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A typical SAT class meets in Puerto Tejada, a small town near Cali.

JAMUNDI, Colombia — Educational District No. 034 starts somewhat to the west of where the Pan American Highway cuts across Colombia's western flank and extends to the Pacific Ocean. Favored with ample mineral resources, good soil, abundant water and a temperate climate year-round, the district would seem to be blessed with all the prerequisites for prosperity.

Yet the region is poorer than Colombia as a whole and only sparsely developed. One of three rural districts administered by the municipality of Jamundi, it is settled partly by the descendants of former slaves, who survive with subsistence farming supplemented by jobs at coffee picking and sugar cane harvesting. Like in much of the countryside in Colombia, and, indeed, in many other places in Latin America and the South, opportunity has fled to the cities.

The problem is strongly related to education. In the first place, there aren't enough secondary schools in the region — only 50 percent of eligible students are enrolled in high school — making a good education hard to obtain. To make matters worse, most of those who do manage to finish secondary school are unlikely to find a suitable job, and so they head to Jamundi, or over the horizon to Cali, the largest city in the region. At the same time, the lack of opportunity and development here make it hard to attract and keep the teachers that might make secondary education more available.

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# Creating Sustainable Communities

Throughout history, urbanization has been associated with human progress. Humanity's coming together in villages, towns and cities has fostered social, economic and cultural development. Many of our greatest religious, political, educational and scientific institutions have been established in metropolitan areas. In short, to borrow a phrase from the Habitat II agenda, cities have been the "incubators of civilization."

Yet cities — and indeed human settlements on all scales — are today under siege. Around the world, human settlements, especially the largest ones, seem instead to be incubators of crime, poverty, ill health, social alienation, and environmental pollution.

The situation is patently unsustainable. Trends in crime, poverty and pollution, as well as urban migration, traffic congestion and infrastructure decay, are converging on chaos in many cities — with collateral effects in the countryside.

The main question before the upcoming United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), then, is this: how do we go about creating sustainable human settlements?

Too often in the past, solutions to the problems of urbanization have been seen principally in technical terms: better urban planning, new technologies of transportation and energy production, and superior social service organizations. That was a common refrain at Habitat I, held in Vancouver 20 years ago.

Habitat II's draft agenda shifts the focus to socio-cultural solutions, suggesting that only through a "partnership" involving the participation of actors at all levels of society can human settlements be made sustainable. It also draws extensively on the agendas for sustainable development, social integration, and gender equity set by recent United Nations world conferences.

Nevertheless, the scale and com-

plexity of the problems facing human settlements require a deeper analysis. The real basis for creating sustainable communities lies first and foremost in the promotion of unity.

The quest for unity is the central impulse in human civilization. Gathering as families, tribes, cities, city-states and finally nations, humanity has reached ever higher levels of social, economic and cultural development. Each stage reflects a certain level of unity, and progress to the next is possible only when the sense of unity is enlarged.

Unity, in this context, is not uniformity. Rather, unity in human society can be best understood by comparison to the human body: although composed of widely differentiated and highly specialized cells and organs, the body functions as one unit with a common purpose and an integrated existence. True unity, then, is based on an appreciation of diversity, coupled with a shared sense of values and goals.

Such unity in society enables cooperation, creates conditions for human development and promotes the group's prosperity. This has been the case for the tribe, the city, and, today, the nation. History has also shown, however, that if a group fails to make the transition to the next level, its long term survival — its sustainability — is threatened.

According to this paradigm, the real source of urban problems stems from underlying disunities within modern society. Poverty comes from the disunity of classes within society and reflects a failure of people to fulfill their moral obligations towards one another. Crime is a manifestation of the extreme disunities between individuals and society at large. And environmental degradation also stems from a failure to apprehend the unity and interdependence between humans and the physical world, as well as a neglect of the sacred trust this underlying unity requires. The list can go on.

The real question, then, is this: how do we create such an ever-widening sense of unity in human settlements?

The first step is to understand where humanity's central quest for unity is tak-

## Perspective

ing it: towards a unified global society. Already, we have seen the unification of global markets, the growth of a world-girdling system of mass communications, and even the development of new global cultural norms, such as the concept of universal human rights.

Recognizing and acknowledging our essential unity is also a key step in addressing the "local" problems on the Habitat Agenda.

In the past, it was easier to find solutions to urban problems when the population of a city, a town or a neighborhood was relatively homogenous in its background, values and goals. But in the cosmopolitan megacities of today, neighborhoods may be populated with families from dozens of different nationalities, cultural groups and/or religious communities.

And the world today is a global neighborhood. The health of a community — the number of new jobs created, the availability of food, the cleanliness of the environment — depends as much on decisions made in overseas markets and capitals as on local efforts.

Another essential element in the creation of unity is justice. These two imperatives are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have true unity without justice; and the elemental understanding of what is just must be based on a consciousness of unity. "The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men," wrote

Bahá'u'lláh some 100 years ago.

In this day, bringing about justice means a greater sharing of resources, wealth, information and technology, as well as efforts to provide education for all, observe human rights, eliminate racism and promote the advancement of women.

On a more practical level, an important step towards creating unity lies in fostering the concept of world citizenship. By promoting this ethic in schools, the media and the arts, much progress can be made towards the goal of developing well-rounded citizens who are strongly committed to the well-being of their families, fellow citizens, communities, nations and, ultimately, the entire human family.

In the final analysis, building sustainable human settlements will also require a greater acknowledgment of humanity's spiritual nature. In the past, communities were built not only from the bricks and mortar of commerce and patriotism, but also from broad qualities of spirit: the willingness to put the good of the entire community ahead of selfish concerns, as well as devotion to duty and moral discipline.

