

**A Bahá'í Perspective on the
Future of Canadian Foreign Policy**

May 1994

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada
7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, Ontario, L3T 6L8
(905) 889-8168 fax (905) 889-8184

Executive Summary

The Canadian Bahá'í Community has a keen interest in Canada's foreign policy. Fundamental to the convictions of the more than 20,000 Bahá'ís in Canada is the understanding that only by working to ensure the well-being of humanity as a whole can we guarantee a satisfactory future for the world's nations, our own included. In this statement the Canadian Bahá'í Community encourages the government to extend and deepen the Canadian commitment to building an international order in the coming years based on equity, justice and the rule of law.

Under successive governments Canada's foreign policy has given priority to the United Nations. Canada has established an enviable reputation supporting the United Nations system as the best available means to promote world peace and security, development and social justice. We would like to see this record of service continue. We feel that the United Nations system provides the field of international activity in which Canada's extremely important international influence is most effectively amplified.

The challenges facing the United Nations are serious, but criticism is primarily directed at the lack of resources and the efficiency and legitimacy of decision-making and executive action. The existence of the United Nations is not questioned. What must be done to strengthen, better equip, reform and more sensibly manage the United Nations should be raised by Canada for consideration within the international community. Above all, Canada must support the development of the legitimacy of those instruments of world governance and international order which the United Nations system represents. It is time to move more resolutely towards a stronger international framework with a sufficient level of legislative scope and executive authority, and backed by a collective security force able to halt armed conflicts and check international traffic in crime, terrorism, drugs, and arms. The United Nations system, integrated with other significant multilateral associations, provides the surest route to the development of this framework.

We believe that an ever more interdependent and increasingly united world is the dominant theme of current history. A deeper understanding of the implications of the principle of the oneness and fundamental solidarity of the world's peoples is essential if Canada's foreign policy is to gain effective leverage in world affairs and if the centrality of the United Nations system is to be properly understood. A principle of world unity, which fully respects and upholds diversity, would be the most effective organizing principle of Canadian foreign policy. However, better informed public opinion is required if the government's commitment to strengthening the United Nations system is to find the necessary public support. Public education programs are as important to foreign policy as diplomatic expertise, and we feel the best way to conceptualize such programs is to make their central focus the concept of world citizenship.

Our experience in working with the Canadian Government over the past fourteen years, as Canadian officials raised their voices in international fora in defence of the Bahá'í community in Iran, has given us a deep appreciation for this country's commitment to a more just world. Our comments on Canada's foreign policy are generated by the hopeful prospect contained in the vision of our Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, of the eventual integration of humanity and the emergence of a richly diverse global society as the central phenomenon of the coming century.

A Bahá'í Perspective on the Future of Canadian Foreign Policy

Introduction

The Bahá'í Community of Canada is pleased to present its views to the Special Joint Parliamentary Committee reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy. International affairs and our government's foreign policy are of keen interest to Bahá'ís. By virtue of its central principles the Bahá'í Community understands itself as a global community rather than a national one. Drawn from over 2,100 national, ethnic and tribal backgrounds, living now in every country of the world, the six million members of the Bahá'í Faith think of themselves as world citizens. At the same time, this does not prevent more than 20,000 Canadian Bahá'ís from being proud citizens of this country. Our abiding interest in the well-being of humanity derives from the Bahá'í conviction that only by ensuring the interests of the world as a whole can we guarantee a satisfactory future for the world's nations, our own included.

Canadian Bahá'ís are proud of Canada's record in international affairs. Our foreign policy has reflected values which are central to our national make-up: a spirit of moderation and compromise, support for democratic principles, and respect for human rights, social and economic justice, and the rule of law. In this statement the Bahá'í Community encourages the government to extend and deepen the Canadian commitment to building an international order based on equity, justice and the rule of law.

Today the world beyond our borders has more to tell us about the kind of Canada we will leave to our children and grandchildren than either our much talked about national deficit or our unending provincial and regional preoccupations. We are, therefore, pleased to note an increasing realization of the need to directly link domestic and foreign policy. As this century closes it is evident that the independence of nation-states is no longer an option. While preserving a necessary measure of autonomy, it is clear that unfettered national sovereignty must come into adjustment with the demands of global interdependence in an age that will be characterized by world unity and the increasing solidarity of the human race.

