



LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM
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From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters

This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on environment, climate change, and sustainability. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to newsletter@ief.org. Please share the Leaves newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

Members Corner

Welcome

We warmly welcome the following new members and associates to the International Environment Forum:

New Members

Jing Chen, USA

Zinzan Gurney, United Kingdom

Tahirih Matthee, South Africa

Fabrice Mouketo Doha, Republic of Congo

Sione Tu'itahi, New Zealand

Ned Walker, USA

New Associate

Joshua Davis, United Kingdom

We look forward to getting to know you better and invite your active participation with IEF!

New IEF Lecture Series

IEF is launching a new lecture series on environmental action & issues around the globe, and we want to hear from you!

Are you working on any environmental initiatives as part of your career, community service, or academic research? Whether it is in the arena of engineering, science, medicine, business, finance, education, government, or non-profit work, if you would like to share it with the IEF community, please consider participating in our lecture series. Presentations should be 20 to 40 minutes long, so there is time for questions and discussion afterward, and should relate the topic to a Baha'i principle or action (such as unity, consultation, participating in public discourse, education, social action, or the like). We have no set time or schedule yet, we will accommodate your time zone and availability). To volunteer to present, or for questions, please contact ief@iefworld.org

Faith for Nature

Report of the International multi-faith action conference 5-8 October 2020

A wonderful International multi-faith action conference on Faith for Nature was hosted in Iceland on 5-8 October 2020, and used the historic Skálholt Cathedral in the South of Iceland as its global anchor from where high-level sessions were live-streamed. It achieved a global reach through online dialogues in five regions (Asia and Australia, Africa, Europe, North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean). It brought together, at least virtually, senior leaders of the major world religions, to take collective action for the Earth. The results include a Declaration (see below), a record of the proceedings, documentation and conference outcomes being made available on its website <http://www.faithfornature.org>, and outreach to connect thoughts to actions that unify us. There is also a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/faithfornature>.

Major organisers were the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and its Faith for Earth programme, and the Government of Iceland, represented by its President and former President, and the Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources. Among the other organisers were the Bahá'ís of Iceland. IEF Governing Board Member Halldor Thorgeirsson was an active participant and chaired the Declaration Coordination Team, presenting the Declaration at the final session. Among the many distinguished speakers were the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, head of the Orthodox Church, Grand Ayatollah Al-Modaressi, Cardinal Peter Turkson, Chief Rabbi David Rosen, and Bani Dugal, Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community.

UNEP described plans for a Faith for Earth Coalition, including a Council of Eminent Leaders, a Youth Council, a Network of Faith-Based Organizations with a focus on the environment, and a Faith-Science Consortium of religious scholars, scientists and environmentalists to bridge the gap between environmental science and religions. UNEP also launched its new book: *Faith for Earth: A Call for Action*.

The conference Declaration follows:

Our sacred commitment

High-level faith leaders, faith communities, and academics—recognising the triple threats of poverty and inequity, climate change and biodiversity loss—engaged in a global dialogue anchored at the historic cathedral of Skálholt in Iceland to discuss a coalition of hope, commitment and action.

From all corners of the globe we came together to hear the cry of Mother Earth. Religious institutions and faith communities have a long history in fostering sustainable development. Faiths cultivate values of compassion, community, and care for the vulnerable. We shared our love, compassion, and belief that the Earth is sacred, and we are called to be keeper of this sacred trust given into our care.

We came together in this global dialogue from diverse backgrounds and experience and were moved by a deep sense of global consciousness, concern for our planet and a commitment to demonstrate leadership. We emerged with a shared resolve to mobilize around the protection of nature and our common home, and to working through the proposed Faith for Earth Coalition to turn our commitment into action.

We do so recognizing that religious communities and faith-based organizations have a unique and

vital contribution to make to global efforts on environmental protection and ecosystem restoration building on a growing track-record of multifaith action for nature. Faith and spiritual values drive individual behaviour and personal choices and shape cultural values, social inclusion, and political engagement. Faith communities with their vast networks, adherents, education structures and spiritual endeavours, are a valuable partner in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Recognising that there have been times when science and religion have been at odds, we commit ourselves to communicate spiritual insights informed by best available science. Harmony and balance between scientific and religious inquiry is essential for the advancement of humankind at this critical juncture. Local, traditional, and indigenous knowledge, wisdom and spirituality will continue to be an indispensable source of guidance. Efforts need to be made to cultivate synergies and mutual understanding between indigenous, religious, and scientific inquiry.