In our era, it is only by reaching for the next level of human unity, at the global scale, that we can unleash the spiritual, moral and social forces capable of healing the divisions and solving the problems that are currently afflicting our communities. This is true from the smallest hamlet to the largest megalopolis. ☸

**The scale and complexity of the problems facing human settlements require a deeper analysis. The real basis for creating sustainable communities lies first and foremost in the promotion of unity.**



Three members of the Commission on Global Governance visited the School of the Nations in Brasília, Brazil, on 7 March. Shown entering the school's grounds, left to right, are: Ms. Puran Monadjemi, member of Bahá'í community of Brazil; Mr. Cyrus Monadjemi, coordinator of diplomatic affairs for the Bahá'í community of Brazil; Mr. Shridath Ramphal, co-chairman of the Commission on Global Governance; Dr. Celina do Amaral Peixoto, Commission member; Mr. Manuel Camacho Solis, Commission member; Ms. Guitty Milani, secretary for external affairs, Bahá'í community of Brazil; and Mr. Daniel John Vaillancourt, director of the School of the Nations, which is operated by the Bahá'í community of Brazil.

# NGOs gear up for Habitat II

## Prepcom for UN Conference on Human Settlements allows greater participation than in the past

NEW YORK — Non-governmental organizations around the world are gearing up for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, the last scheduled major UN conference of the decade, hoping it will further establish civil society as a key player in the creation of a peaceful and sustainable world civilization.

The Conference, known as Habitat II, is scheduled to be held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 3-14 June. As in previous UN conferences, specially accredited NGOs will be allowed to participate in the actual governmental conference. A parallel NGO Forum will also be held to facilitate a wider variety of NGO activities.

The Conference has two main themes: "sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world" and "adequate shelter for all." Yet, despite the seemingly narrow focus, many expect that one important outcome of Habitat II will be a further acceptance of NGOs as real partners in the process of global development fostered by recent UN conferences in Rio de Janeiro,

Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing on the issues of environment, human rights, population, social development and women's empowerment.

"Our hope is to build within the Habitat II process a common ground between NGOs and governments and local authorities," said Emel Kurma, project coordinator of the Host Committee for the Habitat II NGO Forum and a member of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly. "Because it is on that common ground that you can build everything else."

Certainly the Conference organizers are giving encouragement to this idea of partnership. The Conference's Secretariat has billed Habitat II as a "partners' conference," issuing a series of guidelines that calls for non-governmental, community-based and international organizations, as well as local authorities, the private sector, and others, to initiate activities that will contribute both to the understanding of human settlements issues and to national and global plans of action.

And at the Third Preparatory Committee Meeting (Prepcom III) held February 5-16 in New York, NGOs were given more access to the government negotiating process than at any similar previous UN conference. NGO representatives were granted easy access to all major working sessions of government nego-



Four members from the Turkish Host Committee for the Habitat II NGO Forum attended February's Preparatory Committee meeting in New York. Shown left to right are Emel Kurma, project coordinator for the Host Committee and a member of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly; Fulya Vekilogula, project coordinator for the Turkish Bahá'í Office for Habitat II; Cigden Turkoglu, of the Chamber of Architects; and Korhan Gümüş, of the Istanbul Arts and Research Foundation.



tiations and were allowed to suggest changes in the text, paragraph by paragraph, as the Prepcom's documents were forged. Suggestions for amendments by NGOs were also printed up and distributed alongside official UN documents.

"From the many comments I received, I felt that this Prepcom offered NGOs far better opportunities than ever before to feel a part of the process," said Farouk Mawlawi, NGO liaison coordinator for Habitat II. "They are, of course, very keen on building on this, that there should be no retreat from these heights of NGO involvement and acceptance.

"We expect that this openness to NGO involvement will continue in Istanbul," said Mr. Mawlawi. "We have no reason not to believe that."

Indeed, the draft documents which emerged from the Prepcom, collectively known as the Habitat Agenda, repeatedly emphasize this spirit of partnership, evidence that governments realize they cannot alone implement the kinds of changes in cities, towns and villages that are required to improve living conditions and create long term sustainability.

"The sooner communities, local governments, partnerships among the public, and private and community sectors join efforts to create comprehensive, bold and innovative strategies for shelter and human settlements," states the Preamble to the draft Agenda, "the better the prospects will be for the safety, health and well-being of people and the brighter the outlook for solutions to global environmental and social problems."

The draft Agenda also reflects NGO concerns regarding the advancement of women, protection of the environment, and the promotion of health.

"The Habitat II process is innovative in the sense that the UN system is entering a new era of repositioning with respect to NGOs and civil society in general," said Malick Gaye, coordinator of the Environnement et Developpement du Tiers-Monde, an NGO based in Dakar, Senegal. "What interests me especially in the Habitat II process is the partnership dimension on an international level between governments, local authorities, the private sector and NGOs."

One new feature of Habitat II will be the



"World Business Forum," a parallel conference for the private sector designed to bring businesses into a closer partnership with UN programs and action plans.

To be held 30 May - 2 June, the Business Forum has as its stated goal to help "create sustainable living environment through enterprise." So far, some 300 corporations and business organizations have signed up to participate, said Marcello Palazzi, chairman of the Forum. "For the first time, the business community will be a central actor in the UN process," said Mr. Palazzi. "This is important because business is the engine of the global economy."

Among those groups participating in the Forum will be the European Bahá'í Business Forum, which will hold a series of workshops there and at the NGO Forum.

