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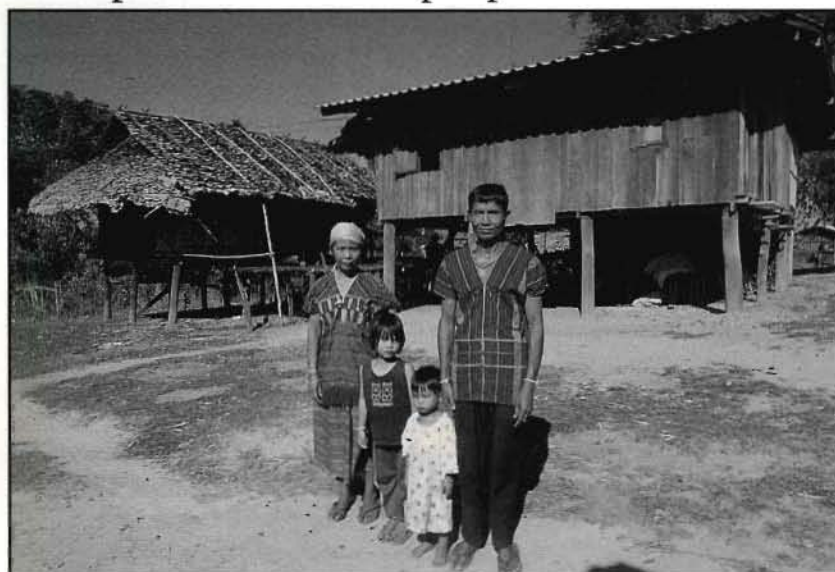


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Rong Sujipong, headman of Pongdin village, and his family.

OMKOI DISTRICT, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand — Nine years ago, at the age of 60, Boonphan Intawong began a series of trips up into this remote and mountainous district in northern Thailand to assist in the processes of social and economic development among the Karen people, an indigenous hill tribe that by many accounts had been long ignored.

"Many of the villages didn't have schools," said Mr. Intawong, a school teacher, now retired. "I felt that no one really cared about them."

Mr. Intawong, who is a Bahá'í, enlisted the help of other Bahá'ís in his hometown of Takham Neau, located in a valley just outside the Omkoi District. Over the course of 1988 and 1989, Mr. Intawong and his friends visited 26 villages in the district, talking about some simple spiritual principles that they believed could be a motivating force for advancement.

"We talked about the principles of unity and oneness, and how these ideas could build up the power of the community for development," said Mr. Intawong. "When we first started going there, the area was very primitive. The people were scattered and disunited in their thoughts."

Over time, according to Mr. Intawong and others, a larger sense of community was indeed generated in many of the 26 villages, creating new capacities for development. Others in the wider Bahá'í community of

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The Imperative for Moral Education

The case for moral education is made most starkly by asking: Would this century's notorious death camps and campaigns of ethnic or racial purging have occurred if the world's population had achieved a higher level of moral development?

Beyond such dramatic examples, even a cursory glance at current global concerns points to the need for a renewed emphasis on developing in every individual an inner guide, an ethical vision, or, as many commonly say now, a "moral compass."

Consider the degree to which emerging democracies will require the vigorous, enlightened and principled participation of their entire citizenry if they are to be successful. Or the necessity

for businesspeople to moderate their concern for profits with human-centered values if the world's current preference for the market system is to avoid a catastrophic polarization of wealth.

Or consider the dissipation of human capital that now occurs in the quest for an untempered and narcissistic materialism. Cultivated through world-girdling media, the attitudes conveyed by such an outlook implicitly condone drug and alcohol abuse, unrestrained sexual appetites, and other self-centered pursuits. Such attitudes ultimately degrade the individual and bring harm to family, friends and neighbors.

These and other trends cry for a collective reflection on the necessity of and the means for the promotion of moral development on a global scale. And, accordingly, many have called recently for the adoption of a global ethic, a universal moral vision appropriate for our new age of human interdependence.

