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Religions vow a new alliance for conservation

Leaders from nine major world religions, meeting in London to discuss conservation projects, agree to higher levels of cooperation

WINDSOR CASTLE, England — Few places more closely symbolize the inner sanctum of the Western establishment. For nearly 1,000 years, this sprawling complex of medieval and modern buildings has been a residence for the English monarchy, head of Anglican Christianity.

All the more dramatic, then, that it should be the venue for a ground-breaking summit meeting between religious leaders representing nine of the world's major faiths.

They came together here 29 April-4 May 1995, along with key officials from several major secular institutions, to discuss how the world's religious communities might become more involved in protecting and preserving the earth's environment.

The Summit on Religions and Conservation was sponsored by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Pilkington Foundation, and MOA International, a Japanese humanitarian foundation. Invited were top leaders from the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, and Taoism. By one count, the assembled leaders represented more than two billion religious adherents — roughly one third of the earth's population.

The results, say those who were involved, represent not only a dramatic degree of commitment by each of the faith communities to further their work at promoting conservation within their own mem-



Leaders from nine world religions gathered in London in early May for a summit on conservation. Participants gathered on the steps of St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle for this photograph. A list of participants is on page 12.

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Women and Peace

When the history of how humanity finally achieved lasting peace and global prosperity is ultimately written, it is quite likely that scholars will pinpoint the decade of the 1990s as among the most fruitful periods in laying the foundations for such a new world.

The end of the Cold War, of course, stands as a pivotal episode in the emergence of international peace, and that event might be said to have occurred in the late 1980s. But the end of the Cold War only signaled the end of an old era; it did not necessarily establish the basis for a new one.

In the 1990s, however, the United Nations has sponsored an unprecedented

Perspective

series of world conferences, starting with the Children's Summit in New York in 1990, and then continuing with the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, and the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995.

Some say that such meetings merely produce much talk and little substance. But whatever their shortcomings in terms of concrete commitments, a thoughtful reading of the collective documents — including NGO statements — that have emerged from each conference shows that a remarkable degree of international agreement has been reached on the norms and values needed to construct a just, peaceful and sustainable world civilization.

In September, the next gathering in this series will take place in Beijing. And the Fourth World Conference on Women, likewise, promises to bring to the world's consciousness another essential element in the creation of global peace and prosperity: the achievement of full equality between women and men.

When one considers the entire series of conferences, it will be seen that the increasing presence and growing

influence of the world's women — which the Beijing conference promises to showcase — will have been one of the most important factors in helping the world to see exactly which values and principles can contribute most to the peace and well-being of all humanity.

Women's advocacy over the last few years has dramatically changed the way the world looks at international economics, sustainable development, and human rights. The changes women have promoted in these areas are critical elements in the foundation for peace and prosperity.

In Rio, women brought to the attention of the world's leaders the degree to which they, as small farmers and household decision-makers, hold the key to sustainable development.

In Vienna, women helped the world see that human rights must be extended across all boundaries, whether of race, ethnicity, nationality or gender, if peace and justice are to be attained. Their status as the oppressed majority — women compose more than half of the world's population — gave no small amount of moral impetus to the conference.

In Cairo, women successfully argued that the education and empowerment of women are the best ways to bring down population growth and to promote fruitful

Women's advocacy has dramatically changed the way the world looks at international economics, sustainable development, and human rights – critical elements in the foundation for peace and prosperity.

development. Their role as mothers gave unassailable credibility to their views.

And in Copenhagen, women were instrumental in analyzing and calling attention to the impact of old world economic systems on the poor, most of whom are women, and in helping to project new



Bahá'í communities around the world are laying plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations this year. The photograph at left was taken at a Symposium on Fifty Years of the United Nations, held in Orissa State, India, on 26 March.

Sponsored by the State Bahá'í Council of Orissa in collaboration with state UNICEF representatives, the event featured Governor Sri Satyanarayan Reddy and Justice S. Chattarjee of the Orissa High Court. Shown speaking at left is Gov. Satyanarayan Reddy. In June, in San Francisco, the Bahá'í community of the United States sponsored a series of events in observance of UN 50th ceremonies there. These events included a seminar on global governance, held on 24 June at the San Francisco Bahá'í Center, as well as an evening performance by the Bay Area Bahá'í Youth Workshop, held on 23 June.

ideas for alternative models of social development. (Women, of course, have been in the vanguard of social development; their value as experts is only now becoming recognized.)

While there are some who would still seek to marginalize the contributions of women, and who perhaps tend therefore to devalue the importance of the Beijing conference, we are of the view that it is in many ways one of the most important gatherings of the decade.

Members of the Bahá'í Faith, who today compose a worldwide community of more than five million individuals in some 232 countries and territories, are united in the view that men and women everywhere must begin to forge a new and equal partnership. This is not only a matter of justice but the key to the realization of the age-old dream of universal peace and prosperity.

More than 80 years ago, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, said: "When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed." In another passage, he continued: "...until this equality is established, true progress and attainment for the human race will not be facilitated."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, whose words Bahá'ís revere, also indicated that such a peace would be realized because of the essential quali-

ties that women, when equality is achieved, can bring to all spheres of life.

"The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind," he said. "But the balance is already shifting — force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals — or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced."

Seen in light of such inevitable progress towards a new partnership between women and men, the Beijing Conference is already a success. The ideas and networking and connections that have been made by women around the world in advance of the event, and their influence in the preceding United Nations conferences, has had an incalculable effect. The peace that comes as a result of the new values and norms that have been recognized and fortified by the work of these conferences will be established in no small measure thanks to the efforts of the world's women. To whatever degree the world at large further heeds the voices of the women who gather in Beijing, it will only gain. ☉

Thousands heading to Beijing for Fourth World Conference on Women

Draft Platform for Action a focus of concern; NGO Forum promises to showcase women's accomplishments

NEW YORK — At first glance, in its physical form, the draft Platform for Action for the Fourth World Conference of Women appears innocuous. Like many official United Nations documents, it is graphically dull and typographically tame.

