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Liberian refugees strive for self-sufficiency

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Fish raised in a man-made pond as part of locally initiated development projects undertaken by Bahá'í refugees in the Ivory Coast are helping to make them less dependent on outside aid.

GUEDEYE, Toulepleu region, Ivory Coast — When civil war broke out in Liberia three years ago, thousands of refugees walked across the country's eastern border and settled in this remote northern region of the Ivory Coast.

Their arrival, like the coming of international refugees to many countries, created an atmosphere of potential trouble. Largely undeveloped, the region has barely enough resources to support its own residents, let alone thousands of homeless outsiders.

Among the Liberian refugees were some 200 Bahá'ís. Before the civil war, they had established thriving communities in Liberia. Upon their arrival in the Ivory Coast, they quickly worked to rebuild their communities, which are based on distinctive principles of local governance, group cooperation, and individual conduct.

The result has been startling. Rather than becoming a burden on their hosts, the Liberian Bahá'ís have sought to be self-sufficient and, in doing so, helped to contribute to the social and economic vitality of the region.

Bahá'ís have organized some 25 local Bahá'í governing councils in the region, known as local Spiritual Assemblies. These Assemblies provide an administrative foundation for collective activities and, through them, at least 16 small-scale development projects have been established. They include 11 vegetable gardens, four fish ponds, and a poultry raising project.

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The Source of Human Rights

After matters of peace and security, there is perhaps no endeavor of the United Nations more far-reaching — or more quietly successful — than the promotion of human rights.

International human rights instruments, such as the all-important Universal Declaration on Human Rights and even the UN Charter itself, have in effect become the conscience of the world. Over the years, the influence wielded by this collective world superego has steadily increased, and the benefits have been immeasurable.

Now comes the World Conference on Human Rights, scheduled to be held in Vienna this June, which will offer an opportunity

for governments, regional bodies and non-governmental organizations to review and assess the progress made in the field of human rights since adoption of the Universal Declaration in 1948.

There are today some 70 covenants, conventions and treaties, including the Charter and Declaration, that define the rights of individuals and groups and which create the framework for monitoring adherence to those standards.

While the Conference must carefully examine the effectiveness of United Nations standards and seek to discover new ways and means to ensure their implementation, the meeting also offers an important chance to step back and reflect on the underlying principles which must guide the new sense of international conscience that has emerged. The dramatic changes on the world's political scene over the last several years make the challenges especially acute.

Bahá'ís believe that a sense of human rights arises not merely from some innate social standard, like some natural resource of civilization. It is, rather, an endowment from the Creator.

"Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust?" the revelation of God to Bahá'u'lláh asks. "That no one should

exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from the one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul..."

In other words, human rights derive their ultimate authority from the will of God. Whether one believes that humanity was created from clay or from DNA, all people are made from the same stuff. All human beings are equal in the sight of their Creator — and therefore all human beings must recognize their equality in the sight of each other.

Interestingly, it is only in this century, as humanity has increasingly recognized its own interdependence and oneness, that the human rights movement has risen and flourished worldwide.

Accordingly, it is this principle of human oneness — discussed in these pages many times — which delegates to the World Conference should keep foremost in their thinking as they ponder the current status and future direction of the international human rights system.

For from this fundamental principle comes virtually all of the other important concepts about our modern rights and freedoms: If we are one race, then women deserve equality with men; if we are one race, then all forms of prejudice or discrimination based on race, ethnic, or national origin must be eliminated; if we are one race, then individuals deserve the right to explore truth for themselves and to worship in the manner they choose.

Even some of the more complex concepts in the field, such as the right to development and/or the right to commodities such as food, shelter, and health care, can be seen to stem from the same underlying principle of human oneness. The benefits of medicine, science and technology, the products of agriculture, and the knowledge that is imparted by education are all gifts from God. They are the birthright of all.

There are important qualifications to all of this. The practice of human rights cannot be allowed to infringe on the rights of others. Freedom of expression does not confer any right to incite violence; freedom of religious practice must not transgress the

Perspective

bounds of tolerance for other beliefs.

Further, as delegates to the World Conference ponder these ideas, they should also carefully consider the importance of another fundamental principle: that rights must be coupled with responsibilities.

In the Bahá'í view, God has not only given to humanity the great bounty of life, but also the obligation to live up to certain standards of individual behavior: to act towards one another with love and brotherhood; to work and strive for personal progress; to take responsibility for those who are less fortunate among us; to be honest, truthful, and trustworthy.

Consider some of the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration, and the concomitant responsibilities that they imply:

The right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law implies the responsibility to be obedient to the law, and to seek to strengthen and make more just the legal system.

The rights to marry and found a family imply the responsibility to work to nurture and support the family unit. And there are special responsibilities towards one's chil-

dren that cannot be shirked. One has a responsibility to seek education for his or her children; not to mistreat them, and certainly not to abandon them.