"What we are witnessing in the approach taken by Habitat II is an enlarging process of cooperation at all levels among governments, business, NGOs and the general public," said Lawrence Arturo, director of the Office of the Environment for the Bahá'í International Community. "This process shows how governments are becoming ever more aware of the need for civil society to be involved not only in the implementation of agreed-upon development strategies, but also in their conception and design. This involvement is essential to the relevance, long term support and ultimate sustainability of such strategies, and portends a far-reaching shift in the governance of our societies."☉

During February's Preparatory Committee meeting in New York, government delegates and NGO representatives often gathered informally at a coffee bar outside conference rooms in the United Nations building.

**"The Habitat II process is innovative in the sense that the UN system is entering a new era of repositioning with respect to NGOs and civil society in general."**

**— Malick Gaye**

At the Menu Bahá'í Institute, a refresher course is offered for community health worker trainers.



## Community health workers in Kenya stir broad changes

**Active in more than 200 communities, a project to promote vaccinations has also helped to build a new level of intersectoral and interfaith collaboration — collaboration that has paid off by stimulating the construction of latrines and helping create better access to clean water.**

MENU, Western Province, Kenya — As the mother of seven children, Judith Soita is well aware of what it means to worry over a sick child. One day they are out playing happily by the road with other children, the next they are lying down quietly inside, their eyes glazed with hurt. And in this remote village some 1,000 kilometers from Nairobi, there is always doubt over whether they will get up to play another day.

"As a mother, I always have been worried: will my children survive?" the 35-year-old mother and vegetable farmer said in a recent interview. "And how about my neighbors' children?"

There are many childhood diseases to which children here fall prey. From simple diarrhea, which takes so many infants in Africa, to tuberculosis and malaria, which threaten the young and the old, the day-to-day risks are high. Some 10 percent of the children in Kenya never see age five, according to recent statistics from the World Bank.

But Ms. Soita's worries have been lightened considerably since she became a community health worker, a process she started nearly 10 years ago when she attended a training session at the nearby Menu Bahá'í Institute.

"When I attended the first commu-

nity health worker training, I did not know that I would find my answer there," she said. "But since the training program, I've been able to help my family, my neighbors, all the village and the surrounding villages to understand what is primary health care and how easily they can improve their health. I feel there is an answer to my question, that we all can do something to improve our health."

Ms. Soita is one of some 98 community health workers trained at the Menu Institute as part of a primary health care project sponsored by the national Bahá'í community of Kenya. Started in 1986, the project now reaches more than 200 villages in Kenya's western provinces.

Designed in part to support the national Kenya Expanded Programme on Immunization (KEPI), the project has a goal of 100 percent immunization in the districts it serves. These are the Bungoma, Kakamega and Vihiga Districts in Western Province; the Siaya, Kisumu, and Kisii District in Nyanza Province; and the Transzoia, Nandi and Uasin Gishu Districts of the Rift Valley Province.

While the project has made steady progress towards achieving its goal for immunization, many say that its real success has been the way it has helped to

build a new level of intersectoral and interfaith collaboration in many communities of the region. This collaboration has paid off by stimulating the construction of latrines and helping create better access to clean water. Some say that the project has even helped reduce ethnic and religious prejudices in the region, prejudices that have been a major stumbling block for development.

"This project has meant a dramatic improvement in the way people live," said Chief Shadrack Wabomba Kibaba Namwela of Bungoma District, Western Province. "Because of the project's community health workers, we have a regular visit from mobile clinics. The death rate of children has decreased and malnutrition is also less due to the Bahá'í health project. More homes have latrines and are putting good hygiene and sanitation into practice."

#### **"Facts for Life"**

The project follows a model used with great success by Bahá'í communities in other African countries. (Similar projects exist in Burkina Faso, Chad, Uganda and Zambia.) Drawing on a strong base of local Bahá'í communities in a region, volunteers for the program are sought. They are then given several weeks of training in basic health care techniques at a regional Bahá'í institute. Based in part on the UNICEF/WHO/UNESCO "Facts for Life" program, the training focuses on simple things like promoting hygiene and breast-feeding, understanding elementary nutrition, the importance of immunization, and stopping infantile diarrhea.

After the training, the volunteers are sent back to their communities, having been asked to give 10 hours a week of their time as community health workers. Project administrators continue with regular visits to give encouragement and support; follow-up training is also offered.

While many other non-governmental organizations and government agencies run similar programs to train and support community health care workers, the Bahá'í-run programs have been especially effective because of their low dropout rate, the emphasis on service to everyone in the community, and the manifest volunteerism of the workers.

"The only solution for public health is

training of community health workers," said Harold Kodo, national KEPI education officer. "When we talk about improvement in primary health care in a village, we are talking about information and changing behavior. Because community health workers are from the grassroots and they know the culture, they are able to change behavior much easier and faster."

"From what I have seen," Mr. Kodo said, "the Bahá'í health project training was quiet, well-organized and well-conducted. Specifically, the participants were all local people who are learning to help to improve the health of their village. This approach helps the project's sustainability."

"And the Bahá'í trained workers are working as volunteers without any pay and working very hard at that. They all have a very strong spirit which I think comes from their religion. The Bahá'í community health workers' dropout rate is much lower compared with other community health workers because of their motivation, faith and spiritual qualities," said Mr. Kodo.

According to Ethel Martens, a Canadian specialist in social preventative medicine who helped to establish the Kenyan project, the dropout rate has been about five percent on average — versus a dropout rate as high as 70 percent in some government-run projects to train community health workers in Africa.

The project is also distinctive for its

**"They are working as volunteers without any pay and working very hard at that. They all have a very strong spirit which I think comes from their religion."**

**— Harold Kodo,  
national KEPI  
education officer**

At a one-day health seminar in Vihiga, Western Kenya, a district nurse from the Ministry of Health explains to community health workers how to store vaccines.





