

ONE COUNTRY

January-March 1993

Vol. 5, Issue 1 Newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens"—Bahá'u'lláh

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School children at recess at an elementary school in Tirana, Albania. Note the boarded-up windows, a legacy of the volcanic changes in Albanian society.

A new approach to moral education seeks to fill the vacuum left by communism's exit; the appreciation of diversity suggests a model for human rights education

TIRANA, Albania — The trees have all been chopped down along the main boulevards and roads in and around this capital city in what was once the most isolated and is still the poorest country in Europe.

Short on fuel to heat their homes two winters ago, Albanians felled the trees for firewood. Most were cut right to the ground. Hardly a stump remains.

The missing trees tell of the many upheavals this otherwise naturally fertile and scenic Mediterranean country has gone through since the collapse in 1991 of one of the most repressive regimes in the communist world.

At the first taste of freedom, some Albanians vented their anger on anything connected with the totalitarian regime that for some 40 years controlled every aspect of life here. They destroyed schools, the massive storehouses and greenhouses on the collective farms, and other government buildings. A second wave of ruination came as outmoded industrial complexes and other inefficient enterprises were simply shut down and abandoned. Today, virtually none of the state-owned businesses function.

As Albanians face the task of reconstruction, many say that not only has their outward world been destroyed and left vacant: their inner world has also collapsed. Like the trees that once lined their boulevards, the communist ideology that once dominated their mental world has likewise been razed to the ground.

(Continued on page 10)

ONE COUNTRY

is published quarterly by the Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community, an international non-governmental organization which encompasses and represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith.

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International Community

ISSN 1018-9300

Printed on recycled paper

Human Rights and Education

At the last World Conference on Human Rights some 25 years ago, many of the world's most intractable human rights problems seemed to stem from the Cold War.

Now the Cold War is over.

But while the world's human rights situation has vastly improved in many places since the downfall of communism and the departure of many right-wing dictators, new sources of conflict have emerged and moved to center stage.

The old struggle in human rights was over ideology: an East versus West argument over governance and economics.

The new struggles are more about matters of belief and culture: whether one group will allow

their neighbors to worship God as they might choose; whether one group will allow another to enjoy (or simply retain) their ethnic, racial or national heritage.

The short list of such conflicts includes "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia, other ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet Union, communal violence on the Indian sub-continent, tribal massacres in Africa, and the cauldron of conflict over religion, race and nationalism that is the Middle East.

These struggles are rooted in passions that in many respects run far more deeply than the Cold War concerns over ideology. It will, accordingly, require efforts of a different sort if their malignancy is to be eradicated.

Many of the human rights violations stemming from matters of ideology, for example, could be addressed simply by focusing on the actions of governments. That is because in most cases it was governments who were violating someone's rights.

Many cases of human rights violations originating in differences over culture and religion are stimulated and inflamed by governments — consider the extent of Government involvement in the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran as reported on in this issue on page 6, or the

situation in the Balkans.

Yet it can nevertheless be said that perhaps an equally large number of the human rights problem areas today arise more from the recrudescence of age-old hostilities and animosities at the grassroots level than from any specific government policy.

Tackling such prejudices and hostilities, accordingly demands the treatment of attitudes of individuals and groups in addition to the traditional focus on laws and governments. And the best way to address such attitudes is through education.

Educating people about their rights, of course, has long been a bulwark of the effort to stem the tide of human rights violations. As Sue Nichols of the Unitarian Universalist United Nations office says in our story on page 4 about the activities of non-governmental organizations in relation to the World Conference on Human Rights, "The first step in human rights is to know your rights."

However, the deep-rooted nature of the passions that spur these conflicts over belief

Perspective

Educational efforts must go beyond merely telling people about their rights. They must also focus on educating them about their responsibilities toward others and efforts to encourage a greater sense of understanding and tolerance.

and culture requires some re-tooling of this approach.

The educational efforts must go beyond merely telling people about their rights. There must also be a focus on educating them about their responsibilities toward others and efforts to encourage a greater sense of understanding and tolerance.

Governments, of course, must play a role in organizing, shaping and supporting

such education programs. Indeed, in this issue we report on the efforts of the Albanian Government to instill in its people a new sense of civic virtue through a pioneering effort in moral education.

As the story says, this effort draws on Bahá'í principles — notably the concepts of unity in diversity, of religious oneness, and of the oneness of humanity. Farzam Arbab, a Bahá'í development specialist who has been involved in shaping the program in Albania, describes the approach:

"From our point of view, moral education is not simply a matter of teaching love and truthfulness. To say 'Don't tell a lie' is a very little thing compared to helping someone to understand the concept of rectitude of conduct. In the old framework, someone can be truthful and honest, but still have a business that is basically exploitative without us seeing it."