Yet the idea of promoting specific morals or values is a controversial one, especially in this age of humanistic relativism. Too often in the past, campaigns to promote morality have been associated with repressive religious practices, oppressive political ideologies or narrow and limited visions of the common good, as based on a particular nationalistic, cultural or ethnic framework.

The key to resolving this controversy lies in recognizing that there are, essentially, two approaches to the promotion of moral behavior. The first, which is the traditional approach, lies in the formulation of a code of conduct, in which "rules" are given to individuals and "enforced" by various authorities (such as police or priests).

Sadly, despite the good intentions of the authoritarian approach, it has too often led to the excesses — or failed utterly, as when so-called "civilized" societies engage in genocide. As well, there will always be clever lawbreakers who will escape detection and punishment. Of course systems of law cannot be rejected entirely; indeed, our nascent world civilization requires that new institutions to promote justice be established at the global level. Yet it is also clear that something more is needed.

The second approach to moral development lies in a direction that seeks to empower individuals to develop their own moral conscience, such that they will personally make the "right" decision and follow the "right" way of life — even at the sacrifice of their immediate interests.

It is the second approach that needs to be fully examined and pursued in any course of action to promote moral education and development. For this approach, which upholds the inherent dignity of all individuals and indeed recognizes their intrinsic worth and capacity, is more consonant with the dominant principle of our age: the oneness of humanity.

In truth, it is the principle of oneness that must now become the foundation for all ethics. For while there are common moral principles that have been in the past and will continue to be important planks in any program of moral education — principles such as the imperative for honesty, the injunction against theft, and the condemnation of violence — it is also clear that the growing momentum towards world unity impels us to consider again the relationships among all.

For example, goodness, when defined in passive terms (to mind one's own business and not to harm anyone), is simply inadequate in an age of interdependence. Likewise, limited concepts of good

Perspective



Mary Power, right, who has served as Director of the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women since 1992 and worked in the Community's United Nations Office in New York for more than 25 years, retired on 30 June 1997. Ms. Power led the Community's representation at many recent UN conferences on women, including the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. She will be succeeded as Director of the Office for the Advancement of Women by Bani Dugal-Gujral, left, who has served in the New York office since 1994 as an Alternate Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN. Ms. Dugal-Gujral, a native of India, has a law degree from the University of Delhi and a master's degree in environmental law from Pace University in New York state.

— national good, corporate good, tribal good — are insufficient when our neighborhood has become global.

Reflection on these two key concepts — that each individual must develop his or her own inner guide and that all morality today must be viewed through the lens of human oneness — can best be pursued by recognizing the spiritual nature of human reality.

All of the world's religions have sought not only to define what is good and what is bad, but also to develop the inner faculty that can help the individual to perceive and apply such ethics in difficult situations. This inner faculty relies in large part on acknowledgment that we all have rational souls, and that we are responsible for our actions before the Creator.

The moral teachings of the world's great religions, likewise, offer a basic framework for moral development — once we look beyond the differences in religious ritual, cultural practice or theological dogma that have blinded so many to the inherent oneness of religious truth.

One starting point for moral development today, then, lies in a concerted reflection on the commonalities inherent in the great religious and moral systems, a reflection which inevitably reveals that each one espouses unity, cooperation and harmony among people, establishes guidelines for responsible behavior and supports the development of virtues which are the foundation of trust-based and principled interac-

tions. Every religion has taught that morality begins with the so-called Golden Rule — that one should act towards one's neighbor as one wishes others would act towards oneself.

The Golden Rule must now be applied on the global level, such that all are considered as our neighbors. As Bahá'u'lláh wrote more than a century ago: "That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race... It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world."