Bounaventure Wafula, project administrator, shown on right, presents a package of information to Harold Kodo, KEPI Health Education Officer, during a visit by Mr. Kodo to the Menu Bahá'í Institute.

**"In some respects, Village Health Committees have become like an interdenominational council, because the various religions come together and talk about how problems in the community can be solved."**

**— Dr. Ethel Martens**

effort to involve all sectors of the community in decision-making about and the implementation of local health programs.

#### **Village Health Committees**

On the initiative of project leaders, local Bahá'í governing councils in the region have been asked to appoint three members to help found a Village Health Committee. By drawing in as many as a dozen other community leaders, including local government representatives from the ministries of health, agriculture and education as well as representatives from churches, these Committees have brought a new level of intersectoral and interreligious cooperation to many villages.

"In some respects, these Committees have become like an interdenominational council, because the various religions come together and talk about how problems in the community can be solved," said Dr. Martens of Canada. The project is funded in part by the Canadian Public Health Association, which has provided about \$110,000 to the project over the last three years.

Because of the cross-fertilization from different groups and sectors, the Committees have expanded beyond simple health care to efforts involving sanitation, water supply and solid waste disposal.

The Committees have also acted as a focal point in helping to coordinate visits of mobile health clinics, which are run by the government. Coordination is needed because sometimes the mobile clinics fail to show up on the appointed day, often for want of money for fuel or to pay the nurse. The Committees have occasionally worked to help raise the needed extra funds.

The fact that the Committees are composed of representatives of different religions has also helped to soothe ethnic tensions. Tribal identity is intense throughout Kenya, sometimes leading to prejudice. Individual churches are usually populated by members of a single tribe, and sometimes members of other tribes are excluded from their activities.

Bahá'í communities, however, are usually quite diverse; the concept of unity in diversity is emphasized. Bringing various religious representatives together on one Committee has helped foster cooperation and cut down on exclusion.

"Because of the intersectoral team-

work through the Village Health Committee initiated by the Bahá'í health project, all the villagers are receptive to the free education about ways to better the health of their children and families," said Jepheneah Wanjala Wakhulumu, a member of the Village Health Committee in Namwela, Bungoma District, Western Province.

So far, some 24 Village Health Committees have been established, said Mr. Bounaventure Wafula, the project administrator. "The establishment of Village Health Committees have been a source of unity in the villages," said Mr. Wafula. "Chiefs and government officials are recognizing this and they are very supportive of this project."

"Most of the people who are benefiting and participating in this project are women," added Mr. Wafula. "They learn to take interest in their own family health care and actively participate in consultation. This gives them self-confidence."

Ms. Soita, who started with the program in 1986, has now become one of the project's field supervisors. She has seen how the Bahá'í emphasis on inclusion has contributed to the project's success.

"I think that one of the reasons, people in the villages respect and support us, is the way the Bahá'í community health workers serve the people," said Ms. Soita. "During mobile clinic visits and one-day seminars, our community health workers help and serve everybody without any discrimination. It doesn't matter which tribe, religion, young or old, we give them the same amount of care."

"When I started with this project as a community health worker in 1986, most people in my village and nearby villages didn't know the causes of diseases and how they could prevent them," said Ms. Soita. "But today, after attending awareness-raising seminars and through personal contact with the health workers, most of the villagers can and will prevent many sicknesses such as diarrhea and malaria."

"I am a good example," Ms. Soita concluded. "The diet in our family has changed. I learned about nutrition and different food categories, such as carbohydrates, proteins, vegetables, fruits and grains. In my family, I make sure we eat enough of all of them." ☉

**— By Ladan Doorandish-Vance**

# UN report calls for an end to intolerance against the Bahá'ís of Iran

GENEVA — Saying that Iran's treatment of the Bahá'í community should be regarded as a violation of a 1981 United Nations declaration on religious intolerance, the United Nations' chief expert on the issue has called on Iran to end the ban on Bahá'í institutions and other oppressive measures against Iran's Bahá'í community.

On 23 February 1996, in a report to the UN Commission on Human Rights, Professor Abdelfattah Amor of Tunisia, the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, challenged Iran's claim that the Bahá'í Faith is a political organization and is therefore not subject to the declaration.

"With regard to the Bahá'ís, the Special Rapporteur hopes that a clear distinction will be drawn between questions of belief or other questions of a political nature," wrote Prof. Amor. "In that connection, it should not be presumed that the entire community has been politicized or is engaged in political or espionage activities. Considering the religious principles of the Bahá'í community, the Special Rapporteur believes that there should not be any controls that might, through prohibition, restrictions or discrimination, jeopardize the right to freedom of belief or the right to manifest one's belief."

"For this reason," Prof. Amor continued, "the Special Rapporteur recommends that the ban on the Bahá'í organization should be lifted to enable it to organize itself freely through its administrative institutions, which are vital in the absence of a clergy, and so that it can engage fully in its religious activities."

Professor Amor also said that all of the properties of the Bahá'í community that have been confiscated by the Iranian Government should be returned or compensated for. Bahá'ís, Prof. Amor said, should also be granted freedom of movement, full access to the institutions of higher education, the right to freely bury and honor their dead.

The 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief calls for members of the United Na-

tions to ensure that everyone "shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

The Bahá'í International Community welcomed the report. "Given the refusal of Muslim authorities in Iran to accept the religious character of the Bahá'í Faith, it is significant that such a highly respected jurist from North Africa should determine that, under the framework of international law, the ban on Bahá'í activities in Iran should be lifted," said Techeste Ahderom, the Bahá'í International Community's main representative to the UN.