The right to participation in government must go hand-in-hand with the responsibility to act faithfully towards that government; to serve it when called; and to work within its systems to make it better.

The right to work and employment cannot be divorced from the responsibility to perform one's duties to the best of one's ability. And rights to food, shelter or other commodities do not imply license for able bodied persons to rely on society for support where opportunities for employment exist "The most despised of men in the sight of God" said Bahá'u'lláh, "are those who sit idly and beg."

In the broadest sense, the notion of "universal" human rights also begets a responsibility to humanity as a whole. The obligation here is to act as world citizens. In our individual lives we must seek to move beyond the narrow confines of local, regional or national interests and to ask what best serves the world community. ☸

Human rights derive their ultimate authority from the will of God. Whether one believes that humanity was created from clay or from DNA, all people are made from the same stuff. All human beings are equal in the sight of their Creator — and therefore all human beings must recognize their equality in the sight of each other.



Laura Colan

Madame Rúhíyyih Rabbání, a leading dignitary of the worldwide Bahá'í community, signs The Earth Pledge as Theodore W. Kheel, Chair of the Earth Summit Committee to Promote The Pledge and publisher of *The Earth Times* looks on. The Earth Pledge, launched by Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), reads simply: "I pledge to act to the best of my ability to help make the Earth a secure and hospitable home for present and future generations."



A sea of humanity pours out from the main auditorium of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan during the 1992 Bahá'í World Congress.

Bahá'í World Congress offers glimpse of the future

The gathering of 30,000 Bahá'ís from 180 countries in New York suggests how a peaceful and interdependent global society might look and feel

NEW YORK — In a demonstration of the principles of human oneness and global interdependence which are among the fundamental teachings of their Faith, some 30,000 Bahá'ís from more than 180 countries gathered for four days in November to celebrate a century of accomplishments.

The Second Bahá'í World Congress, which ran from 23-26 November, was the largest and most diverse gathering of Bahá'ís ever—and planners and participants alike said it was hugely successful.

"It was a glimpse of the future," said Dr. Wilma Ellis, convener of the World Congress Coordinating Group, which had final

responsibility for planning and executing the event. "With such a diversity of people coming together from around the world, we got a brief glimpse of what an interdependent and peaceful global society could look and feel like."

Using a variety of media, including music, drama, video, speeches and a global satellite television broadcast, the Congress program highlighted the dynamic growth and spread of the Bahá'í community since the passing in 1892 of Bahá'u'lláh, its founder.

A special point of the celebration was the fact of the worldwide community's distinctive unity. The Bahá'í Faith has successfully resisted division into sects and factions, despite the extreme diversity of its membership. This feature, said numerous speakers, offers great hope for a divided humanity.

"In the 100-year period since the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, the faith has spread over the globe more widely than any other religion except Christianity, which has been in existence for more than 2,000 years," said

Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, professor emeritus at Yale University, in a 24 November address to the Congress, taking note of statistics about the Faith's geographic spread as published in the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

The Faith's unity, said Dr. Kazemzadeh, is what has made such an expansion possible. "The Bahá'í Faith is the first world religion that contains a clear order for succession and interpretation. This has allowed the Bahá'í Faith to spread to every country in the world yet preserve its oneness."

Opening ceremonies on 23 November included an address by New York City Mayor David Dinkins, the reading of a letter from U.S. President George Bush, soul-stirring music by a 400-voice choir assembled from 36 nations. New York Governor Mario Cuomo also sent a letter of greeting to the Congress.

Also featured in opening ceremonies was a dramatic procession of some 300 Bahá'ís from virtually every nation in their native dress. "We are the peoples of the world," said Sein Mene Chow, a Bahá'í from Hong Kong, as they marched forward to the specially designed stage at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan, where the Congress was held.

Humanity's Spiritual Crisis

Among the themes of the Congress was the Bahá'í response to the crises and problems now facing humanity, such as

approaches to peace, environmental action, and economic development. Presentations emphasized that the roots of the most intractable problems facing humanity were spiritual in nature.

"This is a time of great urgency for the entire human race," said David Hofman, a former member of the Universal House of Justice, international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. "It is the time when the greatest spiritual crisis in the entire history of the planet is taking place — the transformation from childhood to maturity."

This theme was further developed on the final day of the Congress, when the Universal House of Justice itself addressed the Congress via satellite. The broadcast was also received at more than 50 downlink sites around the world.

"The storms battering at the foundations of society will not be stilled unless and until spiritual principles are actively engaged in the search for solutions to social problems," said the Universal House of Justice, in a statement read by Dr. David Ruhe, a member of the body.

"Disunity is the crux of the problems which so severely afflict the planet," the statement said. "More serious still, disunity is common in the relations between religions and within religions, vitiating the very spiritual and moral influence which it is their primary purpose to exert."

"This is a time of great urgency for the entire human race. It is the time when the greatest spiritual crisis in the entire history of the planet is taking place— the transformation from childhood to maturity."