Dr. Arbab continues: "One often finds the same kind of contradictions surrounding the issues of racial, ethnic or religious prejudice. You can be a very loving person,

full of love for God and for your friends but still feel prejudice towards foreigners and others of different races or religions. If, however, your moral framework comes from a fundamental understanding of the oneness of humanity and the unity of God, such prejudices evaporate."

Such principles must form the bedrock values if we are to build a world civilization. By helping individuals to recognize the fundamental truth of such principles, which can be taught without reference to a specific religion, the path to greater tolerance and understanding between peoples is cleared.

"O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth!" wrote Bahá'u'lláh. "Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you. Then will the effulgence of the world's great Luminary envelop the whole earth, and its inhabitants become the citizens of one city, and the occupants of one and the same throne." ☉



In India, Prime Minister Shree Narayana Guru, right, received a delegation of Bahá'ís at his residence on 12 September. Dr. G. Gopinath, left, director-general of the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi presented Mr. Rao with a photograph of the House of Worship, which has become one of India's most visited sites.

The Bahá'í International Community has participated in all of the regional meetings held in advance of the World Conference on Human Rights. Shown at right are members of the Bahá'í delegation to the regional meeting for Asia, held in Bangkok from 29 March to 2 April this year. Left to right are: Badi Abhasakun, Dr. Tawatchai Wisoodthimark, and Diane Ala'i.



Upcoming World Conference on Human Rights expected to focus on broad questions

“The real question before the Conference is how to create a universal human rights culture—a culture of conscience, so to speak—that cuts across all regions, religious beliefs, and social and economic systems.”

—Techeste Ahderom

VIENNA — Although on a smaller scale than last year's Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, non-governmental organizations around the world are preparing to attend—and, if possible, to influence—the upcoming World Conference on Human Rights.

The United Nations Conference, scheduled to run from 14-25 June here, is billed as a major opportunity to review and assess the progress made in the field since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

NGOs hope to play a special role at the Conference by serving as catalysts for change.

“The Conference is important because it is the first of its kind in 25 years, and it thus provides a chance to sit back and look at all of these great words that have been spoken about human rights and to see how it all is really working,” said Sue Nichols, the co-executive director of the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office in New York.

“I also believe that governments never would have done as much as they have done in human rights if it hadn't been for NGOs,” Ms. Nichols added, “and that is why it is important for NGOs to work hard

on the issue.”

Rather than focus on the examination of specific human rights cases, the agenda for the Conference aims to address a series of broad questions. These questions include:

- To what extent are human rights universal? Is it axiomatic that everyone has the same rights, or are there differences that can be laid to culture, religion and/or region? Can these concerns be reconciled?

- To what extent must civil and political rights be balanced against so-called social, economic and cultural rights? Should the right of association, for example, take precedence over the right to food and shelter? Can these concepts be integrated?

- How can the rights of women, of indigenous peoples and of other so-called “vulnerable” groups, such as children, be better integrated into the international human rights system?

Indeed, the question of integration—how to apply human rights to the full spectrum of issue areas addressed by the United Nations, whether peacekeeping, development or women and children—is shaping up as an underlying theme for the Conference.

"As we look ahead, the real question before the Conference is how to create a universal human rights culture—a culture of conscience, so to speak—that cuts across all regions, religious beliefs, and social and economic systems," said Techeste Ahderom, main representative to the United Nations for the Bahá'í International Community. "In a subtle way, this is the real challenge before the Conference."

NGOs are at the forefront in calling for the integration of human rights into other areas addressed by the United Nations.

For example, a 41-page position paper by Amnesty International, which calls for the establishment of a UN Special Commissioner for Human Rights, has been widely discussed and contributed considerably to the advance debate on the proposal. Among other things, the paper argues that human rights "are too often marginalized or excessively compartmentalized within the UN system," when the aspirations of the Charter mean that human rights "should underpin all of the UN's activities."

NGOs have played a leading role in the call for an increased focus on the rights of women, as well.

"The demands of women's groups, who are really organized at the grassroots level across the world can no longer be ignored," said Reed Brody, the director of the Washington-based International Human Rights Law Group. "We expect that the World Conference will recommend concrete steps for the integration of women's right into all of the human rights programs."

NGOs have always played an important role in pushing for greater observance and recognition of human rights.

"Without NGOs, much of what we have today in terms of all of these mechanisms for protecting human rights would not be in place—or if they were in place, they would be less effective," said Candy Whittome, the United Nations program coordinator for the Lawyer's Committee on Human Rights, an international NGO that promotes the rule of law worldwide.

Whittome and other NGO representatives say non-governmental organizations have proven especially effective at bringing to the world's attention government violations of human rights that would otherwise be suppressed.

"If, for example, the United Nations Spe-

cial Rapporteurs on Human Rights didn't get information from NGOs, their task would be almost impossible. Because much of the information on the situation in the countries they are reporting on comes from NGOs."

This contribution is acknowledged by United Nations officials.

