the peoples of the planet embrace this principle and discern in the vast changes sweeping society the signs of integration, will they develop a sense of confidence about the future, be willing to sacrifice for the common good, and be empowered to play an active, constructive role in the local, the national and, ultimately, the world community. The capacity to think globally is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for the social and economic development of every nation and people. For in such a global consciousness are rooted the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function effectively in our rapidly integrating world.

The Bahá'í International Community, therefore, urges the PREPCOM to reject the justifications of narrow material and national self-interest and adopt the oneness of humanity as the moral and ethical touchstone for the proposed global strategy and action-plan for social development. Embracing such a unifying principle will facilitate both the discovery and the implementation of enduring solutions to the overwhelming social development problems facing the Summit. For only as the peoples of the world come to view the planet as one home and all its inhabitants as one people, will the vision, moral integrity and commitment necessary to address the complex challenges of social development emerge. Then and only then will humankind be able to erect a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet. Addressing our age, Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "*Glory not in love*

Notes

1. The "poverty of values" and the "sense of insecurity and uncertainty" that were brought to the attention of the High Level Ministerial Segment of the Economic and Social Council (E/1993/102, # 5) are indisputable results of this world-view.
2. From the message from the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali delivered to the organizational session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development on 12 April 1993.
3. This principle has been applied, with varying degrees of success, by nations across the planet. (See, for example, A/CONF.166/PC/6, #23.)
4. The PREPCOM's commitment to fostering "a new vision of development for all societies focused on the needs of the people" (E/1993/102, # 1) would be supported by adopting the oneness of humanity as the foundation principle for that vision.
5. E/1993/77, # 86.
6. The Report of the Expert Meeting on Social Integration, the Hague, #66 (Netherlands, 27 September-1 October 1993), asserts that there "is a pressing need for the world community to recognize its common heritage and future and to act on the basis of mutual respect and a sense of shared responsibility for the dignity of all the people of the world."
7. E/1993/77, # 80 affirms that the "UN system still needs to confront a range of questions relating to the notion of unity in diversity;" and the Report of the Expert Meeting on Social Integration, #29, suggests that "we cannot conceive of successful integration as anything but based on the acceptance of diversity and pluralism."
8. This point is made in several places in the preparatory documents, for example: "the promotion of solidarity within and between countries for the purpose of combating deprivation and exclusion ... a recognition by the nations of the world that all have a common interest in each other's social progress and social stability" (E/1993/77, # 86); and "globalization -- or the mounting interdependence, throughout the world, of trends, problems, modes of behaviour and decisions -- is another feature of the evolution of contemporary societies" (A/CONF.166/PC/6, # 19).
9. E/1993/77, # 86. This global strategy and action-plan -- along with a Summit Declaration expressing "principles, orientations and objectives for social development" -- is recommended in the Report of the Secretary-General (A/CONF.166/PC/6, # 163-169). It is also referred to by the Chair of the Preparatory Committee, Ambassador Juan Somavia, as an "Agenda for People" (speech to the Third Committee, 21 October 1993). Likewise, the High Level Ministerial Segment of the Economic and Social Council, (E/1993/102, # 8) furthers this idea by suggesting that the "Summit could adopt a political declaration defining the critical nature of the social crisis together with a global strategy and a plan of action for translating shared values into practical and doable programs and commitments;" and the Report of the North South Roundtable Session (The United Nations and the Bretton Woods Institutions: New Challenges for the 21st Century, September 1993) recommends that the World Summit approve a "World Social Charter."
10. For a more detailed exploration of education programs and public awareness campaigns incorporating this principle, see World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development by the Bahá'í International Community.

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