Bahá'is accept the idea of religious oneness — as well as the reality of human oneness — as a matter of fundamental belief. From these concepts flow other important ideas that must become a mainstay in any program of moral development in our age. These include the following concepts:

- that rectitude of conduct, trustworthiness and honesty are essential elements in the foundation of stability and progress in the world;
- that purity of motive offers a guiding light for all human endeavor, inasmuch as sincerity of purpose is a trait that can be recognized and practiced by any soul, regardless of his or her culture, education or background;
- that service to humanity — not the pursuit of money, position or status — is the source of happiness, honor and meaning in life. ☸

The moral teachings of the world's great religions offer a basic framework for moral development — once we look beyond the differences in religious ritual, cultural practice or theological dogma that have blinded so many to the inherent oneness of religious truth.

At a "Pre-Earth Summit Forestry Gathering" in Athens in May, HRH Prince Michael of Kent (at left) spoke about why governments should protect at least 10 percent of their forests, praising the fact that Greece has agreed to do so. Also addressing the gathering were (left to right): Dimitrios Sarafoglou, Secretary General of the Greek Ministry of Environment, Town Planning and Public Works; Nicholas Hanley of the European Commission; Elias Beriatos, Greek Secretary General of Forests and Natural Environment; and Francis Sullivan of the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). The gathering was sponsored by three non-governmental organizations: the WWF, the Hellenic Centre for Adult Education and Illiteracy Combat (EKEPEKA), and the Bahá'í Community of Greece.



In Greece, NGOs organize a diplomatic event to protect forests

ATHENS — With its highly varied terrain, combining rugged mountains in the north with sun-drenched Mediterranean islands in the south, Greece contains diverse flora and fauna — and some of Europe's few remaining pristine forests.

"Unlike the rest of Europe, Greece still has a fair portion of its original forests left," said Francis Sullivan, a forest specialist with the World Wide Fund for Nature-International (WWF). "Something like 20 percent of Greece is still forests, which is unusually high."

It was a significant event, therefore, when the Greek Government announced in May that it would set aside some 10 percent of its forests as protected areas, in line with an international campaign undertaken by the WWF.

The announcement came at a special "Pre-Earth Summit Forestry Gathering," which was co-sponsored by the Hellenic Centre for Adult Education and Illiteracy Combat (EKEPEKA) and the Bahá'í Community of Greece, two grassroots-level non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In the context of the renewed emphasis on NGO activity to protect the environment and promote sustainable development, as expressed at the recent Earth Summit + 5 [See page 6], the Gathering is reflective of the degree to which Interna-

tional NGOs such as the WWF can maximize their effectiveness by working with locally based NGOs.

The Greek Bahá'í Community, which has itself undertaken a number of small-scale environmental projects, provided key logistical support in helping to prepare for the Gathering, which had the character of an international diplomatic event. The Community also used its contacts overseas to help facilitate a royal presence, working with WWF to bring HRH Prince Michael of Kent from England to address the Gathering.

Without this kind of local and international support, said Mr. Sullivan, it would not have been as easy to win the Greek Government's commitment.

"There was a lot of good will in the Greek Government towards this proposal," said Mr. Sullivan. "But what we did was to create a high level opportunity to do something that might not otherwise have been done."

"Forests for Life"

Held in the prestigious Old Parliament Building on 30 May 1997, the Gathering drew the participation of key Greek ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Environment, Town Planning and Public Works. In all, more than 150 guests attended, including the Mayor of Athens, diplomats, govern-

In the context of the renewed emphasis on NGO activity to protect the environment and promote sustainable development, the event reflects how international non-governmental organizations can maximize their effectiveness by working with locally based groups.

ment officials, and representatives of NGOs and academia.

The announcement that Greece would protect 10 percent of its forested area came as part of an international "Forests for Life" campaign by WWF, which has so far obtained similar pledges from 20 nations.

"It was encouraging to see countries such as Greece recognizing that conservation of a representative sample of their forest resources was an essential component of sustainable development, and acknowledging their responsibility to the international community to ensure the preservation of their share of the planet's biological heritage," said Arthur Dahl, a deputy assistant executive director for the UN Environment Programme, who also addressed the Gathering. "The Greek Government and WWF should be complimented for this important initiative."