"Non-governmental organizations have already had a big impact on the Conference," said Elsa Stamatopoulou, chief of the New York Office at the United Nations' Center for Human Rights. "All of the ideas that are being tossed around, from how to strengthen the monitoring of human rights to the idea of a high commissioner, have been debated at the many satellite meetings held by NGOs in preparation for the Conference."

The role of NGOs in promoting human rights education, especially, is widely recognized. "The first step in human rights is to know your rights," said Ms. Nichols of the Unitarian Universalists. "Which is why education is very important. There are a lot of people who don't know about their human rights. And NGOs are the ones that do much of the educating and the disseminating of information on human rights."

NGOs will have a chance to provide input to the Conference in two ways. Those NGOs that have consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will be allowed to attend the Conference itself, said Ms. Stamatopoulou. Some 938 NGOs worldwide have such status, although not all are concerned with human rights.

In addition, regional and national NGOs that have participated in the regional preparatory conferences on human rights will also be allowed to participate directly. More than 500 such NGOs have participated in this process so far.

NGOs of all types will also be allowed to participate in a parallel meeting, called simply the NGO Forum, which will be held for three days in advance of the Conference, from 10 June to 13 June.

"As far as NGOs coming, the Conference is going to be a big chance for us to network," said Berit Collett, associate representative to the United Nations for the Friends (Quaker) World Committee for Consultation. "That is the best part of such parallel forums at a big world conference like this." ☉



Secret Iranian Government memo outlines blueprint for suppression of Iran's Bahá'ís

1991 paper on "the Bahá'í question" calls for "progress and development" to be "blocked"; signed by President Khamenei

GENEVA — The emergence of a previously secret Government memorandum has provided startling new evidence that—despite a long history of denials—Iran has established a carefully considered high-level policy to suppress and persecute the 350,000-member Bahá'í community in Iran.

The secret memorandum, which was drawn up by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council in 1991, outlines a Government blueprint for the quiet strangulation of Iran's Bahá'í community, which is the largest religious minority in Iran.

The memorandum specifically calls for Iran's Bahá'ís to be treated "such that their progress and development shall be blocked." It then spells out a series of guidelines for achieving this goal.

Although the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran has been well documented—more than 200 Bahá'ís have been executed or killed in Iran since 1979, hundreds have been imprisoned, and thousands have been deprived of jobs, pensions, and/or education—the memorandum for the first time provides conclusive evidence that the campaign against the Bahá'ís is centrally orchestrated by the Government.

"The discovery of this document confirms that the Iranian Government, despite its denials, has in fact engaged in a systematic effort to oppress and persecute the Bahá'ís in Iran, with the ultimate objective of eliminating them as a viable community," said Mr. Techeste Ahderom, main representative to the United Nations for the Bahá'í International Community.

"The document indicates for example that the Government aims to keep the Bahá'ís illiterate and uneducated, living only at a subsistence level, and fearful at every moment that even the tiniest infraction will bring the threat of imprisonment or worse," Mr. Ahderom said.



A copy of the secret memorandum on "the Bahá'í question" has been obtained by the Bahá'í International Community. A complete English translation begins on page 7.

**In the Name of God!
The Islamic Republic of Iran
The Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council**

Number: 1327/....

Date: 6/12/69 [25 February 1991]

Enclosure: None

CONFIDENTIAL

**Dr. Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani
Head of the Office of the Esteemed Leader [Khamenei]**

Greetings!

After greetings, with reference to the letter #1/783 dated 10/10/69 [31 December 1990], concerning the instructions of the Esteemed Leader which had been conveyed to the Respected President regarding the Bahá'í question, we inform you that, since the respected President and the Head of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council had referred this question to this Council for consideration and study, it was placed on the Council's agenda of session #128 on 16/11/69 [5 February 1991] and session #119 of 2/11/69 [22 January 1991]. In addition to the above, and further to the [results of the] discussions held in this regard in session #112 of 2/5/66 [24 July 1987] presided over by the Esteemed Leader (head and member of the Supreme Council), the recent views and directives given by the Esteemed Leader regarding the Bahá'í question were conveyed to the Supreme Council. In consideration of the contents of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the religious and civil laws and general policies of the country, these matters were carefully studied and decisions pronounced.

In arriving at the decisions and proposing reasonable ways to counter the above question, due consideration was given to the wishes of the Esteemed Leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran [Khamenei], namely, that "in this regard a specific policy should be devised in such a way that everyone will understand what should or should not be done". Consequently, the following proposals and recommendations resulted from these discussions.

The respected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the Head of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, while approving these recommendations, instructed us to convey them to the Esteemed Leader [Khamenei] so that appropriate action may be taken according to his guidance.