We recognise with profound concern scientific evidence on environmental degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss and the limited time available to achieve the deep transformation

needed. The world's faith-based organizations are uniquely placed to relay this science and rallying religious communities to act in defense of nature and environmental justice.

We have one common home. Global challenges faced by humankind are deeply interlinked and have a significant spiritual dimension. Appreciation for the spiritual nature of our being leads to a deeper sense of connectedness both with the natural world, of which humans are an organic part, and within the one human family. Humans have the responsibility to protect Earth's live-supporting systems to ensure a sustainable human civilization on which both social and economic capital rest.

Current extremes of wealth and poverty need to give way to greater equity and justice. Justice in all its dimensions is a fundamental prerequisite for lasting unity. Investment needs to be redirected away from extractive economic activity towards green, inclusive, just, and regenerative economic development.

We need a movement with roots and wings. Insights and experiences from elders can reinforce the vision, passion, and creativity of the young. Faith communities draw their power from the interplay of generations, firm grounding in local realities and sense of belonging to a global community.

Recognising the challenge of patriarchy and the vital role of women as leaders in the environmental movement, we commit ourselves to ensuring that women are given access and opportunity to exercise full leadership roles.

The core environmental crisis is an ethical and moral issue. Responsible dietary choices moving towards plant-based diets and attention to the footprint of our consumption of energy and materials are an integral part of ethical stewardship of nature. Nature-based solutions, which are a win for livelihoods, climate, and biodiversity through protecting and restoring forests and other ecosystems need to be developed and scaled up. They offer an essential, reliable, and cost-effective way to address climate change and halt biodiversity loss.

This is a time of lament and a time of hope. We recognise what has been irreversibly lost and confess that we are living off the inheritance of

generations to come. At the same time, we recognise the key role of faith communities as bearers of hope at a time when the environmental movement suffers from despair, which may lead to apathy. We will demonstrate bold leadership and catalyse transformation at all levels. Through hope, faith, empathy, and reason we can build a better future.

The sudden emergence of COVID-19 changed the global outlook. The very health and future of humanity depends on our ability to act together not only with respect to pandemics but also in protecting the global ecosystems. We must seize this moment to change course, protect and restore nature, reduce our vulnerability to deadly viruses and to the impacts of climate disruption.

People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership—these are woven together through the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals thus providing a framework for urgent action and a roadmap for faith communities to work together. We recognise that there is still much work remaining to translate that vision into language accessible to people of faith in the local context.

Faith-based organizations around the world are committed to working across spiritual traditions and across sectors to take actions that protect and restore nature. We see it as a shared moral responsibility to contribute. The time has come for people of faith to work together for the planet given into our care.

The proposed Faith for Earth Coalition has a vision—in partnership with UNEP—to enable faith groups to promote action and influence policy choices at the local, national, regional, and international levels. We encourage governments to come to an agreement at the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly in 2021 to turn that vision into reality. We stand ready to join hands with UNEP to turn this ground-breaking vision into a model for others to emulate.

We express our appreciation to the Government of Iceland, our Icelandic partners, Religions for Peace and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (USA) for enabling this global exchange and resolve to disseminate our findings and channel our energy into focused and sustained action.

Avoiding Another New Normal

Op Ed by Ian Hamilton

Office of Public Affairs, Baha'is of the United States

1 July 2020

COVID-19, has driven humanity into an extended, global crisis. With an uncommon rapidity and severity, what started as a localized public health crisis has grown into a global pandemic, threatening lives, economies and social cohesion – including education at all levels, collective religious worship and any kind of social gathering. Prosperity, in its broadest definition, hangs in the balance.

Like many others, I find myself experiencing a heightened level of anxiety and worry: will my older friends and family remain healthy? How long will working remotely be sustainable? How long will the social cohesion enjoyed by my faith community endure? How long will I balance work and homeschooling? Elements of society previously taken as certainties are no longer certain.

However, I find that the root of my anxiety and worry lies quite a bit deeper than just this current pandemic. When I consider both the spread and disproportionate impact of this novel virus, the economic upheaval, the travel restrictions, the distrust in societal institutions and the undermining of social structures, I cannot help but think that this a premonition of the parallel challenges that will result from the damage we are daily meting out to the climate.

[The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) as well as the [U.S. Fourth National Climate Assessment](#) outline, in detail, the expected impacts of climate change over the years to come. Further, thinkers and commentators have started to compare and contrast COVID-19 and climate change, including the [MIT Sloan Review](#), [Bloomberg Green](#) and [Scientific American](#).

