



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.

ANNOUNCING IN-PERSON IEF CONFERENCE IN THE UK 26-29 JUNE

The IEF Board is excited to invite everyone to the 29th Annual Conference at the Baha'i Training Centre near Oxford, UK!

Building Capacity for Sustainability Discourse and Action

Join us for a weekend of reflection, collaboration, and action—where science, values, and community come together for a sustainable future!

The program will include study sessions, discussions, outdoor activities, and a hybrid panel.

For more information and registration, visit the conference website:
<https://iefworld.org/conf29>



What is the conference about?

At a time when the forces of disintegration, including the triple environmental crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, are threatening people everywhere, the world-wide Bahá'í community is working at the grass roots to strengthen forces of integration, bringing people together for unity in diversity. The 29th annual conference of the International Environment Forum aims to contribute to these efforts toward building a world where we live in harmony with nature and with each other. The primary tools we will explore for this purpose are social action and public discourse.

There is a particular need to address the materialistic consumer society that has driven us far beyond the sustainable limits of the Earth's resources. Advertising and social media cultivate addictions in the name of profits. Fake news, disinformation and conspiracy theories entrap people in distrust and fear. The conference will explore these issues and how to find positive ways forward, overcoming anxiety about the direction the world is taking and providing both scientific knowledge and spiritual principles that can motivate constructive action.

The conference will be participatory in its format and encourage joint learning. **We welcome people of all ages but particularly welcome youth and those working with youth and junior youth groups as animators to explore how their activities relate to environmental issues as part of their local - and global - reality.** Together we can learn how to build capacity for both public discourse and social action drawing on resources from Baha'i educational materials and beyond. The conference organisers are also welcoming young and old Bahá'ís who are engaged in environmental social action to share their experience. There may also be an opportunity for a hands-on environmental project.

While most of the conference will be in-person only, we are planning a **hybrid event on Saturday evening 28. June.** Check the conference webpage for updates:
<https://iefworld.org/conf29>

IEF Members and Friends:

- **We very much hope that we will see you in person or at the hybrid conference event!**
- **In one session of the conference, participants will share case studies of Baha'i-inspired environmental action or public discourse. If you would like to share such a case study, please, let us know. If you cannot attend the conference, you may send your story in writing to the IEF secretariat ief@iefworld.org, and we will ask a youth to present it.**
- **Please, help spread the word about the conference!**
We rely on IEF members and associates to invite people personally, on social media, and with announcements or articles in their national or local Baha'i newsletters.
Here is a conference invitation for download:

Conference Invitation [in pdf for sharing](#)



Other IEF News

We welcome our new members and associates:

Member:

Mahvash Amini (USA)

Associates:

Anne Echoga (Nigeria)

Rahul Bhadouria (India)

Lost IEF Members – please, help us find them!

IEF does not have valid email addresses for the following IEF members:

Crawford Prentice, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Jennifer Eldridge, Warwick, Australia

Zoltan Orzsi, Babocsa, Hungary

José Maldonado, Honduras

Lesley Bradley-Vine, Auckland, New Zealand

If you know any of them, please, contact the secretariat: ief@iefworld.org

29th IEF Webinar

The well attended 6 April webinar on *Global biodiversity patterns, spiritual values, and transformative change* attracted participants from all over the world, from Canada, China, Fiji, the Netherlands, and many other countries! They could all enjoy a very interesting and thoughtfully prepared talk by Cedric Åkermark and a lively discussion afterward. A recording of the webinar will become available on the IEF website. For all past recordings, go here: <https://iefworld.org/lectures>

What are rights worth?

On 20 March 2025, IEF president Arthur Lyon Dahl posted a thought-provoking blog on the IEF website which prompted a comment by IEF secretary Christine Muller.

IEF members and associates are invited to continue this conversation by posting a comment here: <https://iefworld.org/node/1693>

Arthur Lyon Dahl's blog

How much do you think human rights are worth? How would you value your right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as recognised in international law? Do you have a right to protest peacefully against something that you think, based on sound science, will cause irreparable harm to people and the environment? What is the right of a country to take a decision through a democratic process of popular vote? Imagine trying to develop some ranking of human rights, with perhaps the right to life at the top.