Negotiated in March by government delegates assembled for the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, the 149-page report is adorned only by two UN logos on the cover and uses a traditional mono-spaced typewriter font for the main text.

On a deeper level, however, the document can be understood as a major symbol for the aspirations and concerns of the world's women — and potentially one of the main vehicles for translating them into reality in the coming century.

In this context, the draft Platform for Action stands at the center of a maelstrom of hope, activity and controversy as some 40,000 women and men around the world prepare to travel to Beijing in late August and early September for the Conference and parallel NGO Forum.

At the heart of the document are 12 issue areas that government delegations, with strong and purposeful input from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have over the last two years identified as "critical areas of concern" to women everywhere.

These areas of concern are listed as: the burden of poverty on women; unequal access to education; inequalities in health care; violence against women; the effects of armed conflict on women; inequalities in access to economic structures; inequalities in the sharing of power and decision-making; insufficient mechanisms to promote women's advancement; the promotion and protection of human rights for women; women and the media; women and the environment; and issues

surrounding the girl-child.

In the current draft, each issue is followed by a series of action steps which governments and international institutions — and NGOs — should take.

"It is a very significant document," said Soon-Young Yoon, who is the UN liaison for the NGO Forum office. "It has nearly 600 different actions in it, and it covers a wide spectrum of actors, from governments to all sectors of civil society, from trade unions to religious organizations. And in general, I think, it is an attempt to be a document of affirmation."

Yet, as has been the case with draft documents heading into previous UN world conferences, there is much controversy and debate over just how far the recommendations and action steps should go in each area of concern — stimulating a flurry of pre-conference lobbying activity by NGOs, governments and other international actors.

Many "brackets" left

In the draft document, for example, an estimated 30 percent of the language remains in question. It is in "brackets," as those involved in the negotiations say, a reference to the fact that tentative language and disputed passages are set off with square brackets, [like this].

While many of these bracketed passages are relatively benign, reflecting the fact that much new language was introduced at the Commission meeting in March and many government delegations were unable to confer with their capitols in time to reach full agreement on them, there are a number of areas which remain hotly disputed. These include questions over women's reproductive rights, the human rights of women in general, and issues of resource allocation and the degree to which commitments to action can be made concrete and specific.

"What we are really talking about is changing the ratios of power and the balance of power between men and women, and between various countries, and between generations," said Rachel Kyte, a senior policy analyst at the International Women's Health Coalition. "And

"What we are really talking about is changing the ratios of power and the balance of power between men and women, and between various countries, and between generations. And the question is whether you think that is a good thing."

**— Rachel Kyte,
International
Women's Health
Coalition**



An NGO Consultation, held 13-14 March prior to the Commission on the Status of Women session at the United Nations in New York, featured a panel discussion about plans for the upcoming Fourth World Conference on Women and the parallel NGO Forum on Women '95, which are to be held in Beijing in late August and early September. Shown, left to right, are: Mary Power, chair, NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York, and a Bahá'í International Community representative to the United Nations; Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General, Fourth World Conference on Women; Irene M. Santiago, Executive Director, NGO Forum; and Supatra Masdit, Convenor, NGO Forum.

the question is whether you think that is a good thing."

In the NGO community, there is a wide range of opinion on those issues. Among activist-oriented women's organizations, there is a general view that even if all of the most controversial sections in the draft document were resolved to their liking, the Platform for Action would still fall short of their goals.

"I think the document mostly restates things that have already been said in other UN conferences and agreements," said Charlotte Bunch, the director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, which has been a leading force in coordinating NGO lobbying on human rights issues.

Others say that even if that is true, the document nevertheless presents a broad, action-centered program that NGOs will be able to use into the next century to prod their communities and governments in a direction that promotes the overall advancement of women.

"For many of us, the important thing about the Platform for Action is to have something that we can take back into our own countries and say to governments, 'You signed this, now let's get on with it,'" said Claire Fulcher, the United Nations representative for the International Fed-

eration of Business and Professional Women, which has more than 100 national affiliates.

NGO Forum aims high

Amid the controversy over the Platform of Action, a number of observers are saying that the activities and results of the NGO Forum may well in some ways overshadow the government activities at the main conference.

And, indeed, organizers of the Forum have high hopes that their event, which begins on 30 August and ends on 8 September, will become the heart and soul of the Beijing activities, giving the world at large a chance to "look at the world through women's eyes" — which is the theme that Forum organizers have taken.

Some 36,000 women from more than 180 countries have registered to attend the Forum, which will be held in the rural resort town of Huairou about 50 kilometers from the main Conference site. (The Forum was originally to be held at the Worker's Stadium in Beijing, much nearer to the main Conference site, but in late March the Chinese government changed the Forum's venue to Huairou.)

"At the Forum, you have thousands of people coming together who are primarily interested in sharing ideas, learning what other people have been doing,

"At the Forum, you have thousands of people coming together who are primarily interested in sharing ideas, learning what other people have been doing, and then taking it back home. Not everything hangs on the Platform of Action."

**— Claire Fulcher,
International
Federation of
Business and
Professional Women**

The Bahá'í International Community will co-sponsor a number of events at the NGO Forum on Women in Beijing, including:

- **A workshop about "Women's Perspectives on Global Security." Co-sponsored with the International Peace Research Association and the Association of African Women on Research and Development.**

- **A video and discussion about a project entitled "Traditional Media as Change Agent." Undertaken with funding from UNIFEM in Bolivia, Cameroon, and Malaysia, the project uses theater and dance to encourage a dialog between women and men.**

- **A workshop, co-sponsored with UNICEF, on gender roles in the family as they affect the attitudes and behaviors of boys and girls.**

In Hong Kong, the Bahá'í Women's Committee participated in the planning of a Vision for the 21st Century Conference, which was organized by the Hong Kong Non-Governmental Organizations' Forum. The Conference took place 18-19 February.

and then taking it back home to their local areas after Beijing," said Ms. Fulcher. "Not everything hangs on the Platform of Action."