WWF launched the campaign in 1995, aiming to establish "an ecologically representative network of protected areas covering at least 10 percent of each forest type by the year 2000." The campaign has gained impetus after a WWF-sponsored mapping study in 1996 discovered that only 6 percent of world's forests are protected. It has gained further support as governments and NGOs have realized that key international agreements to protect forests, as urged by the accords (Agenda 21) adopted in Rio de Janeiro at the 1992 Earth Summit, have failed to materialize.

"Concrete commitments to act now to bring ongoing forest loss to a halt are few and far between, despite agreement about the importance the world's forests have for survival of life on earth," said Prince Michael. "Current protection levels are inadequate to ensure that biodiversity and ecological processes can be maintained."

The campaign, in a nutshell, is an effort by the WWF to bypass international inaction on forest protection. "We believe that the international negotiations on forests are taking place at completely the wrong rate," said Mr. Sullivan, who heads the Forests for Life campaign. "At current rates of forest use, we estimate there will be virtually no natural forests left in 50 years. And there has been no meaningful agreement which has changed this on the ground."

As part of the campaign, WWF Presi-

dent (emeritus) HRH the Duke of Edinburgh has written to more than 50 heads of state, asking them to support the 10 percent protection target. "The Greek event is a very significant stepping stone in our campaign," said Mr. Sullivan. "It allows us to reach our internal objective of getting 20 countries signed up by June. And if Greece can do this, then any other country can."

Bahá'í Environmental Activities

Co-sponsorship of the Gathering was one of a broad range of environmental projects undertaken by the Bahá'í Community of Greece in recent years, said Socrates Maanian, secretary of the Community's national governing council.

"We've had many youth projects dealing with the environment, such tree-planting, cleaning up beaches, sponsoring lectures and so on," said Mr. Maanian. "So this event was a natural step for us."

Mr. Maanian said that the Bahá'í Community of Greece was established in 1957 and now has local communities in some 21 towns and cities. Their work in support of the Gathering lay chiefly in making contacts with the Government in order to elicit their support for the event, helping to send out invitations, and making local arrangements for venue. EKEPEKA also played a key role in facilitating contacts in the Greek Government.

At the international level, assistance came from Ms. Guilda Walker, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community (*and an associate editor of ONE*



Among the speakers at the gathering was Nikos Anagnostopoulos, president of the Hellenic Centre for Adult Education and Illiteracy Combat (EKEPEKA), a co-sponsor of the event.

The Bahá'í Community of Greece has undertaken a number of small-scale environmental projects in recent years, from tree-planting efforts to the sponsorship of lectures on sustainable development. Shown below are members of the Community participating in a beach cleanup project in Iraklion, Crete, in August 1996.



Ms. Guilda Walker, left, shown here with H.E. Konstantinos Stefanopoulos, President of the Greek Republic, was a major force in helping to organize the Athens gathering. She is a representative of the Bahá'í International Community and an International Advisor to the World Wide Fund for Nature.



COUNTRY]. Ms. Walker is an International Advisor to WWF and she helped facilitate the presence of Prince Michael and other international dignitaries.

"Without Guilda, we never would have achieved the event," said Mr. Sullivan, explaining that she helped not only to pull together high level international contacts, but also to enlist the local support of the

Greek Bahá'í community.

In his talk, Prince Michael formally thanked the Bahá'ís for their support, noting that this was the fourth such forestry-related event co-sponsored between the WWF and the Bahá'í International Community in recent years. [See the July-September 1994 edition of *ONE COUNTRY* for information about previous World Forestry Gatherings.] ☉

Earth Summit + 5, downbeat in its assessment of progress since Rio, sends NGOs home with new energy

UNITED NATIONS — Five years ago, after some 118 world leaders at the first "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro adopted Agenda 21, a global program for environmental protection and economic development, it was greeted with banner headlines and diplomatic congratulations.

This year, when some 53 heads of state and government showed up for an "Earth Summit +5" meeting in New York to gauge the progress that has been made since Rio, the outcome was considerably more downbeat. Many government representatives themselves said that Rio's promise for a new spirit of international cooperation to promote "sustainable development" had not been realized, and many commentators flatly called the meeting a failure.