A new answer to these questions is now emerging through trade agreements and laws carefully crafted over decades by proponents of a neoliberal economy that place the corporate right to profits above all of these other rights for which the value is not so easily calculated.

A couple of recent examples from *The Guardian* newspaper illustrate how far this has now gone in very concrete ways. The environmental defender Greenpeace has just been

condemned in a U.S. court in North Dakota to pay at least \$660 million dollars to an oil pipeline company for peacefully protesting the construction of an oil pipeline on indigenous lands. This represents not just the money the company invested in the construction project, but all the profits that it had anticipated from the operation of the pipeline over its lifetime. Protest itself was ruled to be defamation of the pipeline company, which could add additional penalties. These cases are used by companies to silence protest by imposing the high cost of a legal defence even if the case is lost.

While fossil fuel companies (and states) deny any responsibility for the damage they have done over many decades to the land, waters and climate under the polluter-pays principle, their right to maximum profits is now recognised by laws and the courts.

The other example takes this right to profits to another level. The government of Greenland is being sued under an obscure Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) agreement for \$11 billion, nine times its annual budget, for blocking a company from mining for rare earth minerals that would have produced incidental uranium pollution of the surrounding land and waters, threatening local health and livelihoods. The local inhabitants protested, it became an election issue, the winning party was against the project, and the government refused the mining permit. The arbitration tribunal risks deciding that, if the project cannot go ahead, the government must compensate the company for all the profits it would have made over the life of the mine, as estimated by the company.

There is now a whole new set of legal practices, or litigation finance investors, that are making enormous profits from such cases, in which they offer to pay all the legal fees for taking a case to court in return for a share of the winnings if the case is successful. ISDS cases have required government pay-outs to oil companies of \$84 billion, and across all industries of \$120 billion, since 1976.

While I hesitate to suggest the logical conclusion to which this process can lead, for fear that it will give some lawyers new ideas, imagine how much signing a peace treaty would be worth to the arms industry if they could sue the governments concerned for the loss of their profits had the war continued.

The right for wealthy investors to imagined future profits is now considered more sacred than human or environmental rights or the considered decisions of democratic governments. What can we do to push back against such unethical and immoral practices?

Christine Muller's Comment

Your blog concisely describes how human morality has been turned upside down.

It reminded me of the words of Baha'u'llah:

The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then, and only then, will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody. ([Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh](#))

While I am guessing that there is no easy answer to your important question at the end, I see this destructive development in the context of the above quotation and other Baha'i Writings. It is hard though to internalize that the world's "perversity will long continue."

I think that there are two ways open for meaningful action:

1. Build communities from the grassroots based on a strong spiritual and moral foundation, and

2. infuse public discourse with the world-embracing vision of Baha'u'llah which is diametrically contrary to current trends.

Of course, that is not new to you, and these areas of action are already being pursued by Baha'is around the world, but I thought it would be worthwhile to state them in this context.

The first one, communities based on the values of truthfulness, trustworthiness, regard for science and reality, love, compassion/empathy, justice, and a world-embracing view, will assist people through the ordeal and will be essential for humanity to build up society after a collapse.

The second one – public discourse – may help in the following way: When more people including leaders of thought are becoming attuned to spiritual values, they may be able to reduce human suffering and environmental destruction despite continual social decline.

Both of these actions will also help humanity at the time when suddenly appears “that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake” to listen to the “Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody”, meaning, according to my understanding, the divine teachings for our time.

UN Commission for Social Development: BIC highlights spiritual foundations necessary for social prosperity

April 1, 2025

BIC NEW YORK — A society's social bonds and spiritual foundations are as vital to its true prosperity as economic growth, emphasized the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) in its contributions to the 63rd session of the UN Commission for Social Development at the United Nations headquarters.

“The deteriorating state of the world today has deepened the gap between extreme wealth and poverty, has left growing numbers without a livelihood that can allow them to live a dignified existence and contribute to the upliftment of their societies, and has fueled greater degrees of mistrust and conflict,” said Cecilia Schirmeister, a member of the 11-person BIC delegation to the Commission.

“Yet the moment is one not only of tremendous crisis, but also of significant opportunity as humanity increasingly recognizes its interdependence,” Ms. Schirmeister continued.

At this session of the Commission, discussions focused on “strengthening solidarity, social inclusion, and social cohesion” as part of advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The forum brought together representatives of governments, UN agencies, and civil society organizations.