NGOs and individuals have asked to hold more than 5,000 separate activities during the Forum. They will range from seminars and workshops to plays and dance events.

"The topics addressed will span the spectrum of issues addressed by the Conference and more, from human rights to economics to environment," said Chandra Budhu, program coordinator for the Forum. "There will be a great diversity of perspectives and discourse, and I think it will showcase the great variety of ways that women are working to bring human-centered values into society around the world."

As the Platform for Action has been developed around 12 issue areas, so will the Forum be organized around 12 "thematic clusters" — many of which overlap with the Platform and a few of which are quite different. They include: economy; governance and politics; human rights; peace and human security; education; health; environment; spirituality and religion; science and technology; media and information; arts and culture; and race and ethnicity.

"I think that some of the best ideas will emerge from the Forum," Ms. Budhu continued. "It will be much more exciting

than the government meeting."

Focus on the Girl Child

One example of NGO influence was seen in changes to the draft Platform for Action so that it now includes a separate section on the girl child, said several NGO representatives.

"While I join in with much of the discontent over the Platform for Action as a whole, it is a positive sign that the issue of the girl child is now included," said Renate Bloem, who represents the World Federation of Methodist Women at the United Nations in Geneva.

Ms. Bloem and others said the section, which asks governments and institutions to focus on the education, nutrition and rights of girl children as a means of achieving long term advancement for womankind as a whole, was included towards the end of the Commission meeting in March, largely at the behest of NGOs, and particularly NGOs with strong representation in Africa, working with African governments.

"NGOs contributed substantially on this issue, particularly in the wording of the text which was adopted by governments and in the lobbying to make sure that the issue would be brought onto the floor and finally accepted," said Gianni Ballerio, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. ☉



Survey of Bahá'í communities finds high ratio of women leaders

The percentage of women in positions of leadership in the Bahá'í Faith compares favorably with the percentage of women in positions of political leadership worldwide.

Figures on the subject have just been collected in a survey on the participation of women in Bahá'í community life. The survey was conducted by the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women in 1994 in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in September in Beijing, China.

The survey found that women compose about 30 percent of the elected membership of national-level Bahá'í governing councils, for example, and some 47 percent of the membership in special Bahá'í appointed positions for the sub-national regional level. The average percentage of women members in the world's parliaments is about 10 percent, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

While the percentages in the Bahá'í community fall short of an idealized 50 percent, they reflect the earnest efforts of a highly diverse worldwide community to live up to and put into practice a religious value that often runs counter to the traditions and culture in society at large, said those who conducted the survey.

"The equality of women and men is a cardinal principle for Bahá'ís," said Rebequa Getahoun, one of the team that conducted the survey for the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women. "But for the vast majority of the Bahá'ís of the world today, many of whom are the first in their generation to become Bahá'ís, the values and habits they have been brought up with are difficult to shake.

"In this sense, the results of this survey are really rather dramatic," said Ms. Getahoun. "The fact that women compose some 30 percent of our elected governing councils at the national level shows the degree to which Bahá'ís — who use secret ballots when voting — have already begun to overcome traditional prejudices.

"Further," Ms. Getahoun said, "the fact that appointed positions do approach an idealized 50/50 ratio shows that the community's leadership is making an earnest effort to further combat the trends in society at large."

In addition to basic information on male-to-female ratios in various positions of leadership in the Bahá'í community, the survey also asked about women's activities at the local and national level. The responses indicated that some 55 Bahá'í communities held specific events concerning women's issues at least once a year over the last six years. Among topics that were discussed at these events were equality between women and men, women in leadership, marriage and family life, parenting, and "heroines of the Bahá'í Faith."

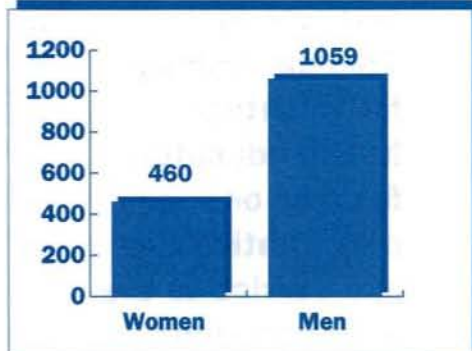
The survey found that in Bahá'í publishing ventures, women play a prominent role. Most national communities indicated that they had publication committees, and the male-to-female ratio on these committees was about one-to-one. Some 54 communities published books during the last six years; 24 were produced about women.

Many of the appointed leaders who responded to the survey indicated that they regularly promote principles of equality and partnership between women and men in their speeches, workshops and personal discussions.

The membership of the Bahá'í community is among the most diverse population of people on the planet. The more than five million Bahá'ís worldwide come from virtually every nation, ethnic group, culture, profession and social or economic class, representing more than 2,100 different ethnic and tribal groups.

Geographically, the Bahá'í Faith has become the second-most widespread independent world religion, following Christianity. In all, Bahá'ís have established communities in some 232 countries and territories. ☉

Women compose 30 percent of elected leadership in Bahá'í councils at the national level, comparing favorably to national parliaments, which average 10 percent women worldwide.



In 1994, among 169 national-level governing councils of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide, some 30 percent of the members were women. Each council has nine members, although there were some vacancies when the above numbers were compiled.