Yet some participants and observers found reasons for hope in the 23-27 June

meeting's outcome, suggesting that through crisis new strength can be found for future action.

"This is an occasion when the non-governmental organizations should come to the rescue," said Malaysian Ambassador Razali Ismail, who chaired the New York Summit in his capacity as President of the UN General Assembly. "I think the job is clearly cut out for the NGOs to reexamine this document, see what is wanting, then go back to the grassroots and push and agitate for more sincere, honest implementation of all the aspects of Rio."

And NGO representatives, who were also largely disappointed with the Summit's failure to resolve a number of key environmental issues, likewise resolved to work harder. "I'm going home with not only a lot of hope but a lot of strength to continue the

"This is an occasion when the non-governmental organizations should come to the rescue."

— General Assembly President Razali Ismail

work," said Chief Bisi Ogunleye of the Nigerian Countrywomen's Association. "Because now I have the full belief that it is people that can save the world, not governments. Now it is up to civil society to save the planet."

Unsustainable development

At its adoption five years ago, Agenda 21 sought to address a wide range of challenges, from the threat of global warming and the depletion of natural resources to the erosion of the ozone layer and the loss of biodiversity. Agenda 21 also linked these challenges to human needs, discussing the connection between environment and development in addressing the problems of overpopulation, excessive consumption, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. In the process, the term "sustainable development" came to epitomize the world's desire both to protect the environment and improve the material welfare of its peoples.

Although there have been positive developments, including a continued rise in world food production, a slowdown in population growth, and a number of regional improvements in environmental quality, many of the trends and problems that faced leaders in Rio remain unabated or have worsened. Among other things, nations have failed to agree on how quickly they must reduce carbon dioxide emissions, a major cause of global warming, and how they must act to protect the world's forests, which are fast disappearing. [See page 4.]

Beyond such details, perhaps the most serious shortfall in meeting the expectations of Agenda 21 was the failure of the North (the so-called "developed" nations) to meet a pledge to increase monetary aid and technical assistance to the South (also known as the "developing" world) so that the South can enjoy the benefits of development without causing the same levels of pollution and environmental damage Northern countries created during their development.

Unlike at other recent UN Summits, governments failed to reach agreement on a joint political statement about overall direction for action in the future. "The failure to produce a political statement reflects the crisis of credibility and confidence, as well as good will, between the rich and poor nations, between the North

and the South," said Martin Khor, director of the Third World Network, an NGO coalition. "The compact [at Rio] was that the North would change its model of development and provide aid, and that the South would change its own patterns of development, so that it would not go the way of high energy use. But the aid given by the North did not rise. It fell."

Yet some said that the atmosphere of confession that evolved around the Summit may be good for international relations and cooperation in the future — and provide a forerunner of what the world can expect as it prepares to assess the results of other global plans of action from the UN conferences that followed Rio, such as the 1995 Social Summit in Copenhagen and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

"It is perhaps because of its acknowledged failures that the Earth Summit + 5 shows signs of a new level of maturity in the international system," said Lawrence Arturo, director of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of the Environment. "It is only from such a process of frank consultation that a new level of genuine international cooperation can emerge. In this regard, despite the missed targets and obvious divisions, we consider the outcome here quite hopeful and a harbinger of the kind of honest assessment and hard work that the international community will increasingly have to undertake if its common challenges are to be resolved." ☉

"Now I have the full belief that it is people that can save the world, not governments. Now it is up to civil society to save the planet."

— Chief Bisi Ogunleye

The Earth Summit +5, held in June to assess environmental progress since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, drew a moderate amount of media attention. Shown below is the forest of satellite uplink dishes from television broadcasting trucks in front of the UN during the speech of U.S. President William Clinton.



UN reform tied to NGO access

"No reform can take place without civil society."