The United Nations System

Central to Canada's foreign policy has been the priority given to the United Nations under successive governments. Canada has established an enviable reputation supporting the United Nations system in which the central organs of the United Nations combine with its many specialized agencies to form the best available set of instruments for world peace and security, development and social justice. Canadian Bahá'ís are proud of the role Canada has played in the development of the United Nations. Dr. John Humphrey's pivotal role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Lester B. Pearson's Nobel prize-winning leadership in the area of peacekeeping, and Stephen Lewis' staunch defence of the United Nations at a time when influential groups were eager to diminish its stature are a few of the individual highlights of close to fifty years of broad Canadian

support for the United Nations system. Like most Canadians we would like to see this record of service continue. The Bahá'í Community of Canada feels that the United Nations system provides the field of international activity in which Canada's extremely important international influence is most effectively amplified.

The challenges facing the United Nations are serious. We agree with the words of the current Human Resources Minister and the Secretary of State for Africa and Latin America when they introduced the May 1993 "Foreign Policy Handbook". "The Cold War era is gone; but in its place we are witnessing the ugly resurgence of violent nationalism. The principle of absolute state sovereignty is eroding, offering a better chance for progress in human rights; but it has also led to a fracturing of international order. The realities of global environmental degradation and human poverty are being accepted at the highest levels of government; but concrete steps to take remedial action are few and far between. The United Nations is experiencing a revival as a central instrument to promote world peace; but remains bedeviled by inefficiency and financial shortcomings."

What criticism is directed at the United Nations, however, seems to turn entirely on the matter of its lack of resources and efficiency of decision-making and execution. Its existence is rarely questioned. What must be done to strengthen, better equip, and more sensibly manage the United Nations must be brought forward for discussion, consideration and action. Above all, Canada must support the continued development of a global sense of the legitimacy of those instruments of world governance and order which the United Nations system represents.

In the face of pressing international environmental concerns, the harsh inequities of an uncertain economic order, widespread political frustration, and a disturbing pattern of civil strife, bold initiatives in the international arena are clearly required. We feel such initiatives should rely on existing United Nations instruments, reforming them where deficient, creating new approaches where required. While it is true that nationally directed foreign policy initiatives can encourage the expansion of international trade, facilitate academic, scientific and technological exchange, and promote a wide range of personal and non-governmental interaction, as long as national sovereignty remains an overriding feature of international relations even the well coordinated actions of separate nations lack the means to adequately manage a sense of proper priority in the overall development of the global system. Such actions are too weak to stop the international diffusion of crime and terrorism, arms and drug shipments, environmental damage, health problems, and the spread of racism and other ideologies of fear. Instances of genocide, the constant rise in refugee flows, ethnic and tribal conflicts, deforestation and loss of arable land, and cruel inequities in economic opportunities and living conditions cannot be met except through a much strengthened international framework of law, the effective executive action of a legitimate world authority, and an improved collective security system. Outbreaks of armed conflict across borders and within borders are today left too much to a process of nation-to-nation diplomacy, or at best the uncertain interests of different multilateral organizations that are structurally too slow and diffuse to contain, much less halt, serious escalations of conflict.

Interim steps prior to a more adequate provision of the funds and resources necessary for a more effective United Nations system are obviously necessary. These include fostering the development of existing continental associations and regimes and other multilateral associations, making operative the provisions of Chapter VIII of the

United Nations Charter, so that there is a division of international responsibility and an adequately funded system of international coordination and decision-making able to give immediate response to the problems of the environment, refugee migrations, civil strife, and traffic in arms, drugs and terrorism. Then, over the longer run, a much better financed and supported set of world governing agencies will have to be developed as international public opinion and national leaders and governments recognize the advantages to be gained from a flexible but determined drive to see the United Nations system evolve towards a genuine supra-national governing apparatus.

There is general agreement that the traditional foreign policy levers of nation-states are weakening with the impact of transnational and sub-national forces. This phenomenon occurs at the same time that national deficits are putting additional pressure on the exercise of foreign policy. Only an international governing framework commensurate with the internationalization of virtually every dimension of human affairs can adequately take up the slack represented by the ever more limited initiatives of state governments. It is time to establish a more permanent international authority and system of governance with a sufficient level of legislative scope and executive authority, and backed by a collective security force able to halt the occurrence and spread of armed conflicts and check the international traffic in crime, terrorism, drugs, and arms. The United Nations and its agencies provide the surest basis on which such an international governing framework can be erected. Technological, social, economic, cultural and civic forces, operating above the political level at which nation-states have traditionally operated, provide the necessary preconditions for a more robust and effective international polity; and an increase in international undertakings, expanding networks of personal and non-governmental organizations, and the success of a number of initiatives of United Nations agencies in health, nutrition, human rights, and in promoting exchanges in scientific, technological and cultural areas, all bode well for a significant advance in the evolution of a worldwide governing framework. We, therefore, have high hopes that a major advance in the vigour and versatility of the United Nations can be generated during and immediately following the Fiftieth Anniversary Year of the United Nations.