Trainees in the community health educators program at the William Masethla Bahá'í Institute learn how to make a simple drink of salt and sugar for oral rehydration, which can be a life saver for young children with diarrhea.



Simple health measures go far in Zambia's villages

At the William Masethla Bahá'í Institute in Zambia, training for volunteer health educators focuses on preventative care and service to the entire community

LUSAKA, Zambia — Henry Kasondah's livelihood comes from his work in the soil. The 35-year-old farmer grows rice, maize and cassava on a plot of land in Makuya village, Mwinilingua District, about 550 kilometers from the capitol in this central African nation.

His avocation, however, is his work with people as a volunteer village community health worker. It is an assignment he has undertaken since 1988, when he received initial training at the William Masethla Bahá'í Institute, which is itself located about 65 kilometers north of Lusaka near Liteta in Central Province.

"Before my training as a health educator, we had a big problem in my community," Mr. Kasondah said recently during a refresher course at the Institute. "In the rainy season the grass grows very tall. Small children and drunkards didn't bother to go to the bush to relieve themselves. They used the road instead.

"But after my training, I talked to the chief. I told him about the problem of people defecating in the road. The chief was not happy about this. He sent his retainers to announce to everyone that each family must have their own toilet,

rubbish pit, dish rack and bath room. Now almost every family in our village has these things," Mr. Kasondah said.

They are simple measures, really: knowing the importance of digging and using a latrine and a rubbish pit; learning to let the dishes dry on a rack in the sterilizing sunshine; and understanding that one should wash up before preparing food and eating.

The difficult part is to get this kind of knowledge — and other basic health care information — into the outlying villages where government services are scarce.

In this effort, the Government has promoted the development of a network of community health educators. Asked to spend just 10 hours a week giving their fellow villagers such information, the health educators are on the front lines of primary health care in Zambia.

Since 1987, the Bahá'í community of Zambia has been working with the Government to provide free training to interested individuals — and to use its network of communities to help identify and encourage volunteers at the local level.

While other major non-governmental organizations in Zambia also offer such

training, the Bahá'í Primary Health Care Project is distinctive for the way in which certain "moral" qualities — such as service and sacrifice — are discussed during training sessions. This helps to instill an extra measure of commitment.

"We have trained many health workers in the government and we have a high drop out rate," said Kate Bwalya, a public health nurse for the Ministry of Health, who is not a Bahá'í. "They willingly volunteer to get trained but they are not wholeheartedly prepared to serve. They need something to sustain their zeal. They don't seem to know who they are really serving.

"But the Bahá'í-trained health educators know that they are serving," said Ms. Bwalya, who worked in Mwinilungwa District in the late 1980s where the Bahá'í project was first launched and who now works at the Mwachisompola Health Demonstration Zone Hospital about 15 kilometers from the Institute. "And from what I see, the difference between the two programs is the spiritual stand.

"When we have a refresher course for the government-trained health workers, there is always much discussion about monetary incentives," Ms. Bwalya said. "These questions are not there in the Bahá'í course."

Link to the Grassroots

Since 1987, some 132 community health educators have been trained at the Institute or through outreach pro-

grams. These health educators come from widely scattered regions in Zambia; the program is linked into the network of local Bahá'í communities, which provide grassroots support to the educators.

"The link to the local community through the Bahá'í local Spiritual Assemblies is a key element of the project," said Allan Fuller, who is project administrator for the Canadian Bahá'í International Development Service, which helps to secure technical and financial support from donor agencies for the Zambia project. "That way, at the local level, people are not getting involved because of some promise of gain; people are getting involved because of a certain set of values which emphasize service to the community. This link to the local community, instead of just to individuals, also makes for a far more sustainable program."

The Zambia Bahá'í community has about 15,000 members country-wide, and it is organized into about 145 local Spiritual Assemblies, which are the freely elected governing councils that administer the affairs of the community at the local level. Some 80 local Spiritual Assemblies are involved in the community health educator program.

The primary goal of the educators, however, is not to serve the local Bahá'í community when they return; rather, they are to serve their entire village. Likewise, they need not be Bahá'ís to receive the training and be included in the program's

"When we have a refresher course for the government-trained health workers, there is always much discussion about monetary incentives. These questions are not there in the Bahá'í course."

**— Kate Bwalya,
public health nurse**



A group of teachers from the Institute, posing with some neighborhood children, before heading to Mporokoso for an off-site training course. The Institute's small truck does yeoman service on the country's difficult roads.



structure. At a training session in June 1995, for example, only 10 of the 24 participants were Bahá'ís.

Currently, the project operates on a two-year cycle. During the last two years, some 26 new educators were given training, and refresher courses were provided to some 21 previously trained educators. Reports received from some of them indicate that they have made some 689 home visits, given 192 health lessons in primary schools, and given 234 public talks. They have demonstrated making the special drink for oral rehydration therapy 372 times. They reported that there are 422 new latrines, 463 new rubbish pits 602 new dish racks and 189 wells improved in their communities.

"The Zambia Bahá'í Primary Health Care intends to assist the Government of Zambia in achieving Health for All by the Year 2000," said Stephanie Parrott, who

is the project manager. "And beyond simply training community health educators, we visualize this as comprehensive health education program which recognizes that health education goes beyond information dissemination by helping people to translate the information into informed decision-making for improvements in health behavior."

