

Baha'i address to the YHFF conference on Environment

The climate which is the main subject of this conference is part of our environment and the environment is the nature in which we live in, by which we sustain our lives and from which we obtain all we have. It is therefore appropriate to offer you the statement of Baha'i International Community on Nature.

In September of 1986 the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) launched their Network on Conservation and Religion, bringing religious leaders representing Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews and Muslims together with environmental leaders in Assisi, Italy.

Each of the five religions represented there issued a declaration on nature. As of October 1987, the Bahá'ís became the sixth major religion to join this new alliance, and put forward this statement in support of the Network's objectives. As the time is short I have asked that this statement to be made available to you and I read to you its main points.

It begins with these words from the Baha'i Writings:

"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. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise."

With those words, Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, outlines the essential relationship between man and the environment: that the grandeur and diversity of the natural world are purposeful reflections of the majesty and bounty of God.

For Bahá'ís, there follows an implicit understanding that nature is to be respected and protected, as a divine trust for which we are answerable.

The statement then refers to the fact that: All the world's major religions make this fundamental connection between the Creator and His creation and goes on to say that:

As the most recent of God's revelations, the Bahá'í teachings have a special relevance to present-day circumstances when the whole of nature is threatened by man-made perils ranging from the wholesale destruction of the world's rain forests to the final nightmare of nuclear annihilation.

More than a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed that humanity has entered a new age. Promised by all the religious Messengers of the past, this new epoch will ultimately bring peace and enlightenment for humanity. To reach that point, however,

humankind must first recognize its fundamental unity-as well as the unity of God and of religion. Until there is a general recognition of this wholeness and interdependence, humanity's problems will only worsen.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

The problems of ocean pollution, the extinction of species, acid rain and deforestation - not to mention the ultimate scourge of nuclear war - respect no boundaries. All require a transnational approach.

Bahá'í Faith also contain an explicit prescription for the kind of new world political order that offers the only long-term solution to such problems.

Again Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of the world is the union of all its people in one universal Cause....."

Built around the idea of the world commonwealth of nations, with an international parliament and executive to carry out its will, such a new political order must also, according to the Bahá'í teachings, be based on principles of economic justice, equality between the races, equal rights for women and men and universal education.

The issue of economic justice is an example. In many regions of the world, the assault on rain forests and endangered species comes as the poor, legitimately seeking a fair share of the world's wealth, fell trees to create fields. They are unaware that, over the long term and as members of a world community which they know little about, they may be irretrievably damaging rather than improving their children's chances for a better life. Any attempt to protect nature, must, therefore, also address the fundamental inequities between the world's rich and poor.

The statement refers to fundamental principles of interrelationship between various elements of nature and the role that religious traditions can play in helping to inspire their followers.

The Bahá'í Faith seeks above all else revitalize the human spirit and break down the barriers that limit fruitful and harmonious cooperation among men and women, whatever their national, racial or religious background.

For Bahá'ís the goal of existence is to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. Such a civilization can only be built on an earth that can sustain itself. The Bahá'í commitment to the environment is fundamental to our Faith.

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