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

A. General status of the Bahá'ís within the country's system

- 1. They will not be expelled from the country without reason.**
- 2. They will not be arrested, imprisoned, or penalized without reason.**
- 3. The Government's dealings with them must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked.**

B. Educational and cultural status

- 1. They can be enrolled in schools provided they have not identified themselves as Bahá'ís.**

The complete text of the secret memorandum on "the Bahá'í question," translated from Persian into English. Words in square brackets have been added by the translator.

2. Preferably, they should be enrolled in schools which have a strong and imposing religious ideology.

3. They must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Bahá'ís.

4. Their political (espionage) activities must be dealt with according to appropriate Government laws and policies, and their religious and propaganda activities should be answered by giving them religious and cultural responses, as well as propaganda.

5. Propaganda institutions (such as the Islamic Propaganda Organization) must establish an independent section to counter the propaganda and religious activities of the Bahá'ís.

6. A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country.

C. Legal and social status

1. Permit them a modest livelihood as is available to the general population.

2. To the extent that it does not encourage them to be Bahá'ís, it is permissible to provide them the means for ordinary living in accordance with the general rights given to every Iranian citizen, such as ration booklets, passports, burial certificates, work permits, etc.

3. Deny them employment if they identify themselves as Bahá'ís.

4. Deny them any position of influence, such as in the educational sector, etc.

Wishing you divine confirmations,
Secretary of the Supreme Revolutionary
Cultural Council

Dr. Seyyed Mohammad Golpaygani [Signature]

[Note in the handwriting of Mr. Khamenei]

In the Name of God!

The decision of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council seems sufficient. I thank you gentlemen for your attention and efforts.

[signed:] Ali Khamenei

Secret memo

(Continued from page 6)

The memorandum came to light in a United Nations report, which was released to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in January. According to the U.N. report, which was authored by Prof. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, the document came as "reliable information" just as the annual report to the Commission on Human Rights in Iran was being completed.

Following receipt of the report, the Commission passed a resolution expressing "grave concern" over reports of human rights violations in Iran, making special mention of religious discrimination against Bahá'ís in that country. In voting on 10 March, the resolution was approved by a vote of 22 to 11, with 14 abstentions. It is the ninth such resolution about Iran by the Commission on Human Rights.

All such resolutions have made specific mention of the on-going persecution of the Bahá'í community there. This year's resolution, for example, expressed concern over the "discriminatory treatment of certain groups of citizens for reason of their religious beliefs, notably the Bahá'ís."

This year's report to the Commission on Human Rights by Professor Galindo Pohl, for example, cataloged numerous incidents of persecution against the Bahá'ís during 1992, from the execution in April 1992 of Mr. Bahman Samandari, a Teheran businessman, to the confiscation of a "considerable number of private homes and other property belonging to Bahá'ís" in Isfahan, Teheran and Yazd.

Copies of the secret memorandum were also obtained by the Bahá'í International Community. [See page 7.]

Although some of its provisions appear to grant a measure of protection to Iran's beleaguered Bahá'ís, its overall impact appears to be to ensure that the Bahá'í community is slowly and quietly suffocated, said Mr. Ahderom.

"The policies put forth by this memorandum seem intended to create an environment where the Bahá'í community of Iran can be slowly strangled without arousing international attention," Mr. Ahderom said.

The memorandum says, for example, that all Bahá'ís should be expelled from

universities; that they shall be denied "positions of influence", and instead only be allowed to "lead a modest life similar to that of the population in general"; and that "a plan shall be formulated to combat and destroy the cultural roots which this group has outside the country."

It also says that Bahá'ís will be allowed to go to school, only if they do not identify themselves as Bahá'ís, and even then that they should be sent to schools "with a strong religious ideology."

"For years, the Bahá'í community has been slowly persecuted on all of these fronts," said Mr. Ahderom. "They have been



Mr. Bahman Samandari, a Teheran businessman, was summarily executed by the Iranian authorities in March 1992.

deprived of their economic livelihood, of access to education, and of the right to religious freedom. These abuses have all been well documented.

"This memorandum confirms every allegation the Bahá'í International Community has made at the United Nations concerning the deliberate and systematic persecution of the Bahá'ís based solely on religious intolerance and hatred," said Mr. Ahderom.

"No other government document has revealed so clearly the determination of the highest Iranian authorities to uproot the Bahá'í Faith from Iran—and even to attack it abroad," said Mr. Ahderom. "It shows conclusively that the persecution of the Bahá'ís is controlled and condoned at the highest levels of the Iranian Government." ❁

Dr. Kozma Grillo, left, the Director of the Albanian Institute for Pedagogical Research, with Dr. Erleta Mato, right, who is working on the pre-school curriculum at the Institute. The Institute is responsible for developing a new national curriculum for moral education in Albania.