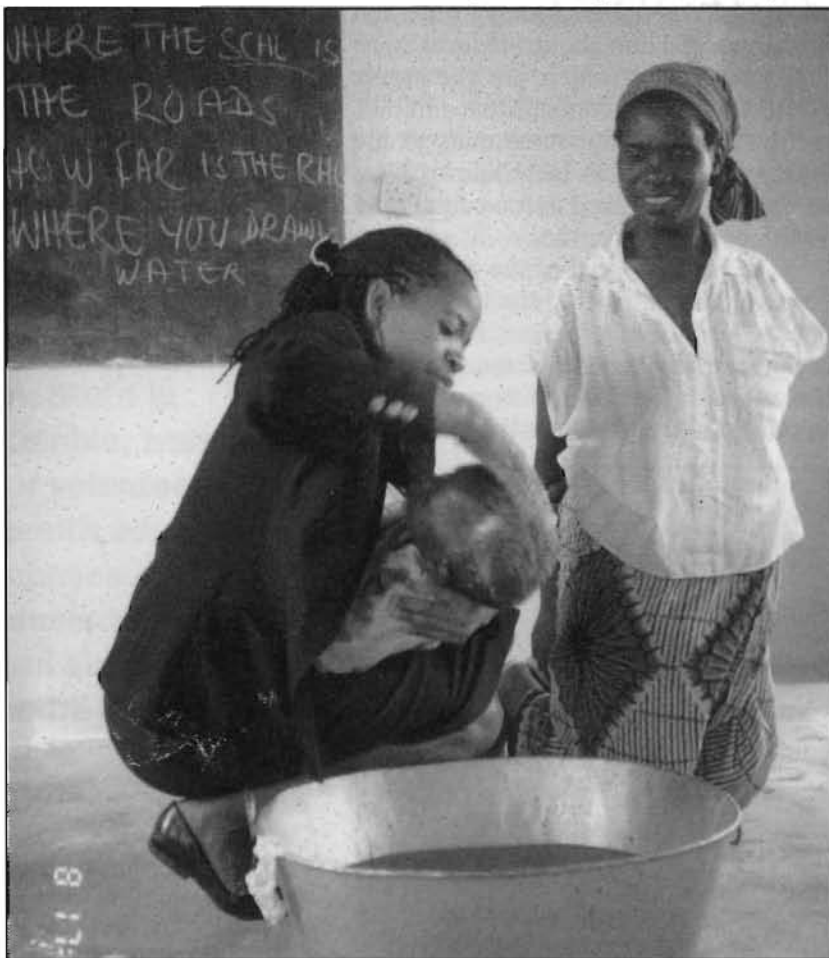
Another evidence of the success of the project is the degree to which Institute-trained educators have become involved in other community development activities. In Northwestern Province, three educators, one woman and two men, have been appointed to committees by the Ministry of Waters Affairs to assist in the construction of wells using community participation. Another educator in the Province now works as a community-based "nutrition technician" in an internationally funded agricultural development project. In Northern Province, two educators have been given employment at local clinics to provide health education to those who come to the clinic.

The curriculum for the educators trained by the Institute draws on a number of materials, among them the Facts for Life program produced by UNICEF, WHO, and UNESCO, and on a booklet entitled "Raising Healthy Children," which was produced by the Bahá'í community of Kenya. The curriculum covers simple sanitation, first aid, oral rehydration therapy, breast-feeding, nutrition, and common diseases. The emphasis of the curriculum is on preventative care and communication skills.

Gender Equity a Key Goal

When women receive health knowledge, the payoff for their children and families is great, and the project has made gender equity a key goal. To this end, the curriculum emphasizes the importance of treating women and men equally, and puts efforts to give women knowledge about breast-feeding, immunization for children, and oral rehydration as key targets.

Communities are also encouraged to select and send women for training sessions — although in many cases the difficulties of travel and the responsibilities of child-rearing make this difficult. Overall, however, 27 percent of the educators trained by the Institute have been women.



Nurse Dorothy Hakoma, left, shows trainee Joyce Hamateyo how to wash a child, who, in this case, happens to be Mrs. Hamateyo's son, Jamsheed. About 27 percent of the people trained by the Institute have been women; the equality of the sexes is stressed in all sessions.

"While these statistics are fairly good in comparison to other community health education programs, we are not satisfied with them," said Ms. Parrott. "So we are looking at various strategies to address this. One reason few women attend the training sessions is that many women are not comfortable traveling the long distance to the Institute. So to encourage participation of women, a training will be held next year in Northwestern Province, for example."

Flint Sanyikosa was trained at the Institute in 1988. A 30-year-old farmer from the village of Kingovwa, Mr. Sanyikosa says he tries to apply the principle of equality to his work. "I teach men that they should assist their wives in jobs like farming, collecting firewood and taking care of the children," said Mr. Sanyikosa at a recent refresher course.

He says that not only has his work as an educator helped his village, it has also helped his family. "Before, the children were not eating different foods, they were eating only meat and cassava leaves, and



Trainees at the Institute learn how to transport a severely injured person using a chair.

their bodies were not looking healthy," said Mr. Sanyikosa. "After my training I came to know that we needed three kinds of food, and my family began to eat differently. We have added beans, eggs and vegetables like cabbage to our diet. There is a difference from the old days." ☉

Fourth International Dialogue on a Global Society to be held at University of Maryland

COLLEGE PARK, Maryland, USA—The Fourth International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society, whose theme will be "Divisive Barbarity or Global Civilization: The Ethical Dimensions of Science, Art, Religion and Politics," will be held 15-17 October 1995 at the University of Maryland.

Sponsored by the Center for International Development and Conflict Management in association with Landegg Academy of Switzerland, organized by the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, and held under the auspices of UNESCO, the Dialogue is an academic forum aimed at exploring the issues and consequences surrounding the transition to a global society.

"Its aim is two-fold," said Prof. Suheil Bushrui, who holds the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland. "First, to find integrative answers to the challenge of building an ethical, global civilization. And second, to inspire purposeful action on the part of leaders in all realms of society so that the proposed solutions can be realized."