The Oneness of Humanity

Our view that Canadian resources in the foreign affairs field ought best be applied to support and develop the United Nations system is rooted in our conviction that an ever more united world represents the principal direction in which current history is moving. While almost everyone comments on the increasing interdependence of the world, it seems to us that many of the broader consequences of this development are not being sufficiently examined. A more extensive appreciation and deeper understanding of the implications of the principle of the organic oneness and fundamental solidarity of the world's peoples is essential if Canada's foreign policy is to gain effective leverage in making a difference to the complex world situation and if the centrality of the United Nations system is to be properly understood. The principle of the oneness of humanity provides the most effective organizing principle for Canadian foreign policy, one which we recommend be made its dominant theme. By placing the principle of the oneness of humanity at the centre of our foreign policy, a tangible overall focus and longer-term objective is provided that can generate and guide Canadian foreign policy. This element of principle is required if the execution of foreign policy is to drive forward with a sense of strategic or proactive mission instead of appearing to be merely tactical, pragmatic and reactive to events -- if we are, that is, to overcome an attention span set by the media.

The organic oneness of humanity is a principle otherwise defined as unity in diversity. Unity requires and sustains a maturity of diverse expression and diverse characteristics. The principle of the organic oneness of humanity is not, therefore, a prescription for uniformity in which either the more aggressive culture prevails or in which a bland homogenizing of cultural expression occurs. Only within the matrix of a humanity consciously united, aware of its human commonality and shared condition -- and, since human, therefore appreciative of local and cultural identity -- can the current explosion of ethnic and national affirmation lead to any sensible and enriching advance in civilization. Without the organizing social principle of unity, a fragmenting world will prolong and deepen worldwide suffering that will always be felt where pain is most acute, within the local and cultural ambient of individual and family life.

In our understanding the most important long-term trend over the past century, accelerating during the past decade, is the inevitable movement of the world towards a universal acknowledgement of the fundamental oneness of humanity and the necessity of some form of world order -- a recognition that all human beings on the planet, in the diversity of their local and cultural identities, live in one political, economic and social order. The unification of all the peoples of the earth is the overarching fact of the period of history we have now entered. An active and strategic response to such a fact of life in the twenty-first century will be far better for our well-being than if we stumble into such a reality with our eyes either closed or focused exclusively on only a few particular problems in the near foreground of our vision.

Unity, oneness and the solidarity of the entire human race, inclusive of the least enfranchised and empowered as well as the most privileged, is the foundation of the Bahá'í approach to understanding and resolving human problems and administering human affairs. Disunity, we believe, is the root cause of the many symptomatic problems that afflict the world. Canada's foreign policy must, therefore, be increasingly insistent on articulating the principle of world unity for the moral persuasion this principle can exercise, the motivation to act it can release, and the specific decisions it can generate. It means that absolute national sovereignty must give way to a necessary measure of authority and legitimacy invested in international decision-making bodies.

However brilliant, however well coordinated with other nation-states the exercise of national foreign policy, it will not be adequate to govern the explosion of communication, exchange and interdependence even now occurring in the international arena. What can be considered a viable, integrated world community or global society is emerging at the international level. No human population has ever developed as a viable community without some measure of civic or political life commensurate with its social, cultural, educational and economic sense of itself as a community. We must, therefore, look to establish an international framework with a measure of sovereignty that corresponds to other features of human living now raised to the level of global phenomenon.

Today even the most enlightened political philosophy finds itself unable to take into account some of the issues that must be resolved in the world. There is a crucial need, therefore, to develop new concepts and approaches to understanding a multi-tiered world system of diverse and shifting complexity. We are beginning to recognize, for instance, the significance of rights which communities have and responsibilities which individuals have, instead of only stressing the axiom, important as it is, that communities have responsibilities and individuals rights. We now know that the virtues of freedom must somehow come into a more satisfactory relationship with the demands of justice where justice means as much to the well-being of a whole community as it does to individual

claims. In coming years a new mental framework -- call it the unity paradigm if you like -- will be essential if we are to solve world problems and erect a healthier world system. We, therefore, urge your committee to give thoughtful consideration to the implications of the principle of the oneness of humanity.