The perspectives shared by BIC representatives throughout the forum were grounded in principles also articulated in its statement to the Commission, which examines how the roots of numerous global challenges lie in how human beings view, value, respond to, and relate to one another; central to this understanding is the recognition of humanity's shared identity and essential oneness.

To explore how these principles have found expression in practice, the BIC hosted a side event in which two of its delegates shared experiences from community-building endeavors.

Neda Badiie Soto, a BIC delegate from the Canary Islands, described community-building processes based on Bahá'í principles that have engaged thousands of participants across several neighborhoods since 2006. “The community-building efforts in the Canary Islands

promote training and consultation where people’s skills and talents are developed and placed at the service of the community,” she explained.

Ms. Badiee Soto drew parallels between family dynamics and societal harmony, noting that communities, like families, require more than material resources to thrive—they need respect, patience, mutual support, and love as spiritual foundations for unity. This understanding has enabled diverse populations in neighborhoods to work together across cultural, generational, and socioeconomic divides, growing from a handful of participants thirteen years ago to a network of over 2,000 people actively engaged in collective action across the Canary Islands.

Zéphyrin Maniratanga, Ambassador of Burundi to the UN, reinforced this perspective in his remarks at the BIC-hosted side event, stating that “social cohesion... is not merely an economic objective, but a moral and human imperative. ... Economic growth alone is not enough to create a just and equitable society.”

Reflecting on the forum, Ms. Schirmeister emphasized the essential foundations of genuine social cohesion. “Social cohesion begins with strengthening bonds of unity and trust among diverse populations.

“It is about finding points of consensus based on shared values and learning to relate to people of different perspectives and backgrounds.”

Ms. Schirmeister noted that in communities where spiritual principles are cultivated, new patterns of interaction emerge, including greater collaboration between youth and older generations, more pronounced expressions of gender equality, and an enhanced capacity for constructive dialogue and consultation.

JUST GROW: Supporting Urban Agriculture through a Framework of Justice

Agriculture Group of the Association for Baha’i Studies Webinar with Rose Jennings

Sunday, April 27

10:00 am PDT / 1:00 pm EDT,
6pm GMT / 7pm CEST

Rose Jennings is currently working on a postdoctoral fellowship as a researcher in the Baur Food Systems Lab at the University of Rhode Island. In this role over the past nine months she has been facilitating collaborative work between six international, trans-disciplinary research hubs in a project called JUST GROW, investigating justice-oriented urban agriculture systems in city regions.



This work has brought her to visit with rice and green tea farmers in Kyoto, Japan; a women-run educational farm in Dortmund, Germany; a collective of African farmers in Providence,

RI, and most recently to Stockholm, Sweden for a synthesis meeting with all hubs and community partners. There are three things that fascinate her most about this project, which she'll be happy to share more about in her talk: 1) how community engagement plays a role in equity outcomes for UA, 2) the need for values transformation for city region food system sustainability, and 3) the lack of knowledge on how to get more women & youth involved in UA.

Rose has also helped to start a community-run urban farm next to the Baha'i Center in Austin, Texas, started a farmers market, volunteered on a dairy farm in Scotland, led sustainable food tours in Bogota, and currently facilitates a group in her community in San Antonio, Texas, to offer monthly climate resiliency capacity-building workshops to the community, led by community members. The real focus of her family's "urban farm" of life has been developing a spiritual education program in their community for kids and youth, to build the soil needed for her kids' and neighbors' kids' joyful growth in preparation for the future challenges ahead.

How to join the webinar: Subscribers to the ABS Agriculture Group Mailchimp page will receive an announcement with the link the week before presentations. People are free to unsubscribe at any time. Sign up here to receive a link: <https://agriculture-working-group.mailchimpsites.com/>

The Environmental Crisis: Why it matters and how a spiritual perspective can help

The [Oakville Baha'i Firesides](#) always address an environmental topic and take place every month. At the 6 February fireside, IEF board member Christine Muller spoke about *The Environmental Crisis: Why it matters and how a spiritual perspective can help*. A recording of her 51 min. talk is now available on the IEF YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REpqAjUPhX8&t=57s>

Young Person's Guide to Systems Change The Club of Rome 2025

The Young Person's Guide To Systems Change from The 50 Percent (a platform for young leaders supported by The Club of Rome), is designed as a collaborative space that empowers young people to develop a deep understanding of systems thinking and apply it to transform the world around them. It challenges the misconception that systems thinking is too complex for young people, recognising their ability to navigate interconnected challenges.