—David Hofman



On 26 November, Bahá'í communities around the world were linked electronically during a global satellite broadcast. Shown on the screen in the main auditorium at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan is a greeting to the Congress from the Bahá'í community of Russia.

The Universal House of Justice said the oneness of humanity must be the pivotal spiritual principle in healing disunity and establishing a new global order.

"This principle means far more than the reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and goodwill among people: It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced," said the statement.

The growth and development of the Bahá'í worldwide community and its demonstration of this ideal of human oneness, the Universal House of Justice said, "encourages our expectation that all of humanity can and will be united."

The satellite broadcast itself also provided a dramatic demonstration of the worldwide scope of the Faith. As Bahá'ís listened in Manhattan, a Bahá'í in Western Samoa read a message from that nation's head of state, His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II, who is a Bahá'í.

The Malietoa urged others to listen to

the unifying teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. "In view of the current state of human affairs, I pray that more and more leaders will listen to the call of Bahá'u'lláh in order that world peace be established, which has been the purpose of all religions of the past," he said.

The broadcast, using a state-of-the-art network of eight satellites to reach all parts of the world, included a two-way video hook-up with the world center of the Faith in Israel and audio links to Australia, Argentina, India, Kenya, Panama, Romania, Russia, Singapore, and Western Samoa.

"It opened up an entirely new world for a religion whose basic principle is oneness," said Alex Frame, an executive with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, who is a member of the Congress program planning committee. "We have never been linked up this way. But through the power of the satellite, we got a glimpse of what it means to be a global family."

Preceding the live broadcast, two-hours of videotaped highlights from the previous three days of the Congress were broadcast

Bahá'í entertainers from around the world were featured in a series of auxiliary events during the Congress. Shown at right is a troupe of Aboriginal dancers from Australia, performing at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.



Paul Slaughter photo © 1992

to viewers around the globe.

The broadcast included scenes from a Carnegie Hall concert honoring Bahá'í musician Dizzy Gillespie, who passed away six weeks after the Congress; footage from the Congress' opening ceremonies and its various talks; and special pre-recorded productions about various accomplishments in Bahá'í history.

Huge Logistical Effort

The First Bahá'í World Congress, held in London in 1963, brought together some 6,000 participants. New York was chosen for the Second Bahá'í World Congress in part because of its great human diversity and internationalism, and because of its role in Bahá'í history. In 1912, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, visited the city and proclaimed it the "City of the Covenant." In Bahá'í terms, the Covenant, which in part refers to the line of leadership succession in the Bahá'í Faith, is the feature that has enabled the followers of Bahá'u'lláh to remain unified. And the Congress was in essence a celebration of that Covenant.

The logistics of bringing together some 30,000 people from every part of the world had been a major challenge facing Congress planners, and it was one that was successfully met. Of special concern was the challenge of moving an estimated 15,000 people in and out of the Javits Center twice

each day for split morning and afternoon sessions.

"I've been working in this industry since 1946, and I've never been more proud of an event in my whole business career," said Benjamin La Rosa, the vice president for operations at the Javits Center. "From a planning point of view, I had been terrified at the difficulties of getting that many people into and out of the Center each day. But there was not one traffic problem, not one incident of pushing or shoving. This was probably the most orderly and courteous group of people I have ever seen in my life."

Other logistical elements went equally well, said Gry Kvalheim, coordinator of logistics for the Congress. She noted that more than 300 buses were used to shuttle Congress attendees between some 5,400 hotel rooms in the New York metropolitan region and the Javits Center each day. As well, the entire Congress required the services of 3,000 volunteers.

"Even though everything was done on a shoestring budget, and many important tasks were handled by volunteers, it all still went exceedingly well," said Kvalheim. "Overall, between the number of people that came and the enormity of the undertaking, with the small number of people we had to carry it all out, it is just short of a miracle that it turned out so successfully." ❁

Steve Berman



The passing of jazz legend John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie, who was a Bahá'í, is being mourned by Bahá'í communities around the world. Mr. Gillespie, accounted as one of the world's greatest jazz innovators, was truly a citizen of the world. In his music and his actions, he sought to promote peace and harmony among all, without respect to race, creed or background. Whenever he travelled, he took the time to meet with his beloved Bahá'í brothers and sisters. Mr. Gillespie's last scheduled appearance was at a Carnegie Hall jazz concert in his honor during the 1992 Bahá'í World Congress. Unfortunately, Mr. Gillespie was too ill to appear. He passed away in his sleep on 6 January 1993.

United Nations again expresses concern over human rights in Iran

Vote in General Assembly and report of the Special Representative reflect a "recent and sudden intensification" of action against the Bahá'í community in Iran

UNITED NATIONS—Reflecting signs that human rights violations in Iran are on the rise, the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December passed a resolution expressing "deep concern" over continuing reports of human rights violations in that country. The resolution made specific mention of the on-going mistreatment of the Iranian Bahá'í community.