—Bella Abzug, co-chair of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

Chairing a meeting held on 30 April entitled "NGO Consultation on Increasing Access to the UN General Assembly and its Main Committees and All Areas of the Work of the UN" was Techeste Ahderom, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN, shown in the center below. To the right is Maurice Strong, Secretary General of the 1992 Earth Summit and head of an official UN task force on reform of the United Nations system. On the left is Afaf Mahfouz, First Vice President of the Conference of NGOs (CONGO).

UNITED NATIONS—Among the key points to emerge from a 30 April meeting on increasing UN access for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was a conviction that effective reform of the United Nations system hinges on its willingness to accommodate greater participation by civil society.

"No reform can take place without civil society," said Bella Abzug, co-chair of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), an NGO which has played a critical lobbying role at recent UN conferences. "NGO representatives should be on all task forces for UN reform. Unless that happens, all of the wonderful partnership experience we've had, from Rio de Janeiro to now, will be thwarted."

Likewise, Maurice Strong, head of a task force on UN reform, indicated that his report will stress the importance of NGOs.

"The UN realizes that there has been an immense transformation in the whole role of governments and government bodies," said Mr. Strong. "It is too much to suggest that governments are not the main bodies. They are and will continue to be. But they are no longer as inclusive in their ability to affect events, and the reality is that the activities that determine the quality of life in the human community take place in the organizations that you represent."

NGOs currently have access to many UN bodies. In particular, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which oversees UN social and economic programs, has

granted more than 1,500 NGOs the right to be present, to lobby, and to make statements to certain committees and agencies under its authority. The Department of Public Information (DPI) allows another 1,500 NGOs to observe some types of UN meetings. And many onetime events or conferences, such as the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, have set up their own procedures for access.

The main decision-making body of the UN, the General Assembly, does not offer formal access. But the growing influence of NGOs, exemplified at major UN conferences like the Earth Summit, has led many to suggest that governments must allow access to the UN's main bodies. The General Assembly itself has established a working group headed by Ambassador Ahmad Kamal of Pakistan to examine this idea.

Amb. Kamal, who addressed the NGO-sponsored meeting, warned that some governments are leery of increased access. "The highest levels of the UN have recognized that there is a constructive role to be played by NGOs," he said. "The problem arises because, in the subconscious of many member states, there is a feeling that the debate is one about power-sharing."

Little will be resolved until Amb. Kamal's working group completes its work—and the General Assembly itself turns its attention to the issue, possibly after the 52nd Assembly convenes in September.

However, events at June's Earth Summit + 5 [See page 6], which was itself a "special session" of the General Assembly, appear to bode well for the possibility of increased access. At the Summit, NGOs were allowed access to many meetings, and 12 speakers representing NGOs and other "major groups"—such as youth, farmers, business groups and indigenous peoples—were allowed to make statements from the same podium as heads of state.

Ambassador Razali Ismail, President of the General Assembly, said after the Summit that he was "very happy" to see such participation. "One of the important features of this Special Session is that we have been able to bring the non-governmental sector right into the plenary of the General Assembly," he said. "This is a milestone." ☉





Sunapa Dechatattanon, at left, leads a class in moral education at the Omkoi Bahá'í Institute, which serves the Karen people in northern Thailand. Ms. Dechatattanon is director of the Institute, which was founded by local Bahá'ís from the region in the early 1990s.

In Thailand, a homegrown project works to assist a neglected people

(Continued from page one)

Thailand soon joined the effort started by Mr. Intawong and they established a number of village-level tutorial schools and other small-scale development activities. The entire process, in turn, has helped to support government-sponsored development plans for the district, including the establishment of more schools.

In this regard, the efforts of the Thai Bahá'í Community have been a catalyzing force in promoting positive change among the Karen people in the Omkoi District, which is one of the least developed areas in Thailand. By undertaking some small pilot projects of their own, Thai Bahá'ís in some respects led the way for government efforts, both by showing what was possible and by serving as a critical liaison between officials and the Karen population. In this way, the entire effort here demonstrates how a grassroots non-governmental organization can give key support to national development plans.