"We can only hope and pray that the Iranian authorities will at long last recognize the nonpolitical character of the Bahá'í community and grant our Iranian co-religionists the right to freely practice their religion," said Mr. Ahderom.

Since 1979, the Iranian Bahá'í community, the largest religious minority in Iran, has suffered intimidation, discrimination, violence and even death simply because its religious beliefs differ from those held by the authorities. More than 200 Bahá'ís have been killed or executed and thousands more have been imprisoned, fired from their jobs, or deprived of access to education.

Most recently, Zabihullah Mahrami, a 49-year-old Bahá'í, was convicted of apostasy and sentenced to death in January by the Islamic Revolutionary Courts of the Province of Yazd. The Court charged that Mr. Mahrami, born into a Bahá'í family, had converted to Islam in 1981, but had then committed apostasy when he reaffirmed his Bahá'í beliefs recently.

After word of this sentence was extensively publicized in the international media, Iran's Supreme Court quashed the verdict, passing it back to a civil court (not a revolutionary court) in Yazd. This decision was handed down in March.☺

**Abdelfattah Amor, UN legal expert from Tunisia, says the ban on Bahá'í institutions and other oppressive measures should be ended.**



Dora Alicia Otero, smiling, center, prepares to cross a busy street in Jamundi, Colombia. Municipal officials are hopeful that FUNDAEC's System for Tutorial Learning (SAT) program, which is operated by Ms. Otero in one of Jamundi's three rural districts, will help to slow the influx of people into the city.

## In Colombia, a rural education innovation

*(Continued from page one)*

The introduction into the district of an innovative new system for rural education, however, has given municipal officials new hope that this cycle can be changed.

Known as the "System for Tutorial Learning" or "SAT" (the Spanish acronym for "Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial"), the program was brought to the district four years ago by Dora Alicia Otero, an energetic young woman from Cali who had recently received training in the system, which makes use of a curriculum that has been entirely written in consideration of the realities of rural life.

"Until two years ago, the desertion rate after primary school was very large," said Hortensia Elena Aguirre, who is director of educational district No. 034. "The area is very poor, and the students leave because they have to go and find work."

But more recently the desertion rate has fallen dramatically in Villacolombia, one of the small communities where Ms. Otero now offers the SAT program, said

Ms. Aguirre. Of 25 graduates from primary school last year, she said, 20 are enrolled in the program run by Ms. Otero.

"Without SAT, they would have gone, or like most other youth, they would simply be picking coffee and working day to day," said Ms. Aguirre. "It's the only way to be able to continue secondary level education in these communities."

Municipal officials are so pleased with the effort that they are backing Ms. Otero in an expansion of the project so that the SAT method can be offered in the other two rural districts of Jamundi.

### A Nationwide Success

All over Colombia the SAT project is showing bright promise. Developed by the Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences (FUNDAEC), a private development foundation based in Cali, the SAT method is currently being used in 13 of the 30 departments of Colombia, reaching more than 15,000 students. In Antioquia, the country's largest department, the state government has backed the program in 60 percent of 124 rural municipalities and is seeking 100 percent coverage.

The program has even drawn atten-

tion from outside the country. In late February seven representatives from the Honduras Ministry of Education visited Colombia to learn about the project and consider it for their country.

What has made the method so successful, said Ms. Aguirre and others, is not only that the curriculum is uniquely formulated for rural students — although that weighs large in its effectiveness. It is also the manner of its presentation. Using a series of highly interactive workbooks, specially trained tutors present the curriculum. The tutors themselves often come from rural areas and they make themselves available on a flexible schedule to meet the needs of rural students.

Taken all together, the program represents an entirely new approach to rural education — and to addressing the problems of rural life in Colombia.

"The central idea we had in developing the SAT program — as with most of FUNDAEC's projects — is that the traditional educational system is not applicable for rural inhabitants," said Dr. Gustavo Correa, the director of FUNDAEC and one of the program's primary authors. "Traditional education systems in Latin America are mostly urban oriented. People who graduate from high school simply don't have the skills needed to thrive in the countryside, and they didn't have other options but to leave."

Instead of simply layering a few basic rural vocational skills, such as animal husbandry or soil chemistry, onto a traditional urban education that emphasizes an academic, often theoretical approach to mathematics, literature and science, FUNDAEC wrote the SAT curriculum from scratch.

For example, rather than dividing subjects up into traditional categories, like biology, mathematics and social studies, the SAT curriculum takes an integrated approach that combines all three subjects in, say, a discussion of how insect populations reproduce (biology) exponentially (math) given the right conditions (social studies and ecology). The result is an integrated curriculum that makes sense to campesinos raised in rural areas — and still covers the same subjects without losing any rigor.

In addition, the curriculum contains a strong measure of moral education.

Some of the founders of FUNDAEC are Bahá'ís and Bahá'í principles are incorporated in SAT. The curriculum is organized around the all-important concept of service to the community, for example. It also emphasizes the importance of basic moral values like honesty, trustworthiness and trusteeship, as well as basic ecological principles.

#### Impact on Development

In its totality, the result is a curriculum that stimulates people to action.

"I feel it is truly a revolutionary education program," said James D. Mitchell, the director of Fundación Comunidad El Camino, a local non-governmental organization (NGO) that operates near Velez in the department of Santander and is devoted to rural development. "I have found nothing in the literature that comes close to the SAT program in terms of an education program that has been developed from the ground up for the rural inhabitants. And it certainly is a program that fits the rural reality and addresses the kinds of knowledge that the people need — without limiting it just to rural knowledge."