To take these pieces in distillation suggests that humanity is at a point where we must begin to ask challenging questions of ourselves in terms of the systems we have thus far built – and their embedded inequality – as well as the future world we want and how we can best ensure that all members of the human race are empowered to flourish. There are clear similarities in how the world must respond to the immediate challenge of COVID-19, as well as the on-going existential threat of climate change. Neither can be overcome

in isolation but will rather require the involvement of a broad array of societal actors. Not least among these actors will be religious and faith organizations.

On an instrumental level, faith groups can potentially mobilize billions of adherents to work toward a specific goal or objective – be that social distancing or reducing carbon emissions. On a non-instrumental level, faith organizations can contribute vital moral and spiritual principles at moments when they may be lacking or ignored – principals such as hope, trust and generosity. Of course, this is in addition to social cohesion that religion has historically fostered and the processes of inner transformation that often form the core of religious belief.

Thinking more specifically, I draw hope and reassurance from a concept enshrined in the teachings of the Baha'i Faith, that of crisis and victory. This dialectic of crisis and victory teaches that progress is realized by maintaining consistency, unity, and steadfastness in the face of setbacks and crises. Like a ship in a storm, one must maintain sufficient forward momentum and plow ahead into the waves to avoid being swamped.

With this dialectic in mind, there are lessons that can be drawn from our response to the COVID-19 pandemic which may inform our evolving response to climate change. For instance, if we begin to consider the shortcomings that have been highlighted by the current crisis, it could be argued that had the World Health Organization been empowered to manage and allocate resources as well as disseminate treatment information and impose travel restrictions, it is conceivable that this current outbreak may have been more quickly contained and more effectively managed. By acknowledging the deficits that have led to components of this current crisis we can better improve our global organizations to more effectively respond to future crises. Similarly, a significant contribution to the crusade against climate change could be made by establishing a global environmental agency tasked with enacting binding, international action on climate change.

While this example is extremely cursory, it speaks to a deeper truth that both climate change and COVID-19 are making starkly and unignorably clear: no longer can we conceive of the world as a host of disconnected nation states. We live in an age of global challenges which require global responses. A virus does not respect national borders, climate change will not target the country that has emitted the most greenhouse gases. The sooner we ignore the supposed significance of the passport we carry and rather embrace the reality that we share an interconnected, interdependent home the better. Increasingly, we need to consider establishing institutions of global governance that are empowered, equipped, and trusted to answer the global challenges that confront humanity.

The prospect of such global institutions, let alone the reality, may cause significant levels of worry and disquiet. To establish the conditions whereby

global governing institutions can support, rather than undermine national sovereignty, will require a collective exploration of how such institutions can become champions of justice, equity, fairness, and prosperity while avoiding the pitfalls of opposition, partisanship, and oppression. In short, humanity will need to grapple with how to build moral, principle-based institutions.

We must not lose sight of the fact that humanity has been hurled into a collective learning moment, arguably at a time when it was deeply needed. In the same way that a grazed knee is an opportunity for me to remind my daughter of the need to tie her shoelaces, we now have the opportunity to imagine the post-crisis world we need and to enter into a far reaching conversation about the environmental, governmental and economic systems that will enable us to flourish.

Source: <https://www.iefworld.org/node/1094> or here: <https://www.bahai.us/newsroom/avoiding-another-new-normal/>

Biodiversity in Baha'i-inspired Agriculture

by IEF Member Daniel Gilliéron

Let's delve into the subject of biodiversity and its crucial importance for agriculture by pondering on a quotation from the Bahá'í Writings:

“Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

There is an amazing statement contained in this quotation, namely “that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves”. The world of being, the material world, is being maintained by the range of created things, another word for diversity. From this affirmation we can conclude how important is biodiversity and of course likewise all the other constructive diversities of human civilization such as cultural diversity.

Polyculture, the art of growing together harmonious plant communities, seems to fit the new paradigm of diversity-based agriculture that the Bahá'í Writings seem to advocate. Let us turn to our beloved Master. Did he practice monoculture or polyculture in his agricultural undertaking?

Thanks to Paul Hanley's article called “Begin with the Village – The Bahá'í Approach to Rural Development” we know that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged farmers in ‘Adasiyyah to diversify their crops, and as early as 1910, they expanded into vegetable production for their families and for the market. Soon, wheat, barley, chickpeas, lentils, and broad beans were **produced side by side** (author's remark: polyculture in action) with a wide variety of vegetables. But this diversity was not enough in the eyes of our beloved Master. To borrow the words of Paul Hanley: “Next, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged the farmers to add fruit trees. He specifically instructed them to grow table grapes, oranges, lemons, tangerines, grapefruits, and limes. Fruit crops were more productive and fetched much higher prices than other farm products, especially the large yellow lemons and sesame seeds.