Reconsidering civic responsibility in Albania

(Continued from page 1)

This has created something of a moral vacuum in Albanian life, and for many it has had a paralyzing effect. According to development workers and foreign residents, many people seem morally and spiritually exhausted. The Albanians have little initiative, they say, and there is a growing fear that the emptiness will soon be replaced with "Western" problems like drug abuse and prostitution—all while the economy remains in suspended animation.

While some say outside aid and investment is the answer, others believe that Albania's redevelopment hinges on the degree to which its people are able to change their attitudes from the xenophobia and servility fostered during the communist era to a more open-minded and resourceful way of thinking compatible with the modern, interdependent world.

"Ultimately, everything will change here, but for that to happen it is first necessary to change the minds of the people," said Vjollca Sinani, a 38-year-old hydroelectric engineer. "Nobody has initiative here in Albania. We all worked like robots under

the old regime. We only did what somebody else told us to do."

The Vacuum in Moral Education

At the forefront in the search for how to fill this vacuum is the Institute for Pedagogical Research, which has been charged with the task of developing a new national curriculum for moral education.

The task is daunting. Having had its own moral center so thoroughly discredited, the country now faces a bewildering array of systems and values. On the menu of choices is everything from American-style capitalism to European socialism.

In the office of Dr. Kozma Grillo, the Director of the Institute, the bookshelves are now piled high with sample textbooks on civic and moral education from Europe and America, with titles that range from "Discovering Our World" and "A New Geography of Britain."

According to Grillo, the main challenge is to choose a path that meets the unique needs of Albania, offering something that will enable the country to thrive in the future, without betraying its unique past.

"It is our duty to rebuild a new type of

"It is our duty to rebuild a new type of man in Albania, and for that reason we are working to create a new curriculum of moral education."

— Dr. Kozma Grillo

man in Albania, and for that reason we are working to create a new curriculum of moral education," said Dr. Grillo. "But it is a difficult prospect. We are against the drugs and prostitution. We don't like the destruction of the family that we see in the West. Until now, at least, the Albanian people themselves were in a pure state, and we want to protect this state."

Among the systems which the Albanians are drawing on in this effort to rebuild their inner values is the moral framework provided by the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.

Dr. Grillo and others at the Institute say that the Bahá'í teachings, which present a modern world view that is socially progressive and yet strongly supportive of traditional family values and individual morality, offer an important model for the reconstruction of moral values in Albanian society.

The Institute has begun an exploration of how Bahá'í concepts might fit into a new national moral education curriculum. That exploration is being undertaken with the Institute for International Education and Development (IIED), which is based in Wienacht, Switzerland at the Landegg Academy. Both the IIED and Landegg are sponsored and operated by Bahá'ís. Collaborative projects between the Institute for Pedagogical Research and the IIED include:

- Joint sponsorship for a series of seminars on moral education for teachers, educational administrators and academicians in Albania. So far, three such seminars

have been held, in November 1991, May 1992 and February 1993, and more than 1,000 Albanian educators have participated.

- The development of new national textbooks on civic and moral education in Albania. While these texts are being written at the Institute, specialists offered through the IIED are acting as consultants.

- The publication of a new 16-page magazine for children from three to eight years old. The IIED will provide editorial content for four pages in each issue. Those pages will, according to a contract between the Institute and the IIED, promote "the spiritual development of children." The IIED will also provide technical assistance in getting the magazine printed in Italy.

Religious Tolerance a Key Issue

Albanian education officials believe that spirituality must be addressed as a component of moral education, in part because of the resurgence of religion in Albania—and the potential for inter-religious conflict. Before the Government of Enver Hoxha, the communist strongman who ruled Albania from the end of World War II until his death in 1985, it was estimated that the country was about 70 percent Muslim, and 30 percent Christian. The Christians were principally Catholics and Orthodox.

The regime made great efforts to stamp out religion, however. In 1968, for example, all religious worship was outlawed, and most churches and mosques were destroyed. According to individuals who lived under the

Among the systems which the Albanians are drawing on in their effort to rebuild their inner values is the moral framework provided by the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.



In the new climate of freedom in Albania, dozens of newspapers and periodicals, covering the entire political spectrum, have begun to flourish. Shown at left is a newspaper vendor with his wares, spread out on the sidewalk by a busy Tirana street.

Vjollca Sinani, a 38-year-old hydroelectric engineer, believes that for Albania to develop properly, the attitudes of the people must first change. "Nobody has initiative here in Albania," she said. "We all worked like robots under the old regime. We only did what somebody else told us to do." She is shown in her apartment in Tirana.



There is concern that if people return to their religious roots, old rifts between Muslims and Christians may be re-opened.

regime, any display of religious feeling could result in a prison term. For example, said one Albanian, children were sometimes asked after religious holidays if their parents had made any special observance; if so, the parents sometimes went to jail.

During this period, say Albanian officials, many of the old barriers between the religious groups were broken down. Men and women of Muslim and Christian background freely intermarried, for example.