A number of prominent leaders and thinkers have indicated they will participate, said Dr. Bushrui, including: former President Amine Gemayel of Lebanon; HRH Princess Rahma bint El Hassan of Jordan; Lily Boeykens, former president of the International Council of Women; Dr. Karan Singh, head of the Auroville Foundation and former Ambassador of India to the United States; Dr. Ervin Laszlo, president of the Club of Budapest and international advisor to the Dialogue; and Dr. Bertrand Schneider, secretary-general of the Club of Rome.

At the invitation of Dr. William E. Kirwan, President of the University of Maryland, Madame Rúhiyyih Rabbání, leading dignitary of the Bahá'í Faith, will deliver the keynote address.

The First International Dialogue was held in September 1990 at Landegg Academy in Switzerland. The aim of the dialogues is to stimulate high-level interdisciplinary discussion on a variety of themes relevant to the advance of a global society. ☉

New religious alliance on conservation

(Continued from page one)

bership, but also a new level of interfaith cooperation and concurrence.

This commitment to interfaith cooperation was exemplified by several unexpected outcomes, including:

- A plan to collaborate with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to engage local religious communities — whether organized around a mosque, church, temple or Spiritual Assembly — in monitoring changes in the local environment.

- A proposal for religious leaders to meet with key directors of The World Bank to discuss how it can become more sensitive to local concerns and spiritual values as they fund development projects.

- An agreement by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to host a meeting between religious leaders and major satellite television executives to “open corridors of communication” about the values that are transmitted by satellite programming.

“I think the Summit was very significant indeed,” said the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, who represented the World Council of Churches (WCC) at the Summit. “In the sense that the coming together of nine

different faiths is itself a very significant event, given that they all have such different histories and traditions and beliefs.

“But what’s equally significant is that they came together to discuss an issue about which there is such agreement — and that is the importance of conserving nature. And I think that fact in itself signifies a tremendous moral authority,” said Dr. Kobia, who is the executive director of the WCC’s program on Justice, Peace and Creation.

Follow-up to Assisi Gathering

The Summit was hosted by HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, husband to HM Queen Elizabeth II. The Duke is international president of WWF. Windsor Castle, of course, is a residence of the Queen, who is not only the sovereign of the British Commonwealth but also head of the Anglican Church.

The Windsor Summit was designed as a follow-up meeting to the 1986 gathering of religious leaders at Assisi, Italy, which was called by WWF. That gathering, which led to the creation of the Network on Conservation and Religion, was perhaps the first major international interfaith meeting on environmental issues.

At Assisi, representatives from five world religions — Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam — pledged to work, largely within their own

Leading participants in the Summit on Religions and Conservation:

Bahá’í Faith

- Madame Rúhíyyih Rabbání, leading dignitary

Buddhism

- His Excellency Sri Kushok Bakula, 20th incarnation of the Arhat Bakula, Indian Ambassador to Mongolia, and acting spiritual head of Mongolian Buddhism
- Somdech Preah Maha Ghosananda, Supreme Patriarch of Cambodian Buddhism*

Christianity

- His All Holiness The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
- Rev. Bernard J. Przewozny, OFM, Pontifical Advisor on Environmental Issues
- Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, executive director, Unit III – Justice, Peace and Creation, World Council of Churches

Hinduism

- Swami Vibudhesha Teertha, Acharya of the Madhva Sect, Founder of the Purnaprajna Family of Schools
- Dr. K.L. Sheshagiri Rao, representing Swami Chidananda, and chief editor of the Encyclopedia of Hinduism

Jainism

- His Excellency Dr. L.M. Singhvi, High Commissioner for India in the United Kingdom
- R.P. Chandaria, chairman of the Institute of Jainology

(Continued on opposite page)



Summit sessions were conducted inside Windsor Castle. Shown, in St. George’s library, is Summit organizer Martin Palmer, left foreground, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, right foreground. Behind them is HE Kushok Bakula, left, and his translator, Sonam Wangchuk.



On the St. George's Library veranda, left to right: HE Kushok Bakula, Madame Rúhíyyih Rabbání, and Xie Zongxing, vice president of the China Taoist Association.

communities, to stimulate environmental awareness and the establishment of conservation projects. In 1987, the Bahá'í Faith joined the network; in 1988, the Sikhs and Jains also became members.

In part as a result of the establishment of the Network, the world's religious communities have since 1986 initiated thousands of local conservation projects, launched numerous environmental education programs, and embarked on a deeper study of how their sacred scriptures and teachings promote respect for the earth.

The 1995 Summit was called primarily to assess the work done since Assisi — and to welcome the Taoists into the alliance, said Martin Palmer, director of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education and Culture (ICOREC), which organized the Summit on behalf of the three sponsors.

"The crucial point of why we held the Summit is that some religions — and the Bahá'ís would stand as a notable example here, along with the Buddhists and some Christian groups — have done a tremendous amount of work in promoting conservation since Assisi," said Mr. Palmer. "They have been busy creating new offices, funding projects, and producing material for their schools."

Other religions, however, have not moved as quickly, Mr. Palmer said, and

so a major goal of the Summit was to stimulate them into action. "On that score, we succeeded," he said. "Because at the end of the Summit, nearly all of the faiths had made major commitments to practical programs for action."

Stimulating such action came through a two-step process. In a pre-Summit meeting held at Atami, Japan, from 3-9 April, environmental specialists from each of the religions discussed what they had accomplished over the last nine years and, with much interchange among the various religions, drew up forward-looking plans of action. These plans were then ratified at the Windsor Summit.

New Avenues of Cooperation

What was surprising, said Mr. Palmer and others, was the degree to which the religions decided in the two meetings not only to expand conservation activities within their own communities, but also to engage in wider and more active collaboration and cooperation across interfaith lines.

"We had planned quite meticulously that each faith would issue its own statement and detailed program of action," said Mr. Palmer. "But, and this was something we had hoped for but could not plan for, what emerged quite substantially was also a willingness of the major faiths to work collaboratively on conservation projects, in relation to the major secular institutions we had invited."

