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World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development

A statement by the Bahá'í International Community to the 4th Pacific Islands Leaders Conference, based on a concept paper by the same name presented to the 1st session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, 14 June 1993

Nui, Tahiti
24 - 26 June 1993

The Bahá'í International Community is greatly honored to be invited to address the 4th Pacific Islands Leaders Conference and to share our views on the promotion of sustainable development in the Pacific Islands region.

The adoption at the Earth Summit of Agenda 21, as a global action plan for sustainable development, was an historic achievement and a critical first step toward a coordinated strategy for sustainable development. The creation shortly thereafter of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development has provided a forum for monitoring efforts to implement that strategy. Now the hard work begins: translating global plans into national and local policies and lines of action that will ultimately change the way people live their lives - here in the Pacific Islands and throughout the world. The challenge of sustainable development is to inspire in people the willingness to think and act differently - the desire to become responsible citizens of an interdependent world.

The Bahá'í International Community would like to propose to this gathering - as it did to the recent first session of the Commission on Sustainable Development - that world citizenship be adopted as the ethical foundation for sustainable development. We further suggest that, in order to inspire people to champion sustainable development, world citizenship be enthusiastically promoted through the education programs and public awareness campaigns called for in Agenda 21.

The greatest challenge facing the world community as it mobilizes to implement Agenda 21 is to release the enormous financial, technical, human and moral resources required for sustainable development. These resources, we are convinced, will be freed up only as the peoples of the world develop a profound sense of responsibility for the fate of the planet and for the well-being of the entire human family.

This sense of responsibility flows naturally from the recognition of the oneness of humanity and is best sustained by a unifying vision of a peaceful, prosperous world society. Without such a global ethic and a world-embracing vision, people will be unable to become active, constructive participants in the world-wide process of sustainable development. While Agenda 21 provides an indispensable framework of scientific knowledge and technical know-how for the implementation of sustainable development, it does not inspire personal commitment to a global ethic. This is not to say that ethics and values were ignored during the Earth Summit process. The call for unifying values was heard throughout this process from Heads of State to UN officials to NGO representatives and individual citizens. In particular, the concepts of "our common humanity," "world citizenship" and "unity in diversity" were invoked to serve as the ethical undergirding for Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration.

The world community has, thus, already come to a basic accord on the need for a global ethic to drive sustainable development, but such an ethic has yet to be articulated and officially agreed upon. We suggest, therefore, that the term world citizenship be adopted to encompass the constellation of principles, values, attitudes and behaviors that the peoples of the world must embrace if sustainable development is to be realized.

World citizenship begins with acceptance of the oneness of the human family and recognition of the interconnectedness of the nations of "the earth, our home." While it encourages a sane and legitimate patriotism, it also insists upon a wider loyalty, a love of humanity as a whole. It does not imply abandonment of legitimate loyalties, the suppression of cultural diversity, the abolition of national autonomy, nor the imposition of uniformity. Its hallmark is "unity in diversity." World citizenship encompasses the principles of social and economic justice, both within and among nations; non-adversarial decision making at all levels of society; equality of the sexes; racial, ethnic, national and religious harmony; and the willingness to sacrifice for the common good. Other facets of world citizenship - all of which promote human honor and dignity, understanding, amity, cooperation, trustworthiness, compassion and a desire to serve - can be deduced from those already mentioned.

Fostering world citizenship is a practical strategy for promoting sustainable development. So long as disunity, antagonism and provincialism characterize the social, political and economic relations within and among the family of nations, a global, sustainable pattern of development can not be established. Over a century ago Bahá'u'lláh warned, *"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."* Only upon a foundation of genuine unity, harmony and understanding among the diverse peoples and nations of the world, can a sustainable global society be erected.

We, therefore, recommend that world citizenship be taught in every school and that the oneness of humanity - the principle underlying world citizenship - be constantly asserted in every nation.

The concept of world citizenship is not new to the world community. It is both implicit and explicit in a host of UN documents, charters and agreements, including the opening words of the UN Charter itself: "We the peoples of the United Nations . . ." It is already being promoted around the world across all cultures by diverse non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics, citizens' groups, entertainers, educational programs, artists, and media. These efforts are significant but need to be greatly increased. A carefully planned and orchestrated, long-term campaign to foster world citizenship, involving all sectors of society - local, national and international - needs to be put into place. Such a campaign should encompass formal and non-formal educational programs, training initiatives and public awareness efforts. It should involve the media, entertainment and advertising industries, popular theater groups, national and local educational authorities, the United Nations and its member-states, and all social groups, and should ultimately touch the lives of every inhabitant of the planet.

World citizenship must be promoted with all the vigor, moral courage and conviction that the United Nations, its member states and all willing partners can muster. The peoples and nations of the Pacific can lead in this effort, both by promoting this dynamic and challenging

principle at home and, in the international arena, by urging the entire UN system to incorporate world citizenship into the full range of its programs and activities. This action alone will do as much for the establishment of a sustainable pattern of development in the Pacific and throughout the world as any program or initiative that may yet be conceived and undertaken by the world community.

The Bahá'í International Community, which has more than a century of experience fostering world citizenship, would be pleased to assist Governments, NGOs and others to further develop this proposal; to provide practical models of racial, religious, national and ethnic unity for sustainable development; and to take part in consultations on building the ethical foundation for sustainable development. As a global community encompassing the diversity of humanity and sharing a common vision, the Bahá'í International Community will continue to promote sustainable development by encouraging people to see themselves as citizens of one world, the builders of a just and prosperous world civilization.

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The Bahá'í Faith