The story here is also of a homegrown project that, with minimal help from the outside, has been able to sustain itself over nearly a decade. It started not with aid from the international or even the national level, but rather when a nearby community of individuals, with few resources of its own, rose up to assist less fortunate neighbors.

And those who have been touched by these efforts say they have generated a distinct momentum for long-term change.

Long Neglected

The Omkoi District comprises some 300 villages and sub-villages on 2,336 square kilometers near the Myanmar border, located about 180 kilometers south of Chiang Mai, Thailand's second largest city. Ruggedly mountainous and heavily forested, the district is 85 percent populated by the Karen people, an ethnically distinct hill tribe whose indigenous lands extend over areas of Thailand and Myanmar.

In part because they have their own language and customs, the Karen have been isolated from mainstream Thai culture. This isolation has manifested itself in a pattern of neglect and even prejudice. Certainly, many Karen believe that they have been looked down upon in the past.

The Karen population here also faces a number of economic problems. Because of the difficult terrain, agricultural land is scarce; as well, farming practices are primitive, relying largely on traditional slash and burn techniques. To supplement their meager farm incomes, many families work part of the year outside the district as migrant laborers. According to the District Development Office, the average annual income per family in 1990 was about \$400

The Omkoi Bahá'í Institute is a locally initiated project that, with minimal help from the outside, has been able to sustain itself over nearly a decade, all the while generating momentum for long-term change. The project also demonstrates how a grassroots non-governmental organization can give key support to national development plans.



Boonphan Intawong, center, was the first Bahá'í to do development work among the Karen people in the Omkoi District. A school teacher, he began going into the area in 1988 and soon enlisted other Bahá'ís in his home town of Takham Neau, including Chum Mopoh, left, and When Chinawon, right, to assist in the effort.

“The most important and effective activity is moral education for the children and youth. [Such classes] help the youth gain confidence in themselves, to help them see their inherent nobility.”

— Sunapa Dechatattanont, director, Omkoi Bahá'í Institute

a year, although subsistence farming provides a clear supplement.

Other concerns include inadequate access to year-round supplies of water, high rates of illiteracy, and a persistent problem with opium addiction. According to one Government paper, as many as 18 percent of the Karen people here smoke opium, which is grown in the region.

The Thai Government has recognized these problems and increased spending in the district. In 1995, for example, the Government appropriated US\$200,000 for the construction of new schools, a significant addition to the annual schools operating budget of about US\$80,000. Other agencies and NGOs, as well, continue to work here. In 1988, for example, four UN agencies collaborated on a four-year project to address social and economic problems in 30 villages in the nearby Paepor Highlands.

The focus of Bahá'í activities has been in the area comprising the 26 villages that were identified by Mr. Intawong and his friends in the late 1980s. Inspired by their efforts, the Bahá'í Community of Thailand held a special campaign in 1992 and 1993 to raise funds for a permanent institute here. About US\$16,000 was donated and in 1993 the Community established the Omkoi Bahá'í Institute, through which current Bahá'í development efforts in the district are channeled.

“The purpose of the Institute, simply put, is to do community development, to lift up the spiritual and physical well-being of

the Karen community here,” said Sunapa Dechatattanont, the Institute’s director.

To that end, the Institute has, at various times, run stopgap village-level tutorial schools in the region, providing education in small or remote villages where the Government’s own program had not yet reached. During 1994 and 1995, for example, the Institute ran seven village-level tutorial schools, offering basic education to more than 300 students in seven underserved villages. Those schools have ceased operation, in part because the Government has increased its own educational efforts in the district and in part because of changes in staff composition at the Institute.

The Institute has also offered on-going moral education and literacy classes. Aimed primarily at children and young people in the region, these classes are today the backbone of the Institute’s work.

“In the situation here, the most important and effective activity is moral education for the children and youth,” said Ms. Dechatattanont, who came to the Institute in May 1996 with her husband, Giovanni de Leon, who is from the Philippines. “We believe these classes are a way to help the youth gain confidence in themselves, to help them see their inherent nobility.”