Judaism

- Prof. Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, honorary vice president, World Jewish Congress
- Dr. Gerhart M. Riegner, honorary vice president, World Jewish Congress
- Rabbi Prof. Nahum Rakover, associate director general, Israel Justice Ministry*

Islam

- Dr. Adnan Bakhit, representing HRH, Crown Prince El Hassan bin Talal, president of the University of Al al-Bayt, Jordan
- Muhammad Hyder, Professor Emeritus, University of Nairobi
- Dr. Ihsan Mahasneh, University of Al al-Bayt

Sikhism

- Sri Singh Sahib Jathedar Manjit Singh, Jathedar of Akaal Takhat
- Prof. Dr. Kehar Singh, Punjabi University
- Dr. Rajwant Singh, special advisor on ecology to Jathedar Manjit Singh

Taoist

- Xie Zongxing, vice president, China Taoist Association, Beijing
- Zhang Ji Yu, vice secretary, China Taoist Association

Other Dignitaries

- HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh
- The Most Reverend and Right Honorable Lord Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey
- Andrew Steer, Director, The World Bank
- Dr. Arthur Dahl, Earthwatch, United Nations Environment Programme
- Sam Younger, Managing Director, BBC World Service
- Samar Singh, secretary general, WWF India
- Dr. Karan Singh, head of the Auroville Foundation

* Present only at the Japan portion of the Summit

In this regard, said Mr. Palmer and others, it was significant that the Summit also marked the evolution of the Network on Conservation and Religion, which was sponsored primarily by the WWF, into a more independent group, called the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC).

Rob Soutter, executive assistant to WWF Director General Dr. Claude Martin, said that when the WWF first asked religious leaders to come together nine years ago, there was a sense that the religions knew very little about environmental matters, and that their efforts would have to be carefully directed.

"Our idea was that here is a way of reaching many, many more people than we could ever hope to do ourselves, and in a far more fundamental way than might be done through press releases and mass mailings," Mr. Soutter said. But, he added, "we thought we had to coordinate it."

"Now we are seeing that it is something really bigger than us," he said. "I think the new Alliance on Religion and Conservation may very well be the next stage in the evolution of this process."

Andrew Steer, a director at The World Bank, said he likewise views the Summit and continuing Alliance as a very important means of promoting sustainable development worldwide.

"In many countries, religious convictions concerning the poor and the environment can be a very powerful force for change," said Mr. Steer, who oversees the Bank's environment and social policies division. "And we need to create a constituency for change. Remember that there are vested interests in most countries that are against making development more sustainable."

Mr. Steer said he views the Summit as part of a new and growing link between the development community and religions. It is a link which the Bank intends to follow closely, he said.

"There is, I think, another reason why this is an especially important time for developing the link between religions and the development community," Mr. Steer continued. "And that is because of the way the whole idea of freedom, of free markets and free expression, is being embraced all around the world."

"As any economist will tell you, free markets work because there is some sort of restraint in the form of trust between those who transact." This trust is a vital, he said, acting as a "sort of moral glue" which is "essential for things to work," especially as the world moves toward less government control. "And I believe religious faith is the best source of such moral glue," Mr. Steer said.

Religions find common ground

For the religions, organizing for conservation has likewise led to new understandings and areas of agreement.

"We quickly discovered that there was no point in even discussing the finer points of theology," said Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, honorary vice president of the World Jewish Congress, who was one of the Jewish representatives in London — and also at the original Assisi meeting. "However, we found that whatever our theological structure, we did agree on a couple of things, which were social. We agreed on the need to protect the environment, for one. And we agreed, almost instinctively, that one of the functions of the major religions in this world is to promote peace, and to be against fanaticism. And the third thing we all agreed on is that we are all committed to being advocates of the poor and to helping them."

"There is an evolving consensus that we really don't differ about what we as religions should be doing in this world," Rabbi Hertzberg added. "And I think this meeting was one of the very important steps along that road."

Madame Rúhiyyih Rabbání, who is the Bahá'í Faith's leading dignitary, headed the Bahá'í International Community's delegation to the Summit. Also attending were Lawrence Arturo, director of the Community's Office of the Environment, and Kimiko Schwerin, a senior advisor to the Faith's international governing body.

"For us, the Summit was enormously significant," said Mr. Arturo. "Clearly, the world's religions are becoming conscious of the common spiritual threads that run through them. At the same time, we are beginning to understand that it is the moral and spiritual force of religious teachings, when coupled with practical and scientific measures, that will ultimately solve the world's problems." ❁

Review: *Women and Empowerment*

(Continued from back page)

colonial administration" in the 1950s to the "empowerment and self-reliance" approach which has been advocated by grassroots women's organizations and feminist writers in the Third World.

The book is also replete with examples of various experiences and projects that exemplify current efforts to promote the advancement and empowerment of women. A project sponsored by the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Bahá'í International Community is highlighted as one example of how gender awareness training can be used at the grassroots level as an instrument for change. The project seeks to empower women by using traditional media, such as song and dance, to reach both men and women.

More than 100 organizations from five continents participated in various aspects and stages of the production. They included major UN agencies, such as the International Labor Organization and



UNICEF as well as NGOs ranging from the Center for Women's Global Leadership to the Young Women's Christian Association.

Yet, unlike the mish-mash that is too often the result of production by committees, the series suggests that the results of such cross-sector cooperation and collaboration can be sterling indeed. ☉

Supreme Court of India highlights Bahá'í views on communal tolerance in Ayodhya decision

NEW DELHI — The Supreme Court of India, in a decision last October concerning the religious dispute between Hindus and Muslims over the Ayodhya Mosque, cited the Bahá'í teachings on tolerance and unity as an example of communal harmony.