Shoghi Effendi, one of the foremost contributors to Bahá'í understanding of this revolutionary change in our way of thinking about how human beings must come to govern themselves, wrote in 1936 about the longer term objectives which can serve to provide the goal towards which United Nations reforms can move:

“Unification of the whole of mankind is the hallmark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving... The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once and for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.”

Such a principle, he pointed out, implies the establishment of some form of what might best be described as a world commonwealth of nations consisting of a world legislature, a world executive, a collective security force, and a world tribunal. Much talked about systems of world inter-communication should be devised free of special interests and national hindrances, requiring the active participation of the world's political and social leaders, and other representatives of the peoples, as much as the participation of corporate and private interests. The economic resources of the world need to be better organized, markets coordinated and developed, and distribution made more equitable. A world federal system able to do these things cannot simply come into existence tomorrow, but must be the result of an accumulating series of initiatives and steps which would accelerate the reform of the current patchwork of supra-national agencies and regimes. The nature of thinking about world problems and solving immediate short-term dilemmas contributes to this process in so far as they serve to test our understanding of the principle of oneness and, thereby, counter all forms of provincialism, insularities, prejudices, and any institutions and social assumptions which do not promote the welfare of the generality of humanity.

A more educated public opinion and understanding is required if the government's commitment to strengthening the United Nations system is to find the necessary public support. Canada's foreign policy has to be reinforced domestically by a rapid increase in public awareness of the principle of unity as a fact of life on the planet in the twenty-first century. There is a vital need to educate public opinion to the necessity of those bold steps required to create a universal framework for world order so that the economic, environmental, social and political realities of the twenty-first century can be adequately engaged.

In the context and spirit of Agenda 21, the framework for the work that has moved forward out of the Rio Earth Summit of two years ago, the Bahá'í Community feels the best way to conceptualize education programs and public awareness campaigns is to centre them on fostering world citizenship. World citizenship can reorient education, public awareness and training toward sustainable development. We have serious doubts that our schools, universities and public media are doing an adequate job in raising up a generation of authentic world citizens, and ask directly if our government leaders sufficiently grasp the

enormous implications of a world that must be united simply to survive. Canada should pioneer widespread educational programs which instill this mentality and outlook in children whose lives, economically and socially, will depend on their capacity to embrace the world's opportunities and needs, not just Canada's. The Bahá'í Community of Canada would be willing to contribute in any way it can to educational programs adopted by the government which aim to raise the consciousness of our identity as world citizens.

Conclusion

For almost fifteen years Canada's Foreign Affairs Department has extended its assistance in defending the lives and human rights of Bahá'ís in Iran. Government awareness of this tragic case was signaled in 1980 and 1981 by two unanimous resolutions of the House of Commons condemning the persecutions of the Iranian Bahá'í Community, that country's largest religious minority. In the past twelve years, over nineteen resolutions condemning the Iranian Revolutionary Government and drawing attention to the inexcusable treatment of Bahá'ís have been passed in the General Assembly of the United Nations and at the U.N. Human Rights Commission. It has been said that the Bahá'í case is a model of how international human rights machinery can be used to protect an oppressed minority, and we have been proud witnesses to the energy and sensitivity employed by Canadian representatives and officials of Canada's Foreign Affairs and International Trade Department doing their utmost in utilizing international fora to advance the cause of human rights not only for our beleaguered co-religionists but also for many other peoples around the world. Our experience with the Department of Immigration and our collaboration with the Canadian International Development Agency in social and economic development projects have confirmed our high opinion of Canada's foreign affairs policies and their practical consequences. Those policies are evidence of Canada's understanding of its moral responsibilities in the community of nations.

Over one hundred years ago the Founder of our religion, Bahá'u'lláh, forecast the eventual integration of humanity and the emergence of a global society as the central phenomenon of this century and the next. In describing the complex problems of this transitional period in human history, Bahá'u'lláh identified some of these as inevitable features of the coming of age of humanity. They can be overcome, He affirmed, to the extent that we choose to hasten the integration of all the world's peoples in one richly diverse, firmly united global society. "The well-being of mankind," Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." However difficult the transition to a new age and a new way of functioning, Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a global civilization gives us every reason to believe that world unity is indeed the inescapable outcome of humanity's long and painful history on this planet. Our comments on Canada's foreign policy have been generated by that hopeful prospect.