The El Camino Foundation is one of more than 20 NGOs in Colombia that offer the SAT program through an agreement with FUNDAEC. Fr. Mitchell, a Catholic priest, heard about the SAT program six years ago; El Camino now oversees some 620 students in 32 groups in Santander.

"I have worked with young people most of my life and I have never seen a group of

**"I feel it is truly a revolutionary education program. It fits the rural reality and addresses the kinds of knowledge that the people need."**

**— Fr. James D. Mitchell, director, Fundación Comunidad El Camino**

A group of students at the University Center for Rural Well-being (Centro Universitario Bienestar Rural), more commonly known as the "Rural University." Most of these students say they hope to establish SAT tutorial learning programs in their own communities once they graduate.



Háder Carabali, Jamundi's municipal secretary of education, who supports the introduction of the SAT program in rural communities within the city's jurisdiction.



rural students so energized," said Fr. Mitchell. "They are activated because of the program. They are enterprising. They have no fear of speaking out. It's not just an education program by itself and isolated from everything else. It is part of a whole development process."

Graduates of the SAT program do indeed emerge with comprehensive knowledge in agriculture, animal husbandry, soil chemistry, and other fields traditionally associated with rural vocations. But they also come out with knowledge about how to create microenterprises and participate in community development.

Community development is in part stimulated by the organic manner in which the program expands. Because it is a tutorial system, based more on a series of workbooks than on open-ended curriculum planning done by an educator, it is possible for someone with a high school education who has taken a few special courses to become a tutor; indeed, one route to becoming a SAT tutor is to graduate from the program.

Thus, with some additional training, it is possible for graduates to establish their own SAT tutorial programs, preferably in their own communities. In this way, the program itself creates the possibility for employment as SAT graduates go on to establish their own private education enterprises. The program thus provides a shortcut in the creation of more secondary-level teachers, and it produces teachers who are by inclination willing to remain in the rural areas.

The program's positive impact on the development process is one reason that the state of Antioquia wants SAT to

be established in all of its rural municipalities, said Clara Monica Zapata Jaramillo, former director of the Division of Formal Education in Antioquia and now in the state education department's Office of Special Projects.

"When the students finish, they are able to manage small agro-industrial enterprises," said Ms. Zapata. "It gives them enough technical knowledge for that."

As well, said Ms. Zapata, the program's emphasis on the importance of community participation in all its facets "has greatly strengthened the process of participation and the cultural identity of the community in those rural communities where it is offered."

Municipal authorities in District 034 are similarly pleased.

"In Villacolumbia, many of the SAT graduates have come to occupy some of the key public posts in the community," said Ms. Aguirre. "They now work to run the public telephone office, the public library, the local pharmacy, the pre-kindergarten program." Those were the types of positions for which, in the past, the municipality had to find people from outside the community, a task which was often difficult.

"In this way, SAT definitely redresses the problem of urban overcrowding," Ms. Aguirre continued, "because it gives rural students the tools to create their own small enterprises within their own communities so they can earn a living in their communities."

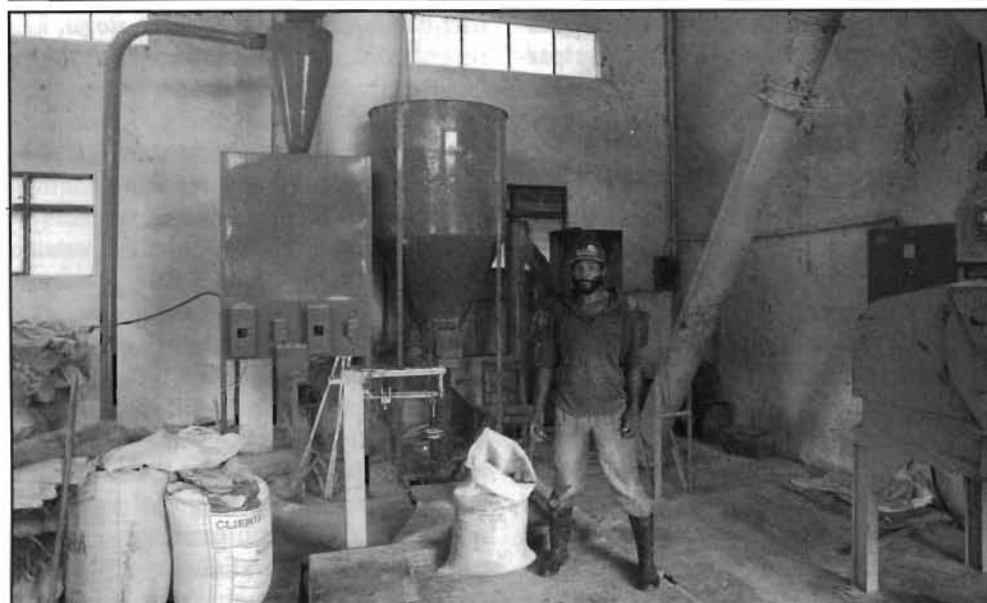
"So what we are arriving at is the community starts managing itself," she continued. "The time will come when the municipality of Jamundi will not need to bring professionals from outside to fill those managerial jobs — they will be filled by the same communities."

This kind of empowerment is having a ripple effect throughout the district as students pass their new values to others.

"SAT helps because the students have a greater consciousness of living in their own community," said Háder Carabali, Jamundi's municipal secretary of education. "And that consciousness of the importance of remaining in the community has been exported to other communities with whom the students interact, with family members and neighbors." ☉

**"SAT definitely redresses the problem of urban overcrowding, because it gives rural students the tools to create their own small enterprises within their own communities so they can earn a living in their communities."**

**— Hortensia Elena Aguirre, director, educational district No. 034.**



## FUNDAEC: Not a typical development foundation

CALI, Colombia — It is often said that some of the best new ideas come from outsiders. Because they are not hemmed in by the traditions of a particular field of study, they feel free to strike out in new directions.