This guide is the result of seven online sessions, where young leaders co-created a shared toolbox filled with knowledge and strategies for driving systemic change.

Blending humour, anecdotes and practical insights, this handbook introduces key concepts of systems thinking and systems transformation, making complex ideas accessible and engaging.

SOURCE: <https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/young-persons-guide-to-systems-c...>

Planning Your Lawn Care for this Year

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.

[Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#)

In recent decades, it has become fashionable to have a lawn in which nothing else grows than one species of grass. Fortunately, the tides are turning, and many people are becoming aware of the numerous harmful impacts of mono-culture lawns.

That is the beginning of an article by IEF board member Christine Muller in the April issue of the Wilmette Institute newsletter. To read the article, go here:

<https://wilmetteinstitute.org/planning-your-lawn-care-for-this-year/>

Reimagining Global Governance for Food Security

Kofi Annan Commission on Food Security

February 2025

The Kofi Annan Commission on Food Security has just issued its report addressing the broken food governance system to ensure that everyone on the planet has access to adequate and nutritious food, which should be a basic right. Comprising seven global leaders in food security and governance, the KACFS has created a roadmap to address these systemic failures and redefine how we address one of humanity's most pressing challenges.

Following a comprehensive review of existing governance institutions, the Commission has identified four headline "governance shifts" required to revive the ambition of zero hunger and ensure food and nutrition security for everyone. Under these shifts, the report lays out 10 actionable recommendations—each with a clear, practical roadmap for implementation.

Governance Shift 1. | Reorienting Action on Agenda 2030: Accelerate Progress on SDG 2 by Enabling More Accountable and Informed Governance

Recommendation 1: Enhance the coherence and accountability of food security agencies.

Recommendation 2: Improve data management and access.

Governance Shift 2. | Delivering on Prevention: Prevent the Slide into Hunger through Peacebuilding for Food Security and Social Protection

Recommendation 3: Build peace for food security.

Recommendation 4: Mainstream social protection for food security.

Governance Shift 3. | Food as a Global Public Good: Elevate Food Systems Sustainability as a Global Responsibility

Recommendation 5: Fully integrate food systems into climate, trade, and finance governance agendas.

Recommendation 6: Provide a clear strategy for financing food systems as a global public good.

Recommendation 7: Governments to cooperate to ensure a more equitable food trade regime.

Governance Shift 4. | Shaping the Future: Manage Future Food and Nutrition Needs through Anticipatory Approaches

Recommendation 8: Engage the private sector for more resilient and healthier food economies.

Recommendation 9: Empower farmers to create sustainable food futures.

Recommendation 10: Advance digital and innovative governance approaches to meet the needs of women and youth on an unequal planet.

SOURCE: <https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/publication/fixfoodgovernance/> where you can access the report.

Science Missions for Sustainability officially endorsed By the International Science Council

The ISC's Science Missions for Sustainability programme has been officially endorsed as part of the **United Nations International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development**. This recognition reinforces the ISC's commitment to advancing mission-driven, interdisciplinary research that delivers tangible solutions to global sustainability challenges.

The Science Missions represent a transformative model for solution-oriented research - ensuring that knowledge is not only generated but fully integrated, actionable, and applied to meet the scale of humanity's most pressing needs.

By aligning with the goals of the UN Decade, the ISC is helping shape a globally coordinated scientific response to sustainability. This endorsement highlights the critical role of science in building a more equitable and resilient future.

Source: International Science Council <https://council.science/our-work/science-missions/>

World Forest Forum

We thank IEF newsletter subscriber Ulf Persson for sending us the following information.

The World Forest Forum is involved in developing solutions that develop the use of forests and at the same time reduce climate impact.

We are a foundation whose purpose is to promote positive local and global development of human use and management of forests. The goal is that all of its values are thereby utilized for a sustainable society, both socially, economically, and in terms of climate and the environment.

Visit their website here: <https://worldforestforum.com/om-oss/>

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