Yet by many accounts, the hunger for spiritual meaning and knowledge was not destroyed. In the current climate of freedom, many Albanians say they never stopped believing in God and that they are now earnestly seeking to understand the truth about religion.

There is concern, however, that if people return to their religious roots, old rifts between Muslims and Christians may be re-opened.

"There are many common things in the values of the Bahá'í teachings and traditional Albanian society," said Dr. Grillo. "For one, your religion opposes the divisions among all of the other religions. For our people, this is very good indeed. Because it isn't good for religion to divide people. This is not only true for Albania, but for all humankind."

Likewise, those involved in curriculum planning say the Bahá'í emphasis on eliminating all forms of prejudice, whether over differences of race, ethnicity or sex, also

offers an important principle for inclusion into a national program of moral education. The emphasis on women's equality has especially struck a chord.

"In some religions, and specifically Islam, I feel that the woman is a person without rights," said Dr. Erleta Mato, who is working on the pre-school curriculum at the Institute. "In the communist system, the woman is treated in many respects just like a man—without difference—in terms of employment. At first, that was better. It was a form of emancipation. But it was incomplete under communism. The woman did men's work, but she still had to do the housework, the cooking and the child care.

"Now we will teach that there are rights for every individual in our society. And the first thing to teach the new generation is the human rights of women," Dr. Mato said.

Bahá'í Principles, Not Propaganda

In providing assistance to the Albanians, the IIED has been careful to design a program that focuses on the needs and culture of the Albanian people. Although it draws on Bahá'í principles, it does not promote the Bahá'í Faith as a religion.

"When we go to Albania, we don't do it as Bahá'í propaganda," said Dr. Iraj Ayman, director of the IIED. "Always our seminars are a free forum for discussion. We do not tell them that we have all the answers. Rather, we say that we want to explore with them the choices.

"What we do have to offer, we believe,

is an entirely new approach to moral education. Most systems of morality, whether they be based on religion or ideology, come in with a fixed set of values that they want to impose. 'Do this. Don't do that.' What we are saying is that while there are some broad universal principles that offer guidelines, moral behavior must be allowed to evolve in each individual as a matter of free will."

In the seminars offered to Albanian educators, for example, the emphasis is on exploring how individuals can be assisted to develop a moral conscience that operates on internal rather than external reference points.

"From our point of view, moral education is not simply a matter of teaching love and truthfulness," said Dr. Farzam Arbab, an international development specialist who has played a key role in shaping the IIED program. "To say 'Don't tell a lie' is a very little thing compared to helping someone to understand the concept of rectitude of conduct. In the old framework, someone can be truthful and honest, but still have a business that is basically exploitative without us seeing it.

"One often finds the same kind of contradictions surrounding the issues of racial, ethnic or religious prejudice. You can be a very loving person, full of love for God and for your friends but still feel prejudice

towards foreigners and others of different races or religions," Dr. Arbab said. "If, however, your moral framework comes from a fundamental understanding of the oneness of humanity and the unity of God, such prejudices evaporate."

While the IIED program focuses on how such broad principles should and can be incorporated in a curriculum of moral education, and not on the Bahá'í Faith per se, there can be no question that the Albanians clearly recognize and appreciate the link between the IIED and the Bahá'í Faith.

Teachers and educators who have attended the IIED seminars, for example, speak quite openly now about the importance of including certain Bahá'í concepts of spirituality in any program of moral education for Albanians.

"In speaking only of my opinion," said Pranvera Kamani, who is the national inspector-general for pre-school education and who has played a key role in organizing the IIED-led seminars, "I took on the task of being a main initiator of the symposia because all the teachings of the Bahá'ís about morals appeal to me. They seem the best for the present moment in Albania. The concept of building a universal society, for example, seems to me to be a beautiful idea." ☉

History of the Bahá'í community of Albania

The Bahá'í Faith has been established in Albania since 1929. That year an Albanian-born man named Refo Çapari returned from New York, where he had become a Bahá'í, and began to tell his friends about the new religion. He soon married, and his wife and her daughters became Bahá'ís.

Mr. Çapari and his family fled to Yugoslavia during World War II. But he returned in 1944. In September of that year, he died. One of his stepdaughters, Myrvete Çani, also returned to Albania in 1944. She remained, and continued a quiet and personal practice of the Bahá'í Faith, even after the Communists took control of the Government and suppressed all open religious activity.

Bahá'ís from Austria were able to re-establish contact with Ms. Çani in 1988. She began to tell her friends and neighbors about the Faith and, in the climate of religious freedom that followed after the fall of the Communist regime in 1991, increasing numbers of Albanians became Bahá'ís.

As of this writing, there are more than 6,000 Bahá'ís in Albania. Some 34 local-level Bahá'í governing councils have been established in cities and towns throughout the country, and the national community was recently able, with the financial assistance of some Bahá'ís abroad, to purchase a building in Tirana for use as a national headquarters.