It was customary to **plant broad beans between and around pomegranate trees** (*author's remark: again polyculture in action*). Some were used fresh or dried for human consumption, but a large part of the crop was plowed into the soil while still green to improve soil texture and fertility. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also introduced bananas to the region. During the last years of His life He received seven suckers from India. Without having ever grown bananas, He guided the farmers in 'Adasiyyah in planting and caring for the new crop. He instructed the farmers to use the basin system of planting instead of the row system commonly used in other countries. The soil around a number of closely spaced trees was ridged up to form a small rectangular basin. The main advantage of the basin was that it held irrigation water for a longer time and allowed a gradual and slow infiltration of water into the soil."

Apart from diversifying the crops, 'Abdu'l-Bahá introduced other methods to increase the productivity and improve sustainability of the farms, such as crop rotation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not only care for crop diversity, he also encouraged the farmers to raise all kinds of animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, poultry and pigeons, which, in addition to meat, milk and eggs, produced the required amounts of manure. In order to increase the diversity of crops (and their yield), 'Abdu'l-Bahá was conscious of the need to improve irrigation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá transformed a barren landscape into a fertile bio-diverse agriculture system. As we can clearly recognize, 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not practice a monoculture-style agriculture, but on the contrary he set Himself to create a farming system that constitutes a hymn to biodiversity. Also, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not only a giant in the spiritual field, but also a luminary expert of agriculture.

Apart from being prone to create disease, pollution and contribute to climate change, intensive animal farming or industrial livestock production, which keeps animals in strict confinement in structures that we could call animal prisons, is contrary to the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá challenges our attitude towards animals with the following exhortation:

"It is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature. For in all physical respects, and where the animal spirit is concerned, the selfsame feelings are shared by animal and man ... The

feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast. There is no difference here whatever. And indeed ye do worse to harm an animal, for man hath a language, he can lodge a complaint, he can cry out and moan; if injured he can have recourse to the authorities and these will protect him from his aggressor. But the hapless beast is mute, able neither to express its hurt nor take its case to the authorities ... Therefore it is essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal, and that ye be even kinder to him than to your fellow man. Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let them try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests." 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The number of animals that can be kept on a unit of surface is of course lower in an extensive animal husbandry system than in intensive livestock production systems. In the long term, this is not necessarily a problem, because the demand for meat will drop as the outcome of a deep change in the eating habits of humanity as it slowly evolves from adolescence to maturity:

"The food of the future will be fruit and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten ... our natural food is that which grows out of the ground. The people will gradually develop up to the condition of this natural food." 'Abdu'l-Bahá

In the future, a diversity-based animal husbandry will probably continue to exist. Animals can be used as farm workers (for example pigs can be used to furrow and fertilise the soil by scattering corn in the places that need to be laboured by them) and their manure can be used to enrich the soil.

A bio-diverse agricultural system needs the stewardship of innumerable human beings. The trend of rural exodus should be stopped. If, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares, **"The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil"**, then agriculture must become the engine of socio-economic development, and not a poor parent of the services and industrial sectors.

Biodiversity concerns also the soil and its organisms. Synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides destroy or impoverish

the life of the soil. Biodiversity (polyculture) and 3-dimensional agriculture can enhance the fertility of the soil, and improve its water retention. 3D agriculture includes elements such as raised beds and crater gardens. The goal is to create a plethora of different micro-climates.

In order to maximize biodiversity, it is also crucial to turn to the role of water in the agricultural system. The earth can be compared to the human body. As the human body needs to be irrigated everywhere with blood, the same applies to the earth that needs to be ubiquitously irrigated with water. Water needs to be retained where it falls down from the sky and be permitted to slowly percolate into the ground. In order to achieve this, natural ponds, natural water retention basins and swales have to be created. If the water management of the earth is restored, a big task of agriculture is fulfilled.

Biodiversity is also tributary to seed harvesting and multiplication, an area that should not be left to the sole care of multinational seed companies that tend to reduce the seed diversity. Farmers should be empowered to harvest and multiply their own seed.

