

One Planet, One Habitation

A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World

A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community

June 2022

Part 1 of 4

The statement

The statement has a complex structure, with 44 paragraphs in the main text under eight headings, **six separate boxes with text on special themes**, and **Proposals for Exploration** under all except the first and last headings. There are also short quotations from the Bahá'í writings.

Structure of the statement

The Natural World

TRUSTEESHIP OF THE NATURAL WORLD

One people in one global homeland

**EMPOWERING PROTAGONISTS OF
TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE**

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Consensus in action

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Redefining progress

RETHINKING ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENTS

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Aligning with higher principles

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

**SCIENCE AND RELIGION:
COMPLEMENTARY SYSTEMS OF
KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE**

Justice as process and outcome

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

LEARNING AS A MODE OF OPERATION

Embracing the role of the state

THE LOCUS OF DECISION-MAKING

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

The world that beckons

Aligning with Higher Principles

Humanity's existence is governed not only by physical forces, but also by social and moral laws of cause and effect. Greed is inherently corrosive to the common good, no matter how artfully justified or concealed. Acts of selfless compassion invariably hold the power to motivate and inspire, no matter how seemingly simple or isolated.

From this perspective, the path to a more harmonious relationship with nature cannot be one of technological adjustment alone. It must also involve communities and societies learning to align themselves with higher principles.

Unlocking the high-minded qualities latent in every individual has been a central concern of religious teachings and ideals for millennia. That fanaticism and sectarian dogmatism have undermined the moral and ethical

imperatives that lie at the heart of so many faith traditions can hardly be denied. Nevertheless, communities that are actively laboring to put transcendent values into practice, for the betterment of all, represent a reservoir of experience worthy of serious consideration.

"Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pagantry of wealth and riches," asserts Bahá'u'lláh, providing one example, among many, of an approach to personal identity and collective interaction that is grounded in values transcending material prosperity alone. How such ideals come to infuse the thinking and behavior of growing numbers, and how this process can be consciously fostered and accelerated, are questions of central importance to the environmental movement and to humanity as a whole.

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Much remains to be learned about models of society that prioritize ethical principles and actively foster their development and application throughout a population. Establishing within each United Nations agency a focal point of learning about the practical application of moral and ethical principles, rather than simply seeking ready solutions, could generate knowledge about how advancement can be promoted across the full range of human experience.

A notable alternative to the paradigm of material advancement alone can be found in the significance that multitudes around the world place in the transcendence of the human spirit and its connection with the divine. Much could be learned from a systematic and scientific inquiry into communities that are learning to apply spiritual principles—such as selflessness, solidarity with others, and stewardship for the natural world—to advance broad-based social progress. In addition to various United Nations initiatives already focused on engagement with faith-based organizations, such an inquiry could explore alternative sources of motivation and inspiration, and the impact they can have on community and environmental well-being.



12

SCIENCE AND RELIGION: COMPLEMENTARY SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

In working to build a more sustainable world, humanity has at its disposal two mutually reinforcing systems of knowledge and practice: science and religion.

Scientific inquiry has been a vital instrument in seeking to understand physical reality and in forging innovative solutions based on a search for truth and a commitment to learning. When combined with values such as freedom from prejudice and bias, it has enabled humanity to separate fact from conjecture. Scientific capabilities—of observing, measuring, rigorously testing ideas—have allowed us to construct a coherent understanding of the laws and processes governing physical reality, as well as to gain insights into human conduct and the working of society. Far from being the province of researchers and

academics alone, the methodologies of scientific inquiry are tools that any individual or community can employ.

For its part, religion provides a framework by which high ideals can be applied to individual lives and to the life of society, for the betterment of all. The spiritual principles animating the world's enduring religions have aided individuals and entire populations to grapple with questions of meaning, purpose, and the nature of the good life and the good society. When true to these ideals, religion has provided a bulwark against ideologies of materialism that would reduce human beings to mere resources to be exploited or consumers to be satiated. At its highest, religion has not only raised the call to virtues such as integrity, good character, high resolve, cooperation,

and sacrificial endeavor, but drawn growing numbers together around such principles, unifying disparate elements, and giving rise to cohesive communities working to manifest high ideals in practice.

Taken together, science and religion provide fundamental organizing principles by which lasting progress can be made. When both the material and spiritual dimensions of humanity are kept in mind, and due attention is given to both scientific and spiritual knowledge, the tendency to reduce human progress to the consumption of goods, services, and technological packages is avoided. Both science and religion are essential to the liberation of individuals and communities from the traps of ignorance and passivity. Both are vital to the advancement of civilization.



"Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress."

— Bahá'í holy writings

13

The brochure has a beautiful layout with photographs

One Homeland

*This span of earth is but one homeland
and one habitation.*

*It behooveth you to abandon vainglory
which causeth alienation
and to set your hearts on whatever will ensure harmony*

— Bahá'u'lláh

The Natural World

The natural world, in all its wonder and majesty, offers profound insight into the essence of interdependence.

From the biosphere as a whole to the smallest microorganism, it demonstrates how dependent any one life-form is on numerous others—and how imbalances in one system reverberate across an interconnected whole.

(One Planet – One Habitation §1)

The Natural World

Intimately embedded in this greater system, and deeply reliant upon it, humanity faces a paradox growing more consequential by the day.

On the one hand, the human race has never held more power to shape the physical world on planetary scales—a development some have termed the anthropocene.

This is a testament to our collective ingenuity and creativity, as well as the boundless potential before us.

On the other, that very power, when untempered by thoughtful consideration and directed by priorities heedless of the present and future common good, gives rise to consequences not only worldwide in scope but potentially irreversible.

The Natural World

As the grave effects of surpassing planetary limits become increasingly apparent, from climate change to biodiversity loss to environmental degradation and pollution, humanity is being compelled to develop more mature, collaborative, and constructive relationships between its peoples and with the natural environment.

(One Planet – One Habitation §3)

The Natural World

Thinking on environmental issues has progressed markedly since the landmark United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in 1972.

The advances achieved over the past half-century, whether scientific, legal, or institutional, stand as a reason for confidence and a source of hope for the future.

Yet, today, increases in understanding must be translated into action far more rapidly and on much wider scales.

The Natural World

Sweeping changes in the organization and operation of human affairs have become an existential imperative, necessary and unavoidable.

The question before the nations and leaders of the world is whether the needed action will be taken as a matter of conscious choice and prevention, or whether it will be prompted by the destruction and suffering wrought by escalating environmental breakdown.

(One Planet – One Habitation §4)

Trusteeship of the Natural World

Human beings exercise a level of influence over the natural world unique among all forms of life on the planet. At times, this has been construed as justification for an orientation toward mastery and control of nature, buttressed by notions of ownership and dominance. As more and more people have come to recognize humanity's interconnection with and dependence on the environment, however, they have accepted that our unique impact carries with it the inescapable duty to nurture and protect the natural world.

(BOX: Trusteeship of the Natural World)

Trusteeship of the Natural World

Each of us enters the world as a trust of the whole. Each in turn bears a measure of responsibility for the welfare of all and for the planet on which we depend. This world-encompassing sense of trusteeship does not seek to eliminate humanity's impact on the natural world. Material resources will always be required to sustain and advance civilization. The goal, rather, is to direct that impact consciously, creatively, and compassionately.

(BOX: Trusteeship of the Natural World)

Trusteeship of the Natural World

As we learn how best to utilize the earth's raw materials for the good of all, we must be conscious of our attitudes toward the source of our subsistence. Our activities must reflect the fact that the wealth and wonders of the earth are the common heritage of all people, who deserve just and equitable access to its resources.

(BOX: Trusteeship of the Natural World)

Trusteeship of the Natural World

Our choices must evince an intergenerational perspective in which the well-being of future inhabitants is taken into account at all levels of decision-making. And in this turbulent period of human history, our activities must increasingly be tempered by the wisdom and judgment that come with growing maturity.

(BOX: Trusteeship of the Natural World)

Service to the common good

*Is there any deed in the world that
would be nobler than service to the
common good?*

... No, by the Lord God!

— Bahá'í holy writings

One people in one global homeland

From a perspective wide enough to encompass the planet in its entirety, humanity can be seen in no other light than as one people living in one global homeland. Consciousness of this oneness, expressed through relationships of justice, constitutes the only foundation on which sustainable societies can be raised.

(One Planet – One Habitation §5)

One people in one global homeland

Every people, in its own way, celebrates the ever-abundant beauty and grandeur of nature.

The traditions of every culture pay homage to that priceless heritage that sustains not only the physical needs of bodies but also the transcendent qualities of the spirit.

The task of building a sustainable and flourishing world holds the promise of providing a point of unity not only in shared endeavor, but in joyful celebration as well.

(One Planet – One Habitation §6)

One people in one global homeland

To acknowledge humanity's oneness is not to suppress variations of expression, culture, or social organization.

The principle of unity contains within it the essential concept of diversity; indeed, this is what distinguishes it from uniformity.