The success of the SAT program would seem to prove that adage: the founders of FUNDAEC were not education professionals or even development specialists. Instead, the 22-year-old foundation was started by a small group that included two physicists, a mathematician, a biologist and a medical doctor.

Concerned about the effects of industrialization and modernization on the rural populations of Colombia, the group, composed mostly of professors at the University of Valle, decided that FUNDAEC's main purpose would be to search for new methods and tools by which the region might be appropriately developed.

The foundation's name tells much about its purpose and approach. FUNDAEC stands for the "Fundación par la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias," or, in English, the "Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences."

"A number of us at the University of Valle were very concerned that the prevailing concept of development, the process of industrialization then occurring

in the country, was not appropriate," said Gustavo Correa, a former mathematics professor who was one of FUNDAEC's founders and its current director. "The economic indicators were saying that things were getting better, but you could see that the conditions of the poor people were not improving."

Although urban areas like Cali were indeed prospering, Dr. Correa said, people in the countryside were pressured into selling their land to sugar cane and coffee companies. The process put cash in their pockets at first but ultimately reduced them from small-scale but self-sufficient farmers to impoverished contract laborers subject to the vagaries of international markets.

### A New Concept of Development

"The idea of FUNDAEC was that we need to have a new concept of development based on the participation of people, and that development has to be based on the processes of life — like how farmers are actually producing things, not the experiments of an agricultural station — and on the needs of rural society itself," said Dr. Correa.

"In order to achieve genuine participation, we realized, people must have access to knowledge. If people don't have access to knowledge, and in today's world

In addition to the SAT tutorial learning program and the "Rural University," FUNDAEC's new approach to rural development has spawned two other projects: a "Solidarity Production System," which works to organize farmers into small credit groups, and a small agro-industrial training center, which seeks to apply FUNDAEC's concept of knowledge generation and distribution to the small-scale processing of agricultural products. Shown at left is Diego Vidal, standing in front of feed concentrate equipment at FUNDAEC's agro-industrial center. Mr. Vidal is the feed concentrate manager and a student at the Rural University.

**"In order to achieve genuine participation, people must have access to knowledge. If people don't have access to knowledge, and in today's world that means scientific knowledge, then you can have all of the 'participatory' meetings you want but you won't really have participation."**

**— Gustavo Correa,  
director of FUNDAEC**

**"The rural teacher really has to be a moral leader... If you tell even one lie, you've lost everything. The community won't trust you again."**

**— Dora Alicia Otero,  
student at the Rural  
University**

that means scientific knowledge in particular, then you can have all of the 'participatory' meetings you want but you won't really have participation. Because the people won't really understand.

"And, second, they need access to scientific knowledge so as to be able to produce new knowledge that is applicable to their own situation, knowledge that works within cultural and technological restrictions that exist at the starting point of development," said Dr. Correa.

In order to implement this idea, the founders of FUNDAEC came up with the concept of starting a "rural university." In their minds, it was to be a new sort of institution of higher learning for Latin America that would generate and apply the kinds of knowledge needed by the rural people and which would also involve them in the gathering and production of that knowledge. It would do this in a framework of positive values aimed at resisting the forces of social disintegration in the countryside.

"The idea of a rural university is not so much a physical place as a space of learning, a social place, where people can get together and produce and then distribute the kinds of knowledge needed for rural life," said Dr. Correa, noting that the SAT program was precisely the sort of new "knowledge" that FUNDAEC's founders had intended for the rural university to generate.

Not limited to any location, FUNDAEC's rural university over the years has had at various stages of development different campuses for different programs. Today, for example, the University Center for Rural Well-being (Centro Universitario Bienestar Rural) occupies a small campus in Puerto Tejada, a small town about 30 kilometers south of Cali. The University also has programs at two other sites, bringing to more than 460 the total enrollment.

The institution has been accredited by the Government to grant degrees in a single, unique field: "rural education." The degree program at the university and the SAT program are intimately linked. Only graduates of the program are empowered to train tutors for the SAT program.

#### **Ms. Otero a graduate**

Ms. Dora Alicia Otero, for example, who introduced the SAT program to Dis-

trict 034 in Jamundi (*see main story*), is a recent graduate of the university. And she believes that it is the university's method — which emphasizes the importance of service to the community above all else and requires students to work in their own communities on development projects — that has enabled her to succeed as a woman working alone in a rural area.

"As a woman, I received education at the rural university that has enabled me to value myself much more," said Ms. Otero, who is now in the process of forming a small NGO that will become the provider of SAT throughout the municipality of Jamundi. "For example, the whole moral leadership course was a central feature in my training."

That course emphasizes the importance of ethical values like trustworthiness, honesty and humility as essential components of development work.

"The rural teacher really has to be a moral leader," said Ms. Otero. "You have to be very sincere with the people with whom you work, because rural communities are very sensitive to the treatment that they receive. This is something I learned at the rural university. People are very tired of all the lies they have heard over the years. So when you promise something, and if you accomplish it, the community won't let you down. But if you tell even one lie, you've lost everything. The community won't trust you again."

In addition to the SAT program, FUNDAEC's new approach to rural development has spawned two other projects: a "Solidarity Production System," which works to organize farmers into small credit groups, and a small agro-industrial training center, which seeks to apply FUNDAEC's concept of knowledge generation and distribution to the small-scale processing of agricultural products.