Virtually all of Albania's native industrial concerns, such as this small factory on the outskirts of Tirana, now stand idle. According to the World Bank, economic output in Albania has dropped by more than 55 percent since 1990.

A local tree-planting ceremony in 1990 in Pakistan reflects Bahá'í efforts at environmental education there.



Tree-planting in Pakistan becomes a common practice among Bahá'ís

The following article is reprinted from The New Road, the newsletter of the WorldWide Fund for Nature's (WWF) Network on Conservation and Religion. It was written by Mr. Samsheer Ali.

SINDH, Pakistan — Bahá'í communities in Sindh, like their fellow Bahá'ís elsewhere have always been aware of their responsibilities towards nature and conservation. They decorate their community centres, graveyards and other properties by planting trees, keeping green lawns and growing flowering plants.

But organized Bahá'í environmental activities took a new turn with their leadership's formal involvement with WWF's Conservation and Religion Network, when the Bahá'í International Community launched a major tree planting program.

As a result, the National Bahá'í Committee for Socio-economic Development in Pakistan adopted tree-planting as one of its goals. In all the training camps, deepening classes, summer and winter schools and conferences, environment, tree-planting and conservation became a subject of study and discussion.

Even in very busy cities like Karachi and Hyderabad, Quetta, Lahore, Rawalpindi or Abbottabad, one can find a green spot with flourishing high trees surrounding Bahá'í centers and other properties, in the

midst of smoky and busy localities.

During official tree-planting seasons, Bahá'ís throughout Pakistan plant thousands of trees on their own properties and in public places needing reforestation.

Major breakthroughs have been noticed in the villages of Sindh where many of the villagers are landless peasants. They live in one place for a specific period, ranging from a harvest season, a crop season or several years, depending on work. As a result, traditionally, they have taken little care of their environment.

Once environmental education was intensified by the Bahá'í leadership, they became increasingly concerned about their responsibilities towards environment. They have now adopted tree-planting as one of their services to humanity and the Creator. They plant trees on land which they are certain to leave one day. They grow trees by the roadside and near their temporary huts. Throughout the villages of Sindh, green nim and gum trees stand proudly.

Those villagers with their own land and houses have made it a point to plant trees which are more shady and fruitful. It has become such a common practice that the number of such communities is increasing, that the Bahá'ís plant trees in memory of and while commemorating their Holy Days and report it back to their national leadership. ☉

Book Review

(Continued from back page)

ern religious and philosophical impulses that have tended to separate man from nature must be held partially responsible for our dysfunctional manner of living on the earth. The answer, he suggests, lies in "the richness and diversity of our religious tradition throughout history..." He notes that most of the world's major religions, as well as various indigenous spiritual systems, all have much to say about the relationship between humankind and the earth.

He defends Christianity against charges that the Biblical concept of dominion implies that humanity should dominate the earth, arguing instead that the Bible actually promotes a deep sense of stewardship. Other religions, too, offer similar counsel. Islamic concepts of unity, trusteeship and accountability, he says, all serve as "pillars for an Islamic environmental ethic." He likewise mentions Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and the Bahá'í Faith.

"One of the newest of the great universalist religions, Bahá'í, founded in 1863 in Persia by Mirza Husayn Ali [Bahá'u'lláh], warns us not only to properly regard the relationship between humankind and nature, but also the one between civilization and the environment," Mr. Gore writes.

Mr. Gore then quotes from the Bahá'í writings: "We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed, everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life molds the environment and is deeply affected by it. The one acts on the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions."

In the final section, "Striking the Balance," Mr. Gore gives a series of concrete recommendations. Once again, his approach is holistic, touching on a wide range of disciplines. Humanity must take "bold and unequivocal" action on a global scale if the earth is to be saved, he says. "We must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization," he writes.

Specifically, he calls for the execution of a "Global Marshall Plan" for the environment, under which the wealthy nations of the West would finance and support five

major strategic goals: 1) stabilizing world population; 2) developing and sharing appropriate technology; 3) adopting a new set of economic "rules of the road" which account for the impact of economic decision on the environment; 4) the negotiation and ratification of a new generation of environmentally sound treaties and agreements; and 5) the development of a new global environmental consensus.

In delivering his prescription, Mr. Gore stresses the interconnected nature of the crisis. He observes, for example, that among the best ways of controlling population is through literacy and the education of women, noting that these factors contribute more than anything to the declining birthrates in industrialized nations.

There is very little to criticize about these proposals. They are, as noted, holistic, bold and quite comprehensive.

Two points, however, are worth making. At one point in outlining his Global Marshall Plan, Mr. Gore stops short of calling for any new supranational authority, or "world government," to oversee such an endeavor. He believes instead that such a plan can be implemented through carefully negotiated international agreements.