Approved by a vote of 86 to 16, with 38 abstentions, the margin of countries supporting the measure was the largest ever for a resolution on human rights in Iran by the General Assembly. Since 1981, Iran has been subject to a steady stream of United Nations resolutions expressing concern over its human rights record.

Noting a recent United Nations report that cited evidence of new executions, torture, an absence of due process, restrictions on freedom of expression and thought, and the "recent and sudden intensification of action against the Bahá'ís" in Iran, the General Assembly called on the Iranian Government to comply with international human rights agreements and urged continued international monitoring of the situation there.

Techeste Ahderom, main representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, praised the resolution, saying that the watchful eye of the international community continues to be the best protection for Iran's beleaguered Bahá'ís.

"The continuing international outcry against the mistreatment of Iran's Bahá'ís is indeed heartening," said Mr. Ahderom. "The on-going monitoring of the human rights situation in Iran by the United Nations system has undoubtedly prevented the much greater horrors there, and it represents one of the genuine success stories of the international commitment to advancing the cause of human rights everywhere."



Bahá'í International Community representative Gila Michael Bahta, shown at left, participated in the Regional World Conference on Human Rights in Tunis, Tunisia, held 2-6 November. At right is the Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ben Yehya.

"The Bahá'ís of Iran pose no threat to the government," said Mr. Ahderom. "Their only desire is to practice their religion freely and to contribute in whatever way possible to the well-being and peaceful development of their nation. We hope that resolutions like this one can help to open the eyes of the Government of Iran to this fact."

Since 1979, some 200 Bahá'ís have been killed in Iran and hundreds more imprisoned in a campaign of systematic persecution by the government. Although the rate of killings has slowed in recent years, the execution of Mr. Bahman Samandari last April, and the death sentences levied against two other Bahá'ís last summer, have raised anew the specter of wholesale killings in Iran.

The deterioration of the human rights situation in Iran was noted in a United Nations report released in November, which provides extensive documentation that Iran's Bahá'í community continues to be the target of systematic oppression.

Sudden Intensification

"The renewed use of executions and the recent and sudden intensification of action against the Bahá'ís, particularly regarding confiscation of their properties and expulsion from their homes, raise the fear that the country is entering a phase of harassment and denial of rights in some regions, a new phase of open persecution of these Iranian citizens," said the report, which was prepared by Professor Reynaldo Galindo Pohl of El Salvador.

As the Special Representative of the

Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Professor Galindo Pohl has monitored Iran's compliance with international human rights agreements since 1986.

In the November report, Prof. Galindo Pohl said the Iranian Bahá'í community has entered a new phase of persecution and now stands in constant fear of "reprisals of all kinds."

The report noted, for example, that at least one Bahá'í was summarily executed earlier this year, that two others currently face death sentences, and that thousands more remain deprived of jobs and pensions, of educational opportunities, and the right to practice their religion freely.

Mr. Galindo Pohl's report also stated that Bahá'í holy places, historical sites, cemeteries and administrative centers remain confiscated or destroyed. He says that Bahá'ís continued to be considered as "unprotected infidels" under Iranian law; that Bahá'ís are deprived of all access to institutions of higher education; and that many Bahá'ís are deprived of the means to earn a livelihood. The report noted, for example, that the majority of the 10,000 Bahá'ís who lost their jobs in the 1980s remain unable to secure employment and that they have difficulties in obtaining permits to establish and manage their own businesses.

Prof. Galindo Pohl also said various forms of harassments against Bahá'ís continue. "It has recently been reported that elderly and widowed Bahá'ís have been evicted from their homes," Prof. Galindo Pohl said. ☉

"The renewed use of executions and the recent and sudden intensification of action against the Bahá'ís, particularly regarding confiscation of their properties and expulsion from their homes, raise the fear that the country is entering a phase of harassment and denial of rights in some regions."

—Reynaldo Galindo Pohl



In Cameroon, Bahá'ís planted trees near Bamenda in observance of World Environment Day last June. The seedlings were provided by the Urban Council.

Inauguration of first Bahá'í Peace Chair set for January

Endowed professorship at the University of Maryland will focus on steps to build a global society

COLLEGE PARK, Maryland, USA — The world's first Bahá'í Chair for World Peace will be inaugurated and Dr. Suheil Badi Bushrui installed as the first incumbent on Friday, January 22, at the University of Maryland at College Park.

The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace was established by the University's Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) and the Bahá'í community of the United States.

As explained by Dr. Bushrui, the Chair's mission is to promote alternatives to the violent resolution of conflict through conflict management, global education, international development, spiritual awareness, and world trade; to share the experience of the worldwide Bahá'í community in building a global society; and to offer that community as a model for study.