Biodiversity can only really flourish in a system distinguished by virtues such as solidarity and justice. This article does not address the subject of the many crucial spiritual qualities required to enable the emergence of a bio-diverse agricultural system. Suffice it to say here that greed, monopolistic behaviour and short-term thinking are definitely anathema to biodiversity. The worldwide Bahá'í community is committed to work towards a culture based on spiritual principles. The celebration of diversity in all walks of human life should be an integral part of what it means to be Bahá'í.

Baha'i Faith and Biodiversity

United Nations Environment Programme

Faith and Biodiversity

<https://www.unenvironment.org/faith-and-biodiversity>

Contributed by the Baha'i International Community

The Baha'i writings are replete with statements on the importance of the harmony between human life and the natural world. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are imbued with a deep respect for nature and the interconnectedness of all things, seeing especially in nature a reflection of the divine¹:

Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity, there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world.

Nature is also a reflection of humanity's inherent beauty, in all its diversity, as described in the Baha'i writings²:

*Consider the world of created beings, how varied and diverse they are in species, yet with one sole origin....
So it is with humanity...*

... Let us look ... at the beauty in diversity, the beauty of harmony, and learn a lesson from the vegetable creation. If you beheld a garden in which all the plants were the same as to form, color and perfume, it would not seem beautiful to you at all, but, rather, monotonous and dull. The garden which is pleasing to the eye and which makes the heart glad, is the garden in which are growing side by side flowers of every hue, form and perfume, and the joyous contrast of color is what makes for charm and beauty. So is it with trees. An orchard full of fruit trees is a delight; so is a plantation planted with many species of shrubs. It is just the diversity and variety that constitutes its charm; each flower, each tree, each fruit, beside being beautiful in itself, brings out by contrast the qualities of the others, and shows to advantage the special loveliness of each and all.

Central to the teachings of Bahá'ulláh is the principle of the oneness of humanity—affirming that our interconnectedness is the foundation upon which human civilization must now be built. The relationships in the environment are used in the Baha'i writings to illustrate our oneness, affirming that we are the “leaves of one tree, flowers of one garden, waves of one ocean.”³ This also extends to our relationship with the environment⁴:

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life molds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

From an expression of our interconnectedness emerge attributes such as dignity and nobility in treating one another and our environment with respect and compassion. Bahá'u'lláh enjoins His followers to practice stewardship of the earth as an expression of world citizenship. As trustees of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity, humanity must seek to protect the heritage of future generations.

Trusteeship is required to safeguard our earth's precious diversity. It calls for a full consideration of the potential environmental consequences of all human endeavors. It compels humanity to temper its actions with moderation and humility, affirming that nature should not be exploited for self-interest. It also requires a deep understanding of the natural world and its role in humanity's collective development—both material and spiritual. Therefore, measures to safeguard biodiversity must come to be seen not as a discretionary commitment, but rather as a fundamental responsibility. Establishing sustainable patterns of individual and collective life therefore requires a new conception of ourselves and our place in the world and a commitment to applying these principles to our endeavors. In a recent message, the governing body of the Baha'i Faith said⁵,

“every choice Baha'i makes ... leaves a trace, and the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands ... that the purity of one's aims be matched by the purity of one's actions to fulfil those aims.”

As there is much to learn about how noble ideals become expressed in committed, sustained action, Baha'i, alongside others around the world, are setting in motion processes of capacity building that enable people of all backgrounds to participate in the transformation of society and to make conscious decisions about, for example, patterns of production and consumption. These communities are coming to recognize that a sustainable pattern of life is dependent on the extent to which all of humanity is willing to adopt such a principled approach. An example of one such community can be found in Mwinilunga—a district in the northwestern province of Zambia.⁶

For instance, Mwinilunga have engaged the community in tree planting activities in order to further rehabilitate the natural environment. The various conversations and actions arising from the group's endeavors have also contributed to improving certain aspects of the local culture as diverse members of the community are now working shoulder-to-shoulder. The efforts of the group have shown how an appreciation for our natural heritage can lead to concerted action to protect it and, in turn, can strengthen the patterns of community life.

Reference

1 Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh.

2 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks.

3 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace.

4 Statement of Shoghi Effendi.

5 Message from the Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is of the world. 2017.

6 For the Betterment of the World. P53.

This article is contributed by Bahá'í International Community.