Bahá'ís would argue that, in the long run, some form of world authority or commonwealth of nations will ultimately be necessary if humanity is to undertake the kind of unified global effort that is necessary to solve the wide-ranging crises before it.

Likewise, Bahá'ís would say that Mr. Gore is slightly off target when he calls for making the "rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization." World unity must be the central principle; only when that is the overriding goal can all other issues, from the creation of social justice to the protection of the environment, be successfully addressed.

As Bahá'u'lláh said more than 100 years ago: "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."

Nevertheless, *Earth in the Balance* has surely established Mr. Gore as a particularly clear headed and forward-thinking figure. His vision is wide-ranging, his analysis is profound, and his solutions are integrated. Everyone concerned about the future should read his book. ☉

One answer to environmental dysfunctionism, Mr. Gore suggests, lies in "the richness and diversity of our religious tradition throughout history..." He notes that most of the world's major religions, as well as various indigenous spiritual systems, have much to say about the relationship between humankind and the earth.

Balancing politics and spirituality in the search for sustainable development

Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit

By Al Gore

Houghton-Mifflin

New York

If by some miracle humanity manages to reverse the seemingly ever-accelerating degradation of the world's ecosystem, future historians will likely recognize as significant the contribution of Albert Gore Jr. and his best-selling book *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*.

Written before Senator Gore became Vice President of the United States, this 407-page volume surely stands as one of the most insightful and accessible examinations of the environmental crisis. It offers concrete, intelligent and politically realistic solutions.

Although addressed primarily to an American audience, its message is global. It has risen to best-seller status in the United States and Germany and is slated for publication in at least a dozen other countries.

What makes the book especially significant is the degree to which Mr. Gore's analysis considers virtually all aspects of the worldwide environmental crisis, covering not only the scientific and technological, but also its economic, political and spiritual roots.

Indeed, as indicated by the book's subtitle, "Ecology and the Human Spirit," Mr. Gore believes that both the problems and solutions to the environmental crisis stem as much from matters of religious belief and moral values as from technology or politics.

"The more deeply I search for the roots of the global environmental crisis, the more I am convinced that it is an outer manifestation of an inner crisis that is, for lack of a better word, spiritual," Mr. Gore writes. "As a politician, I know full well the special hazards of using 'spiritual' to describe a problem like this one. But what other word describes the collection of values and assumptions that determine our basic understanding of how we fit into the universe?"

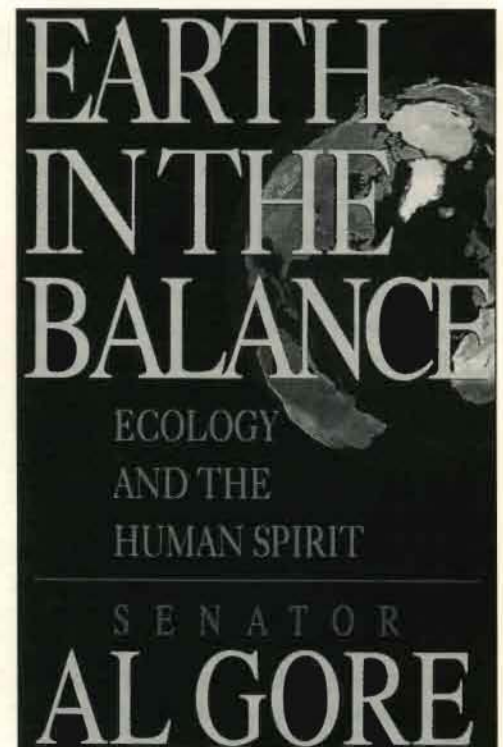
Mr. Gore divides his book into three sections. In the first, "Balance at Risk," he gives a comprehensive but concise overview of the outer manifestations of the crisis, covering the threats posed by global warming, ozone depletion, water pollution and overconsumption of resources. He treats these issues in a highly readable manner, weaving together not only the latest scientific thinking about these problems but also historical parallels and personal observations.

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In the second section, "The Search for Balance," Mr. Gore delves into the political, economic and spiritual roots of the crisis. He draws on his 16 years in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate and offers up a trenchant analysis of the political forces that retard intelligent, long-term action.

"For one thing," he writes, "the way we make political choices has been distorted by the awesome power of the new tools and technologies now available for political persuasion. Thirty-second television commercials and sophisticated public opinion polling can now calibrate and target a political message with frightening speed and accuracy, and they can do more to manipulate the opinions of voters in two weeks than all the speeches and debates and political organizations together can accomplish in ten years."

Mr. Gore argues also that classical economics severely under-values natural re-



sources and fails to account for the cost of pollution, thus encouraging unsustainable development.

While Mr. Gore is highly knowledgeable when writing about both the political and economic aspects of the crisis, it is the insight he brings in talking about philosophical and spiritual roots of the environmental crisis that gives this book its heart.

In essence, he argues that those West-

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