"The Bahá'í world community's success in harmoniously bringing together disparate cultures is worthy of study as a phenomenon," said Dr. Bushrui, an internationally recognized scholar of Anglo-Irish, English and Arabic literatures—and a well-known authority on Bahá'í teachings. "Even now, when the worst danger of war be-

tween the United States and the Soviet Union is over, the uniquely strong sense of unity in the Bahá'í movement is of critical importance—and must be studied."

One of the major and general aims of the Chair is to conduct and publish research, design courses and organize seminars and international conferences that will lead to an understanding of the factors which promote ethnic and religious conflicts within and among nations, and will help in the search for peaceful solutions to resolve them.

Dr. Bushrui has long experience with issues of reconciliation and conflict resolution. From 1982 to 1985, he served as special cultural adviser to Amin el-Gemayel, then the president of the Republic of Lebanon, and he was actively engaged in programs of ethnic and religious reconciliation there.

Dr. Bushrui also has first-hand knowledge of the cultural, social, spiritual and intellectual life of the worldwide Bahá'í community, which he has visited throughout Africa, Asia, Europe and America. From 1970 to 1985, he was chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Middle East and between 1966 and 1968 he was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada.

Dr. Bushrui has been a fellow and visiting scholar with CIDCM for nearly six years. Before that, he taught literature at Oxford University. In recent years, he has also helped to establish the first program in World Order Studies at the Landegg Academy in Wienacht, Switzerland.

Among the more than 200 guests expected to attend the inauguration and installation ceremony are Amin el-Gemayel, former president of Lebanon, and the Honorable Dorothy W. Nelson, United States Court of Appeals judge and vice-chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States of America. Representatives from countries in which the Chair has already established relationships also will be in attendance. These countries include India, Switzerland, Great Britain, France and Bolivia. ☉

"The Bahá'í world community's success in harmoniously bringing together disparate cultures is worthy of study as a phenomenon."
—Dr. Suheil Bushrui

Dr. Suheil Bushrui, designated to be installed as the first incumbent in the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland.





Helvi Sipilä, the first woman to be appointed to the position of United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, addressed a recent conference on "The Role of Women in a United Europe," which was held 28-31 October at the Landegg Academy in Wienacht, Switzerland. Looking on is Nancy Ackerman, a representative of the Bahá'í community of Russia. The event is but one example of Bahá'í-sponsored activities aimed at promoting the advancement of women worldwide.

Bahá'í International Community establishes an Office for the Advancement of Women

NEW YORK — The Bahá'í International Community in December announced the establishment of an Office for the Advancement of Women.

The new Office will provide structure for better collaboration with local and national Bahá'í communities—and with other international non-governmental organizations—in activities aimed at promoting the equality of women, said Mary S. Power, who has been appointed director of the Office.

Joining the Office as a consultant is Alasebu Gebre Selassie, a sociologist from Ethiopia who has specialized in socio-economic studies on women and children.

"The Office for the Advancement of Women will help give a distinct voice to the Bahá'í International Community's work on the status of women throughout the world," said Ms. Power, who will also retain her position as a United Nations representative for the Community. "In recent years, our work has expanded from simply representing our views on women at the United Nations to a broad range of activities and collaborations."

For example, Ms. Power said, the Community took on a new role two years ago when it began to collaborate with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in a series of development projects aimed at promoting change in the attitudes between women and men through the use of traditional media.

Currently underway in three countries, Bolivia, Cameroon, and Malaysia, the project is administered by the Community, and Bahá'í communities at the national and local levels are also participating.

The Community has also been active in recent years as a founding member of The Advocates for African Food Security, a coalition of representatives of about 30 non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and intergovernmental organizations that seeks to highlight the concerns of African women farmers.

"The work of the Bahá'í International Community with the Advocates will now be carried out through its new Office for the Advancement of Women," said Ms. Power, who has also coordinated the Community's involvement in The Advocates. "In many ways, the creation of this office is really an evolutionary step; it is not something entirely new."

Ms. Power has represented the Community at United Nations activities to promote the advancement of women since 1975. She served as vice president of the National Council of Women of the United States from 1989-1991 and is currently serving as Chairperson of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in New York where she is a member of the Steering Committee coordinating the activities related to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women which will be held in Beijing in 1995. ☉

"The Office for the Advancement of Women will help give a distinct voice to the Bahá'í International Community's work on the status of women throughout the world."

— Mary Power

The establishment of local Spiritual Assemblies, like this one in the village of Guedeye, have been the key to stimulating local development efforts among Bahá'í refugees from Liberia in the Ivory Coast. Local Spiritual Assemblies, a regular feature of Bahá'í community governance around the world, offer an administrative framework for local action.



Liberian refugees seek self-sufficiency

(Continued from page one)

"The Bahá'í community in the region, they are quite different from the other refugees," said Eugene Sevrier, a member of the Bahá'í Social and Economic Development Committee for the Ivory Coast. "They are trying to be independent. And that makes their behavior quite different."

