

The Prosperity of Humankind (Oral Statement)

Oral statement presented to the plenary of the United Nations World Summit on Social Development.

Vienna, Austria

6 March 1995

Mr. Chairperson, distinguished delegates and representatives, the Bahá'í International Community welcomes the opportunity to address the Plenary of the World Summit for Social Development on the topic of the prosperity of humankind.

To an extent unimaginable a decade ago, the ideal of world peace is taking on form and substance. Obstacles that long seemed immovable have collapsed in humanity's path; apparently irreconcilable conflicts have begun to surrender to processes of consultation and resolution; a willingness to counter military aggression through unified international action is emerging. The effect has been to awaken in both the masses of humanity and many world leaders a degree of hopefulness about the future of our planet that had been nearly extinguished.

Throughout the world, immense intellectual and spiritual energies are seeking expression, energies whose gathering pressure is in direct proportion to the frustrations of recent decades. Everywhere the signs multiply that the earth's peoples yearn for an end to conflict and to the suffering and ruin from which no land is any longer immune. The effort of will required to overcome the remaining barriers that block realization of the age-old dream of global peace cannot be summoned up merely by appeals for action against the countless ills afflicting society. It must be galvanized by a vision of prosperity in the fullest sense of the term -- an awakening to the possibilities of the spiritual and material well-being of all the planet's inhabitants.

The next stage in the advancement of civilization will require a searching reexamination of the prevailing beliefs about the nature and purpose of the development process and the roles of its various protagonists. The task of creating a global development strategy that will accelerate humanity's coming-of-age constitutes a challenge to reshape fundamentally all the institutions of society. In the crafting and implementation of such a strategy, the following concepts are of critical importance.

- Development policy and programs must be based on an unconditioned recognition of the oneness of humankind, a commitment to justice as the organizing principle of society, and a determination to exploit to the utmost the possibilities that a systematic dialogue between the scientific and religious genius of the race can bring to the building of human capacity.
- The development process must involve the generality of humankind, members of governing institutions at all levels, persons serving in agencies of international coordination, scientists and social thinkers, all those endowed with artistic talents or with access to the media, and leaders of non-governmental organizations.
- The establishment of full equality between women and men, in all departments of life and at every level of society, must be a primary aim.
- While acknowledging the wide differences of individual capacity, a major goal must be to make it possible for all of the earth's inhabitants to approach on an equal basis the processes of science and technology.
- At the heart of development must be a consultative process in which the individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view, in order to function as members of a body with its own interests and goals.
- Spiritual issues facing humanity must be central. For the vast majority of the world's population, the idea that human nature has a spiritual dimension -- indeed that its fundamental identity is spiritual -- is a truth requiring no demonstration.
- A new "work ethic," based on a spirit of service to humanity, will be essential. To that end, training that can make it possible for the earth's inhabitants to participate in the production of wealth must be illumined by the spiritual insight that service to humankind is the purpose of both individual life and social organization.
- New economic models will be required, shaped by insights that arise from a sympathetic understanding of shared experience, from viewing human beings in relation to others, and from a recognition of the centrality to social well-being of the role of the family and the community.
- The principle of the oneness of humanity must be wholeheartedly embraced by those in whose hands the responsibility for decision-making rests, and its related tenets -- including the concept of world citizenship -- must be propagated through both educational systems and the media.
- As the integration of humanity gains momentum, those who are selected to take collective decisions on behalf of society, will increasingly have to see all their efforts in a global perspective. Not only at the national, but also at the local level, the elected governors of human affairs should, in Bahá'u'lláh's view, consider themselves responsible for the welfare of all of humankind.
- It will be necessary to create laws and institutions that are universal in both character and authority. Ultimately, the restructuring or transformation of the United Nations system will lead to the establishment of a world federation of nations with its own legislative, judicial and executive bodies.

Mr. Chairperson, distinguished delegates and representatives, these themes and others relevant to a global development strategy are elaborated in the concept paper entitled, *The Prosperity of Humankind*. You may have already received this document from one of the more than 200 Bahá'ís attending these twin historic events, or you may have seen it on the document tables throughout Bella Centre and the NGO Forum '95. We strongly urge you to obtain a copy and to give the ideas it contains serious consideration.

Over a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh issued to the peoples of the world an appeal which is of particular significance to all of us gathered here today at the World Summit for Social Development and the NGO Forum: *"Be anxiously concerned,"* He urged, *"with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."* *"Be united in counsel, be one in thought."*

Thank you.