In the natural world, systems flourish through the interaction of highly diversified elements.

Differences between various components can enhance the functioning of the whole and strengthen the resilience of the overall system.

(One Planet – One Habitation §7)

One people in one global homeland

In human affairs, diversity of thought, background, and approach are similarly critical.

It is through the interaction of diverse perspectives and experiences that higher degrees of truth can be found and insight gained.

Otherwise, an overabundance of similar views and opinions, like excessive dependence on a single natural resource, leaves a system exposed to dangers and vulnerable to breakdown.

One people in one global homeland

The contributions of ever more populations, well coordinated and integrated, will be required to rebalance humanity's relationship with the natural world.

Presumptions of any one group's superiority over another, asserted along lines of nationality, race, wealth, or any other characteristic, cannot but erode the bonds needed to generate consensus and sustain coordinated action.

Feelings of otherness invariably undermine motivation to work for the common good, either social or ecological.

(One Planet – One Habitation §9)

One people in one global homeland

Humanity has often struggled to appreciate diversity while working to build unity, to respect and protect the particular while drawing on the strength of the shared. Stewardship of the natural world offers a powerful means to reconcile these interconnected ideals.

(One Planet – One Habitation §10)

Empowering protagonist of transformational changes

All of the earth's inhabitants deserve the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of a global society advancing in harmony with the natural world. To create such a society, people everywhere must be empowered to participate in the constructive processes that will give rise to it. Building capacity in individuals, communities, and institutions to contribute effectively to transformational change is therefore an indispensable element of effective environmental action.

(BOX: Empowering protagonists of transformational change)

Empowering protagonists of transformational change

For the individual, this implies developing a range of interrelated capacities—scientific, technical, social, moral, and spiritual. Individuals must be endowed with an understanding of concepts, knowledge of facts, and mastery of methods, as well as the skills, attitudes, and qualities required to establish more healthy and sustainable patterns of individual and collective life.

(BOX: Empowering protagonists of transformational change)

Empowering protagonists of transformational change

In terms of local communities, capacity building involves the enrichment and conscious shaping of culture. On the community rests the challenge of creating a milieu in which individual wills blend together, in which powers are multiplied and manifest themselves in collective effort, and in which higher expressions of the human spirit are demonstrated in new ways of arranging the affairs of society.

(BOX: Empowering protagonists of transformational change)

Empowering protagonists of transformational change

Attention must also be paid to strengthening organizational structures. Institutions with capacity are needed at every level that can act as channels through which the talents and energies of individuals and groups can be expressed in service to the common good.

(BOX: Empowering protagonists of transformational change)

New bases for human happiness

We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end.

— Bahá'í holy writings

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Pressing environmental realities demand of humanity an increasingly mature integration of principle and action, informed by a process-oriented approach to progress. Productive steps should be taken as quickly as possible within current systems, limitations notwithstanding, even as foundations that reflect new paradigms better able to meet contemporary needs are put into place.

(One Planet – One Habitation §11)

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Toward this end, proposals are offered throughout this document in a spirit of inquiry, drawing inspiration from instances where the international community not only imagined a better world, but attempted action along paths previously untravelled. Such practical experiences offer insight into what becomes possible when consensus and requisite action are allowed to transcend prevailing narratives that impede movement toward meaningful change.

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

One means of reinforcing the principle of the oneness of humanity that could be considered is establishing mechanisms that would evaluate the global impacts of domestic policies. An agreed-upon international advisory body, for example, could assess such impacts across national borders and recommend adjustments or restitution as necessary.

(One Planet – One Habitation §11)

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Within current structures, strengthening the legal framework related to the natural world would lend coherence to the biodiversity, climate, and environmental regimes, and provide stronger foundations for common stewardship of the planet. Integrating governance structures in this way is well within the capacity of the international community, and past experiences—advances and setbacks alike—provide valuable foundations which can be drawn upon.

PROPOSALS FOR EXPLORATION

Efforts to increase coherence between engagement in areas of peacekeeping, mediation, human rights, reconstruction, and long-term development, for example—from the establishment of the United Nations' Peacebuilding Architecture to the proposed new agenda for peace—hold initial lessons about what a process of harmonization of related efforts could look like.

(One Planet – One Habitation §11)

Sources

Bahá'í International Community. *One Planet, One Habitation: A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's Relationship with the Natural World*, 1 June 2022. https://iefworld.org/2022bic_OPOH and https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/one_planet_one_habitation.pdf

Working Toward One Planet and One Habitation: Sustainability and Environmental Efforts by Bahá'í Communities Around the World <https://opoh.bic.org/>

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