Although it is not a religious institution, most of FUNDAEC's projects operate along Bahá'í principles, said Dr. Correa, who, like some of FUNDAEC's founders and its current directors, is a Bahá'í. "We don't teach the Bahá'í Faith within the university," said Dr. Correa. "But we do quote Bahá'u'lláh. And the concept of education, of development, of the identity of the human being — everything stems from the principles of the Faith." ☪

## Review: *Style of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

(Continued from back page)

sion of their Author, rendering their authenticity beyond doubt. The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is no exception, having been transcribed on several occasions during the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh Himself."

Thus, for the Bahá'í Faith constructing its sacred canon is not nearly so daunting a task as translating it correctly. The depth of Dr. Bushrui's linguistic knowledge and his extensive practice as a translator are immensely helpful in guiding the English-language reader through these aspects of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. He is able to convey the special qualities that the Arabic language confers on the original and illuminate both the presence and significance of those elements in the English translation.

The Arabic language presents special difficulties for any translator. Dr. Bushrui rightly contends that "the complexities of the Arabic language and the immense problems involved in translating the revealed Word have made it practically impossible for Western scholars to 'encompass the Qur'án with their reason.' And although the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is in many ways more readily approachable than the Qur'án, no Western scholar can hope to achieve a profound appreciation of it only through the acquisition of academic skills."

It is in resolving precisely this issue of how to approach the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* with a "profound appreciation" that Dr. Bushrui's analysis soars. Though fully grounded in critical methodology, it is not oppressed by a scholarly apparatus that makes the book inaccessible to the lay reader. Dr. Bushrui writes with a lightness and deftness of touch that will make his book invaluable for anyone who simply wants better to understand the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Of course, his discussion will be most useful to members of the Bahá'í community, for he writes from within that spiritual tradition. However, his is not a narrow or sectarian analysis, and non-members will be able to profit from it as well, even if they are otherwise unsympathetic to the Bahá'í Faith.

Dr. Bushrui's argument is particu-

larly compelling when he discusses the literary devices present in the style of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. They adhere to no specific literary form in Arabic, and Dr. Bushrui convincingly demonstrates how they have an effect that transcends the limitations of poetry or prose. From them proceeds a music "tempered by the discipline of precise and unequivocal expression."

The reader who follows Dr. Bushrui through the details of this analysis will comprehend the meaning and effects of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* with a new profundity. Dr. Bushrui's language will echo in the reader's own understanding in ways that permit him to recover the grandeur and power of the original text. The source of its spirituality will still keep its ultimate secrets, but the English-language reader will reach the last page of Dr. Bushrui's book with a transformed appreciation of the sublime style in which its spirituality is encased. He will thereby approach more closely the spiritual heart of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* itself. ☉

— Dr. Miles L. Bradbury (Dr. Bradbury specializes in the history of religion in America and teaches in the History Department of the University of Maryland at College Park.)

Below: In Costa Rica, María Morera de Keiller, secretary of the national Bahá'í community, spoke at an interreligious ceremony held on 16 November 1995 in San José for a "Day of Tolerance: Fundamental Step to Peace."



# A close reading of "The Most Holy Book"

## *The Style of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Aspects of the Sublime*

By Suheil Bushrui

University Press of Maryland

"There are three basic characteristics which distinguish every Divine Revelation. Firstly, it explains truths such as the nature of God, the human condition and the world around us; secondly, it directs us towards right conduct and warns us to eschew evil; and thirdly, to those who have faith and accept its guidance, it imparts the good news of forgiveness, purification and salvation, and provides a fresh impetus to the march of human progress and civilization."

Such is one example of the kind of clear-eyed explanations and incisive observations that Dr. Suheil Bushrui offers in *The Style of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Aspects of the Sublime*, one of the first scholarly books to appear on the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* since it was released in an official English translation in 1993.

As Dr. Bushrui notes, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* holds a singular position in Bahá'í literature. Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh sometime around 1873, its title translates into English as "The Most Holy Book." Although ostensibly a book of religious laws, Bahá'ís believe that it spells out nothing less than the charter for a new civilization and offers to humanity "the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples," as Bahá'u'lláh himself says.

In undertaking, then, to analyze the style of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, and, at the same time, to help Western readers understand the underlying power and depth of its original Arabic, Dr. Bushrui has embarked on a rather daunting task.

Yet Dr. Bushrui, who holds the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland at College Park, has written a meticulous and eloquent work. His book makes accessible to the English-language reader the majestic qualities of the original Arabic of this most sacred of Bahá'í texts. Its publication marks a seminal event in the understanding of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and in Bahá'í studies.

The Bahá'í community has long honored learning. However, it has only begun to cultivate the habit of objective scholarship about itself and its texts that

is the modern counterpart of the higher criticism. Partly this is the result of reasons internal to its own development, partly of circumstances that it shares with other faiths whose historical origins lie in the nineteenth century. Dr. Bushrui correctly points out that "no other religion has had its scriptural treasures translated into a universal language, as has the Bahá'í Faith, within so very short a period of time since the inception of the Dispensation."

Translation, of course, relies heavily on what used to be called the lower criticism, an activity that is more commonly referred to now as textual criticism. It seeks to establish the original form or definitive form of a given text from the available variants. Dr. Bushrui provides a sure-footed introduction to these matters, which are basic to any understanding of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. He discusses

## Review

### The Style of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

ASPECTS OF THE SUBLIME

Suheil Bushrui

the location of the work in the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh and sketches in its textual history since its revelation. The Bahá'í Faith is unique in that the authenticity of its textual traditions cannot be questioned. As Dr. Bushrui remarks, "among the unique features of the Bahá'í Faith is that reliable transcriptions of its sacred texts were produced under the supervision" (Continued on page 15)