Most of the people in the region—on both sides of the border with Liberia—are members of the Kran tribe. When refugees began to come across the border, they naturally settled in with their clansmen in Ivory Coast.

The Bahá'ís among the Liberian refugees began to re-organize themselves almost immediately after their arrival. They held a conference and formed a regional Bahá'í governing council composed of the members of various former local Liberian Assemblies.

Among the first items on the council's agenda was to re-establish functioning Bahá'í communities. That means communities which meet regularly for worship, consult about local problems, and seek to provide education for their children.

Once basic community activities had been re-established, the regional council began to consult about ways in which to improve the economic situation of the refugees.

In the fall of 1991, the equivalent of about US\$20 was invested in the purchase of some simple garden tools, and village-level Bahá'í governing councils were encouraged to begin small projects, such as vegetable gardening, according to Henry Appleton, a Bahá'í who now works full-time for the Toulepleu regional Bahá'í council as a community development worker. Starting with Nothing

Starting with Nothing

"We essentially started with nothing," said Appleton. "Now we have 9 hoes, 9 shovels, 3 watering cans. And those tools have helped us make vegetable gardens throughout the region."

Mr. Appleton said the application of the principle of consultation has been especially important in the task of establishing local development projects. Consultation is the method for non-adversarial decision-making and problem-solving used by Bahá'í communities. It seeks participation by all and aims to promote cooperation and unity.

"At first we did everything for the villagers and the projects failed," Appleton said. "Now we listen and say: 'This is good. We all have these problems. Why don't you start a garden. My vegetable garden is producing.'"

Mr. Appleton said that Bahá'ís have also worked hard to get community leaders involved — and they have in many cases succeeded. In many villages, he said, the chiefs now give strong support to the Bahá'í projects. At least six traditional chiefs have joined the Bahá'í community.

"We essentially started with nothing. Now we have 9 hoes, 9 shovels, 3 watering cans. And those tools have helped us make vegetable gardens throughout the region."

— Henry Appleton

"We are only here to encourage, to give support once you start," said Mr. Appleton, speaking of his role as a community development worker and stressing the importance of consultation. "We consult, every community consults, every individual identifies his own needs."

Concurrent with the flourishing of Bahá'í activities and development efforts, the Bahá'í community in the region has grown rapidly. Although only about 200 of the initial group of refugees were Bahá'ís, many more Liberians have since embraced the Bahá'í Faith, along with at least 300 Ivorians in the region. By the end of 1992, there were some 1,000 Bahá'ís in Toulepleu, and they have established some 25 local Spiritual Assemblies in an equal number of villages.

As well, at least eight Assemblies have managed to erect Bahá'í centers in their villages. Bahá'í centers are communal buildings which provide a space for worship, meetings, classes, and the administration of development projects.

Mr. Appleton believes that the results are made possible only because of the spirit of unity and cooperation—an essential element in the Bahá'í teachings—which comes through the proper functioning of Bahá'í community life.

"If work is done in the path of humanity, it brings a lasting result," Mr. Appleton said. "We think development is the practical application of the spiritual potential that God has given man. Our goal is to upgrade the living standard not only of the Bahá'ís

but of people in general."

Important Role for Women

The Bahá'ís in the region have particularly emphasized the importance of women in the development process, and this has contributed to the success of efforts by the refugees to become more self-sufficient.

"In the Bahá'í Faith every woman plays her part," said Ann-Marie, a traditional midwife who embraced the Faith since the arrival of the refugees. "No one is rejected. Children are brought up in the path of God, with moral qualities, not wasted like we see in today's society."

The accomplishments of the Bahá'ís in the Toulepleu region have come with very little outside help. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Ivory Coast recently gave the equivalent of about US\$300 to assist the Toulepleu Bahá'ís to buy chickens for their poultry-raising project. As well, small amounts were donated to help build the village Bahá'í centers.

Not everything has gone perfectly. Recent problems with locusts and a period of drought have decimated the vegetable gardens and reduced the viability of the fish ponds. But the effort to become self-supporting continues.

"Although they are refugees, with no permanent home, they have done wonderful things here," said James Larkpor, who has visited the area several times recently. "They deserve a lot of commendation for what they have achieved in this place." —
Reported by Frances Kazemi ☉



Henry Appleton



The Liberian Bahá'í refugees have held large regional meetings like this one last November as part of the effort to become better organized and less dependent on outside aid. Participants come from many villages, and a wide variety of issues are discussed.

Review: Two luminaries

(Continued from back page)

If both exhibits had a common pivot, it was expressed in the changing landscape of the post-modern soul and its impact on a planet without the traditional reference points.

"environments," as Ms. Martin termed them, the first stage of the exhibit comprised a historical overview of some of the journalistic coverage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the New World, stressing His message of universal peace, the elimination of prejudice, women's suffrage and global unity. The emerging power of the world's press was highlighted by the enthusiastic coverage given to the arrival of the man dubbed as a "Persian Prophet."