Source: <https://www.unenvironment.org/faith-and-biodiversity> and https://www.iefworld.org/2020bic_biodiversityUNEP

Faith Action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Progress and Outlook

Launch of the Report on 21 September 2020

On Monday, September 21st, the [Parliament of the World's Religions](#), [Bhumi Global](#), [UNEP Faith for Earth](#), and [United Religions Initiative \(URI\)](#) released the report *Faith Action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Progress and Outlook*. The report details progress made by the Faith community toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and makes recommendations for achieving even greater impact. You can download the report here: <https://parliamentofreligions.org/documents/faith-action-un-sustainable-development-goals-progress-and-outlook>

The official release of the report was commemorated with an excellent webinar program which you can watch here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whla9RQenDc&feature=emb_logo

Source: <https://parliamentofreligions.org/blog/2020-09-24-1037/parliament-launches-faith-based-action-report-sustainable-development-goals>

UN75 Global Governance Forum 16-17 September with community-driven sessions on 18 September



The three day program focused on the forum's four pillars: Peace and security, sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian action, and climate governance. It included plenary presentations and breakout groups that explored new kinds of multi-stakeholder partnerships and innovation.

You can access an overview of the agenda and the recordings on the Forum's video archive here:

<https://www.platformglobalsecurityjusticegovernance.org/video-archive/>

IEF members and associates may be especially interested in the following programs:

Day 1, Sept. 16:

Climate Governance: The Paris Agreement and Beyond with moderator Maja Groff, an IEF Member

Day 3, Sept. 18:

Reaching the Summit: Promoting the Potential of the UN75 Declaration, coordinated by the Baha'i International Community, UN2020, and Together First

"Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century" book presentation, coordinated by the Global Governance Forum and featuring Arthur L. Dahl, IEF President, and Maja Groff, IEF Member as panelists.

Here is a report by the Baha'i International Community (BIC):

The BIC joins others in exploring the future of global governance

NEW YORK—18 September 2020—

Representatives of the Baha'i International Community (BIC) joined a range of political leaders, subject experts, activists, and other stakeholders in exploring how structures of global governance can best deliver peace, sustainable development, human rights, and protect the natural environment.

The UN75 Global Governance Forum, held 16-18 September 2020 and organized by Stimson Center and UN75, focused on establishing more inclusive partnerships and building consensus around innovations in institutions, policies, and norms.

Focusing on the practical and moral implications of growing global interdependence, BIC Representative Saphira Rameshfar was invited to speak at a session centered on strengthening a global civic ethic.

"The idea that humankind is one sounds simple. But it implies a profound reordering of priorities," Ms. Rameshfar said.

"Too often, advancement of the common good is approached as a secondary objective—commendable, but to be pursued only after other, narrower national interests have been secured. The principle of the oneness of humanity forces us to ask new questions. For example: What will be the global implications of domestic policies? What choices contribute to shared prosperity and sustainable peace around the world?"

These questions echo the growing calls for better systems and better reforms, as stated by Lysa John, Secretary-General of CIVICUS, "for the ideals of justice, equality, equity, and peace that the UN represents. And I think that's a real sign of hope."

The Baha'i International Community, along with UN2020 and Together First, organized one of the Forum's "community-driven sessions," entitled "Reaching the Summit: Promoting the Potential of the UN75 Declaration", with the aim of learning lessons from the past, thinking about ways to innovate, and identifying the necessary steps forward in fulfilling the commitments of the Declaration.

BIC Representative Daniel Perell moderated this event and, in opening remarks, situated present

efforts to update the global order within long-term trends toward integration and unity.

"History must be instructive for us," Mr. Perell said. "At each stage in human history, more complex levels of integration become not only possible, but necessary. New and more pressing challenges emerge, and the body politic is compelled to devise new arrangements that address the needs of the time through greater inclusivity, coherence, and collaboration."

Among the topics discussed, the dialogue touched on the importance of political will as well as citizenship engagement, highlighting the importance of multistakeholder partnerships.

Commenting on the process leading up to the anniversary of the UN and the adoption of the UN75 Declaration, Ambassador Alya Al-Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations and UN75 Declaration Co-Facilitator, expressed, "This process has really brought together a very strong engagement between the United Nations, Member States, and the global civil society movement." Highlighting the importance of partnerships in moving forward, Ambassador Al-Thani stated, "The UN today has shown a different means of engagement with young people and the global civil society movement by listening, and acknowledging, and engaging.... I believe this is something that will continue."

In thinking about the potential ahead and the many possibilities that lie within reach, Mr. Perell stated in his closing remarks, "As forces for change gain in strength, perhaps it is not surprising that forces of the status quo are also rising. But humanity's shared destiny is something that increasingly cannot be denied."