In a decision rendered on 24 October 1994, India's highest court wrote: "A neutral perception of the requirement for communal harmony is to be found in the Bahá'í Faith." The Court then quoted several passages from a Bahá'í statement entitled "Communal Harmony—India's Greatest Challenge," which had been submitted by the Bahá'í community of India.

"Lasting harmony between heterogeneous communities can only come through a recognition of the oneness of mankind, a realization that differences that divide us along ethnic and religious lines have no foundation," quoted the

Court. "Just as there are no boundaries drawn on the earth of separate nations, distinctions of social, economic, ethnic and religious identity imposed by peoples are artificial, they have only benefited those with vested interests. On the other hand, naturally occurring diverse regions of the planet, or the country, such as mountains and plains, each have unique benefits. The diversity created by God has infinite value, while distinctions imposed by man have no substance."

The decision concerned the dispute between Hindus and Muslims that followed the destruction of the Babri Mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya by Hindus, who objected to it on the grounds that it had been erected on a spot where the Hindu god Rama was said to have been born. The destruction of the Mosque, which had been built in 1528, enraged Muslims and ignited a grave crisis in India in 1993. ☉

ABOVE: In ceremonies on Earth Day 1995 (5 June) in Rio de Janeiro, soil from 16 countries was deposited into the Peace Monument, which was created by the Bahá'í community of Brazil in collaboration with the Bahá'í International Community in 1992 as an enduring symbol of the Earth Summit and the '92 Global Forum. The countries contributing this year were the Bahamas, Bermuda, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Guinea, Jordan, Latvia, Malaysia, New Caledonia, Peru, the Philippines, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Ukraine and Vanuatu — bringing to 84 the total number of nations and territories that have sent soil. Shown at left are some of the dignitaries present for the ceremony. Pictured, left to right, are: Vasile Macovei, Consul-General of Romania; Antoaneta Macovei, his wife; João Grinberg, Consul-General of Latvia; Livia Liepin of Latvia; Andreia Ronis of Latvia; Noemi Ronis of Latvia; Farhad Shayani of the Brazilian Bahá'í community; Ambassador Flávio Perry, representing the Governor of Rio de Janeiro; and Jean Pierre Ballaman, interim Consul of Switzerland.

Collaboration brings its own degree of empowerment

Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision Making

Prepared by
Marilee Karl

Zed Books Ltd

London & New
Jersey

There are those who say the product is more important than the process. Others say what counts is the quality of the process, never mind the final product.

In the case of the ten books on "Women and World Development" produced by the UN-NGO Group on Women and Development in collaboration with the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), Geneva, both the process and the product can be justly acclaimed.

Launched in 1989 as an interactive, collaborative process of work between various United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the series seeks to present, in a highly readable and interesting way, the outcome of more than a

decade of research on world development issues and their impact on women.

To judge the success of the process, one might consider its latest result: the tenth and final volume in the series, entitled: *Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision Making*.

Previous titles in the series, which is published by Zed Books Ltd. of London, include *Women and Human Rights*, *Women and the Environment*, *Women and Work*, and *Women and the Family*. However, inasmuch as participation and empowerment bear upon all of these other issues, *Women and Empowerment* provides a fitting capstone for the series.

Like its predecessors, *Women and Empowerment* deals with its subject in a balanced but forceful way: the information is presented objectively, but the additive effect is such that it amounts to a passionate plea for women.

The book draws on a variety of sources, from UN documents to personal interviews to informational material prepared by NGOs. Marilee Karl has fashioned from them a very readable history of women's involvement in politics at all levels: government, trade unions, NGOs, local communities and at the UN itself. It the process, it also provides an insightful summary the latest thinking about how to better grant to women a just share of power and participation in decision-making.

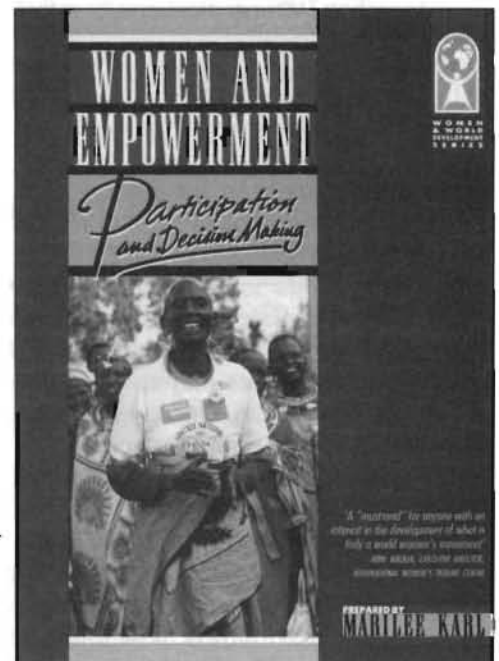
And like other books in the series, it

presents this information in a graphically appealing manner, making extensive use of charts, tables, diagrams and various type styles to highlight and emphasize a diverse range of opinions and information.

The book has up-to-date tables on the percentages of women in various national parliaments worldwide, for example, and the status of women's right to vote in each country. One bar chart diagrams how day-to-day work is divided between women and men in Africa. At a glance one can learn that while men do 95 percent of the work involved in clearing the fields, women do 70 percent of the hoeing and weeding, as well as some 80 percent of the transporting and storing of food. Women do 90 percent of the work involved in carrying water and fuel, and 95 percent of the work involved in feeding the family.

What makes the book especially valuable, however, is the degree to which it provides a summary of the latest think-

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ing about the issue of women and empowerment—which will be perhaps the central issue to be discussed in September at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

In a chapter on Women and Development, for example, the book presents the range of policy approaches to the issue, showing how thinking has evolved from the "residual model of social welfare under

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