A three-dimensional, life-size diorama of the world's events eighty years ago evoked a sense of déjà vu among visitors, portraying prevailing themes of the time—themes that are equally relevant today: war and peace, territorial battles and world conflict, the equality of the races and the sexes and the great injustices and inequities of a newly industrialized world.

Room two explained and illuminated the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, displaying powerful and beautifully illuminated quotations from the Bahá'í writings on the continuity and oneness of all religions and making an otherwise normal hotel ballroom seem like a cathedral of the Sacred Word.

Crowds of every conceivable color, age, and shape, dressed in business suits or feathered tribal costumes or African robes, silently and respectfully celebrated the proclamation of unity brought to America by 'Abdu'l-Bahá eight decades ago.

New York has since been known to Bahá'ís as the City of the Covenant, making it an important symbol of the modern world and of the receiving point for a new religious message that was intended to transform and regenerate that world from a fragmented material civilization into a unified spiritual one.

If the two exhibits had a common pivot, it was here, expressed in the changing landscape of the post-modern soul and its impact on a planet without the traditional reference points. Matisse and his spiritual contemporaries and successors—Picasso, Rouault, Utrillo, Tobey and especially Chagall—clearly understood the essence of this message. Their art increasingly turned away from representational work

toward the abstract, the experimental, the symbolic and ultimately the ineffable. The primary theme of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's utterances in New York, that there is just one indescribable and single reality underlying all religion (and by extension all great art), provided an important counterpoint to the Matisse retrospective.

Indeed, the Bahá'í exhibit showed how the spiritual dimension of life needs expression in the physical world, which is why art and religion have assumed such importance in our future-shocked century. "Bahá'ís believe that this present age was ushered in by a new infusion of God's grace embodied in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh," explained Ms. Martin.

And since Bahá'ís also believe that such grace must find expression in social justice, room three of the pavilion focused on the remarkable advocacy for a divine civilization undertaken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in America. In visits to 23 American cities, during which he delivered numerous talks, had interviews with scores of journalists, met with prominent citizens like W.E.B. DuBois, 'Abdu'l-Bahá brought a message of universal progress, hope, and social change.

The news magazine format of the exhibit came into particular play in room three, where an array of 37 angled panels, a six-sided kiosk and a fanciful parade diorama presented the social problems of the modern world and the Bahá'í proposals for their resolution. Excerpts from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's addresses and talks, in counterpoint with photographs of early Bahá'ís and juxtaposed with images that indicate the awakening of America's social conscience, served to emphasize the timeliness of His message today.

The pavilion's reliance on photographic images was no accident. The early black and white or sepia-tone images made the contrasts of the twentieth century more apparent. (One small child was overheard asking her father, "Daddy, didn't their clothes have colors then?") Photographs and portraits of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were arrayed along two of the panels, and they served not just an illustrative purpose but to show the impact of photography on painting and on modernism as a whole.

The first two portraits, by New York painter and early Bahá'í Juliet Thompson and by Lebanese author and mystic Khalil Gibran, showed romanticized, gauzy, and

ideally proportioned portraits typical of the nineteenth-century sentimental styles the fauvists were so opposed to. The next, painted by Louis Potter, the celebrated American symbolist sculptor, revealed a more intense and real 'Abdu'l-Bahá, while the fourth likeness, a strikingly honest photograph by Gertrude Käsebier, showed a truly modern and quite craggily realistic picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's expressive face.

This portrait by Käsebier, who was recently the subject of a major rediscovery and New York retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, may prove in time to be her most defining and important single photograph, not just for its signal subject, but for its frank lighting, its modern candor, and its nuanced acceptance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's humanity and, at the same time, His undeniably holy countenance.

The themes of both the Matisse retrospective and the *Mission to America* pavilion owe a great deal to the then newly developing art and science of photography. Matisse's later work, along with all the Expressionist painting of the late 19th and early 20th century, can arguably be traced to the impact photography had on the depiction of reality in art.

The photograph's ability to implicitly capture and reproduce physical reality made representational painting redundant, and as photographs improved and became more numerous, the painters of the period moved closer and closer toward the abstract. The newspapers of the day, just beginning to dig their way out of a period of shameless yellow journalism, were beginning to use photographs extensively, and they helped usher in a new phase of more honest and representational reportage.

Photography also had an immeasurable social impact, spurring what 'Abdu'l-Bahá termed "an awakening sense of justice," by accurately transmitting and juxtaposing disparate images of human misery and affluence for the first time. These exhibits, so influenced by the art and science of photography, both gave witness to the power of recorded light.

In room four visitors saw a short, ten-minute documentary called "Mission to America: 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the City of the Covenant." Its emphasis was on the profound significance of that causal moment in history when 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to America,



noting that at the time He called our century "the Great Century" and forecast massive worldwide upheavals that would prepare the way for a new era of global cooperation and peace.