"The question before us, then, is how we move forward together—allowing all to see a higher call for justice and nobility in a future form of governance that is grounded in dignity, sustainability, and ethics. As we increasingly do this, no doubt this process will allow for the fruition of higher orders of collaboration."

Held in the run-up to the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, the Forum sought to feed into a growing global conversation on the future of the multilateral system. The BIC will mark that

milestone of the UN with a statement entitled *A Governance Befitting: Humanity and the Path Toward a Just Global Order*. The statement will be

released 21 September 2020, the day the anniversary will be formally commemorated by the United Nations General Assembly.

BIC marks 75 years of UN, envisages path to just global order

September 21, 2020

BIC NEW YORK — As the United Nations marks its 75th anniversary, the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) has released a [statement](#) on the occasion. That the UN has persisted in spite of numerous challenges and has so far lasted three times the 25-year lifespan of the League of Nations—humanity's first serious attempt at global governance—is an impressive accomplishment, says the BIC.

The statement highlights the need for systems of global cooperation to be strengthened if humanity is to address the serious challenges of our time and seize the immense opportunities of the coming years for progress.

It explores elements necessary for a movement toward enduring, universal peace, including: the acknowledgement of the oneness and interdependence of the human family; a genuine concern for all, without distinction; the ability of nations to learn from one another, and a willing acceptance of setbacks and missteps as inevitable aspects of the learning process; and, the conscious effort to ensure that material progress is connected to spiritual and social progress.

“Collaboration is possible on scales undreamt of in past ages, opening unparalleled prospects for progress,” the statement reads. “The task before the community of nations... is to ensure that the machinery of international politics and power is increasingly directed toward cooperation and unity.”

The BIC, in its statement, sees this to be an opportune moment for the international community to begin building consensus about how it can better organize itself, suggesting several initiatives and innovations that may be worthy of further consideration. For example, a world council on future affairs that could institutionalize consideration of how policies might impact generations to come and give attention to a range of issues such as preparedness for global crises, the use of emerging technologies, or the future of education or employment.

Titled “A Governance Befitting: Humanity and the Path Toward a Just Global Order,” the statement is being released to coincide with the UN General Assembly's [commemoration today](#) of the 75th anniversary. It was sent today to the Secretary General of the UN and to the ambassadors of Member States.

Coming at a time when the global health crisis has prompted a deeper appreciation of humanity's interdependence, this anniversary year has given rise to discussion about the role of international structures and reforms that can be made to the UN.

The statement is one of several contributions the BIC is making to these discussions. It will continue its exploration of the profound themes in the statement at an online meeting next month with UN officials and ambassadors.

A Personal Account of the EU's New Ambition – How to Be More Geopolitical Nowadays? Sponsored by the Karl-Renner-Institute

Report and Reflection by IEF Member David Menham

A recording of the event which took place on Tuesday, September 29, 2020, is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awQVPh1Lnc>

An Introduction was given by HANNES SWOBODA, President of the International Institute for Peace (IIP) and former Member of the European Parliament (MEP).

Panelists

IRINA BOLGOVA - associate professor in the Department of Applied Analysis at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) (via video conference); LEYLA DASKIN - Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management, Austrian National Defence Academy; STEFAN LEHNE - Visiting Scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels; KATI PIRI - MEP, Labour Party, Netherlands (PvdA), Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) Group (via video conference); ANDREAS SCHIEDER - MEP, Head of the Specialist Prosecutor's Office (SPÖ) Delegation, S&D Group (via video conference); MICHAL SIMECKA - MEP, Progresívne Slovensko (Slovakia), Renew Europe (to be confirmed).

Theme

The opening speaker, Hannes Swoboda, stated that "the European Union (EU) faces tough times, major challenges, and countless hybrid threats," namely: a "pandemic and climate change, global migration and refugee crisis, systemic terrorism, pervasive cyber threats, and the return of the forgotten conflict with Russia.

The number of challenges and conflicts is countless: the violent suppression of the protests in Belarus, the ongoing military conflict in Donbas, the collapse of Libya, the confrontation between Greece and Turkey – just to name a few."

Commentary

From a purely Baha'i perspective, my listening in to this debate through a Facebook link highlighted how academics and politicians have currently dealt with conflicts in discussions with the glaring absence of a truly global vision.

The old world order is in a state of complete disarray. Boundaries are once again being redefined between countries as new conflicts arise. This is bringing to bear new political and economic realities while old alliances are beginning to dissolve. Thus, clear international leadership is left hanging in the balance.