In the final room was a fragrant garden where a soundtrack of dignified readings from the Bahá'í writings was played, creating an atmosphere of calm and spiritual repose. "We wanted visitors to the pavilion to come away feeling that they had experienced an encounter with 'Abdu'l-Bahá," Ms. Martin said. Judging from the tears and the smiles on the radiant faces of those who exited the pavilion, that design worked. Mr. Kavelin and Ms. Martin, who labored long in the face of tight budgets and looming deadlines, get extremely high marks for their conception and construction of such a moving and noble installation.

Near the end of his life, Matisse was asked what the future of art was, and he replied in one word — "Light." In New York last month, that light streamed out of an unlikely collection of museum galleries and hotel ballrooms and into the consciousness of a waiting world. — David Langness ☉

[David Langness is the designer of the Lifestyle Choices exhibit, the largest museum display on drug and alcohol abuse prevention in the United States, and is a critic and author. His latest book, "The Seeker's Path: Myth, Maturity and the Bahá'í Teachings," will be published in March by Oneworld Publications.]

Madame Rúhiyyih Rabbání, center, is shown with John Kavelin and Elizabeth Martin at the 'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Mission to America* pavilion, which was on exhibit for four days in November during the 1992 Bahá'í World Congress. Mr. Kavelin, at left, and Ms. Martin were co-designers of pavilion. Madame Rabbání is a leading dignitary of the Bahá'í Faith.

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How two turn-of-the-century luminaries foresaw this "great century"

Exhibitions: 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Mission to America and Henri Matisse: A Retrospective

New York

Long, slow-moving, thousand-person-an-hour lines stretched out from the entrances of two remarkable exhibits in New York last month. Focused on the inauguration of the modern age, both presentations chronicled its inception and celebrated the rebirth it still promises. They provided an unparalleled window to a new understanding of the driving forces behind the currents of the twentieth century.

The better known—the huge retrospective of French painter Henri Matisse at the Museum of Modern Art—has drawn a record number of visitors from the United States and Europe to see the 400 paintings, drawings and sculptures created by the great modernist.

Less publicized was a powerful installation at the New York Hilton that commemorated the 1912 visit to New York of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, who founded the Bahá'í Faith in the nineteenth century and whose teachings so clearly presage the twentieth century and its ubiquitous revolutions. Titled *'Abdu'l-Bahá: Mission to America*, the exhibit was built for the Bahá'í World Congress. [See page 5 on the Congress.]

Although open for just four days during the Congress, the *Mission to America* pavilion is nevertheless perhaps historic in the annals of such displays. There can be little doubt that no such exhibit has ever been visited by a wider and more diverse cross-section of humanity—certainly not in so short a time.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived in New York, the progressive teachings of the Bahá'í Faith on the dawning of a new era in human maturation were just beginning to spread to the West. "Now the new age is here and creation is reborn," 'Abdu'l-Bahá proclaimed. "Humanity has taken on new life. The autumn has gone by, and the reviving spring is here. All things are now made new. Arts and industries have been reborn, there are new discoveries in science, and there are new inventions.... Renewal is the order of the day."

For those who saw both exhibits, the enormous impact of a new religious revelation on human thought and emotion was made abundantly clear.

Review

By far the most interesting section of the Matisse show, for instance, was the section entitled "Abstraction and Experimentation," which covered the period between 1913 and 1917, and traced Matisse's development from a fairly representational and middling expressionist painter into a leading abstractionist.

Called "fauves" (untamed) by their critics, Matisse and other abstract expressionists, along with the Cubists, the Surrealists and the Dadaists, led the early twentieth century's revolt against realism and impressionism. The fauves worked their way into new realms of artistic expression, painting not just the physical, but attempting to pictorialize the spiritual.

Matisse's early subjects had tended toward lambent odalisques in brightly-colored interiors. They slowly became more stylized, geometric and simplistic as he moved toward cut-paper collage constructions—which reflected and even predicted the world's awakening need to progress beyond form toward essence. The artist's challenge to those who viewed his paintings was a radical one: look past the objective world. Certainly no comparable period in the history of the world's artistic development has charted such a completely new direction as the one Matisse's life and work represents, and the Museum's retrospective, viewed as a whole, showed why.

At the *Mission to America* pavilion, the century's radical new direction was given form in a direct, involving, journalistic style, tracing the conventions of the period and outlining, one by one, the new and unconventional Bahá'í approaches.

The pavilion was the fruit of a collaboration between former Disney set designer John Kavelin and Elizabeth Martin, a writer and filmmaker from Canada. The partnership's success lay in the extraordinary extent to which the graphics and other design elements captured a complex and powerful vision for a new global order.

"As we began designing an experience that would honor the powerful message of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," said Mr. Kavelin, "we found that the layout of news magazines, with each subject a single page interspersed with the photographs of the day, was the most expeditious way of expressing the complex themes the Bahá'í teachings articulate."

Displayed in five separate rooms or
(Continued on page 14)