In the debate there was some talk of the territories between Europe and Russia being part of a common neighbourhood, but a stark lack of

cooperation between the various state actors showed that these conflicts of interest would remain unless a more global outlook could be developed. Events in Belarus as well as among Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey further complicated matters. Another highlight was that leadership within the EU was also lacking due to the effects of Brexit and the split between the US and the EU as regards foreign policy. There was a brief discussion on the need for a community of common interest; however, the main focus was on the power blocks forming as part of a regional or tribal response to conflicts.

Back in 2000 in his book *Searching for Peace: The Road to Transcend*, Johan Galtung (former director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)) speaking about the need for a more therapeutic approach to solving conflict stated: To prevent a slide into a large war with enormous widespread suffering...we need deep self-reflection, identifying the conflicts, the issues, solving them, reconciliation. Dialogue and global education to understand how others think, and to respect other cultures, not debate to defeat others with stronger arguments, only this can lead the way toward healing and closure.

In the Conclusions of *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions, 2020*, in support of such a therapeutic approach, Lopez-Claros, Dahl, and Groff refer to Bertrand Russell's assertion that "people are forced to expand their mental horizons and to acquire broader loyalties" as part of a heartfelt desire to live in peace and harmony which is particularly relevant in this increasingly globalised world.

Perhaps it is time for all of us to pay much greater attention to the timeless utterances of Abdu'l-Baha, one of the most prolific thinkers on matters of war and peace, which can uplift our thoughts way beyond the political and economic realms into a deeper and brighter level of understanding. In words such as these taken from *The Tablet to The Hague* in 1919 while speaking of Universal Peace, he said: "Every just one bears witness to this... that darkness may be changed into light, this bloodthirstiness into kindness, this torment into bliss, this hardship into ease and enmity, and hatred into fellowship and love."

In this way, perchance we will be able, with absolute clarity of vision, to conquer every conflict and difficulty, which comes into our path.

GHG Concentrations Hit Record Highs Despite COVID-19, Leading Science Organizations Warn

IISD 17 September, 2020

A recent scientific report titled [United in Science](#) finds that atmospheric GHG concentrations and climate change impacts are at record levels despite a temporary decline caused by the COVID-19 lock-down.

The publication highlights the negative and irreversible impacts of rising global emissions and climate change on oceans and seas, ecosystems and economies, water resources, and human well-being and health.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has coordinated the publication of this multi-organization high-level compilation of key climate science findings.

Building on the 2019 edition, the report titled, 'United in Science 2020,' brings together the latest climate science updates from WMO, Global Carbon Project (GCP), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (UNESCO-IOC), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the UK Met Office. Each organization contributed a chapter.

The publication highlights the negative and irreversible impacts of rising global emissions and climate change on oceans and seas, ecosystems and economies, water resources, and human well-being and health. The report also reviews how COVID-19 has hindered global monitoring of climate change and finds that, despite a temporary decline, global emissions are on track to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Key findings address emissions trends and current and projected impacts of climate change. The WMO's Global Atmosphere Watch states that although sustained reductions in emissions are required to achieve the targets established by the Paris Agreement on climate change, concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O) continued to increase in 2019 and 2020, with overall 2020 emissions decreases leading to only a small reduction in the annual increase of the atmospheric concentrations of GHGs.

This is the [link to the whole article](#). This is the [direct link to the report](#).

Source: IISD 17 September, 2020 <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/ghg-concentrations-hit-record-highs-despite-covid-19-leading-science-organizations-warn/>

Recent pieces on importance of 'sliding baselines'

Our recollections about how things were in our own earlier years often disregard how they were in far earlier 'normal' times.

By SueEllen Campbell

Thursday, September 24, 2020

Here is a question posed by Vox reporter David Roberts: "Recent research shows that 'extremely hot summers' are 200 times more likely than they were 50 years ago. Did you know that?" And then, "Do you feel it?"

Even if your answer to the first question is yes, which for many is unlikely, the answer to the second is almost certainly no. This example illustrates the "sliding baseline" syndrome.

Coined as it applies specifically to fisheries, this simple, powerful term turns out to be highly relevant to grasping and dealing with climate change. As journalist John Sutter puts it, it's "a phenomenon of lowered expectations, in which each generation ... regards a progressively poorer natural world as normal." We get used to everything – and in so doing, we lose touch with what the world used to be.

To read the whole article, go here: [https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/09/recent-pieces-on-importance-of-sliding-baselines/?ct=t\(EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_DAILY_092420\)](https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/09/recent-pieces-on-importance-of-sliding-baselines/?ct=t(EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_DAILY_092420))