By coming to understand their nobility, Ms. Dechatattanont said, the Karen youth are better able to resist the attraction to opium and other drugs. The moral education classes are also aimed at teaching that all humankind is one — and that the Karen are part of this oneness. In this way, she said, the Karen children and youth see that they are equal with others, and feel empowered to change and advance.

“We feel better about ourselves.”

According to Karen who have participated, the classes have provided a key resource — and helped them to feel equal to the Thai majority in the country.

“Some people like to say that we are stupid and we don’t know how to read or write,” said Tanyarak Sujipong, a 14-year-old girl from Pongdin, one of the villages where the Institute has been especially active. “But the Bahá'ís taught us how to read and write and not to use any drugs. So now we feel better about ourselves. We feel we have equality.”

This spring, Ms. Sujipong was one of four girls who were the first Karen stu-

dents from Pongdin to be admitted into the District's regional high school, an important signpost of the village's progress.

Khamnoi Gilatoh, a 30-year-old mother of three living in the village of Pang Ong Mong, said that even though her 10-year-old daughter attends a nearby district-run school, the supplemental classes offered by the Institute have greatly sped her daughter's progress.

"At the regular school, the children study only a little bit and play most of the time," said Mrs. Gilatoh. "The teacher is absent a lot and often comes late. But at the Bahá'í school, they study more and I feel my daughter has become smarter. And also before my daughter was quiet and shy. Now she has the courage to talk."

Government officials confirmed that it is often difficult to get good teachers to serve in this remote district, where school buildings are frequently little more than a single room, open to the air and sheltered by a thatch roof. "But it is better than in the past," said Bopit Vatavijarana, a development officer with the national Community Development Division assigned to the district. "The Government is actively working here now and would like to make the whole of Thailand equal in its development."

In this regard, the Institute has also played an important role as a catalyst for official development efforts by acting as a liaison between the Karen communities that it works with and government development officers like Mr. Vatavijarana.

According to Rong Sujipong, the 44-year-old headman of Pongdin village, the Institute has provided a link between his community and the authorities. "When we need anything, we contact the Institute and they contact the government," he said.

Mr. Sujipong, a vegetable farmer, enumerated a series of small projects in Pongdin that the Institute has either established itself or helped the village to obtain from the government. Such projects include the village primary school, which was started by the Bahá'ís and then taken over by the district, a well and a piping system to bring more reliable supplies of water to the village, and a new day care center.

"Pongdin has become much better since the Bahá'ís came," he said. "We have the school, we have tap water, and the

children have become much better from attending the Bahá'í morals classes.

"Because the children have had this education, it will lead to a better future," he said. "This all has made me feel that everyone is equal, that all the Thais are equal, and everyone around the world is equal. And it has made me feel better inside."

No one suggests that the Institute has been solely responsible for the changes here. "It's not to the extent that if the Bahá'ís hadn't come, the Government wouldn't have come," said Supachai Nimmanheminda, 40, who was Deputy District Officer from 1991 to 1992, a period when many of the efforts were started. "But for sure, they have had a good effect, and been a good support."

Mr. Nimmanheminda, who now operates a family flower-growing business near Pongdin village, said the Institute has been distinctively sensitive to indigenous Karen culture. "Unlike some other groups, the Bahá'ís don't go in and change things immediately," he said. "They don't go in and tell the Karen to stop believing in ancestor worship. Rather, they build something so that the people themselves can change things. So the Bahá'ís teach them to develop their own wisdom, and from that, change occurs."

The Bahá'ís who have been involved with the Institute say their goal has been simply to be of service to their less fortunate neighbors, and their motivation has come from their own understanding of the principle of human oneness.

"I went to teach them because I've seen that the world has developed so much and I wanted to help them develop themselves," said When Chinawon, a 77-year-old farmer from Takham Neau who was one of the first to accompany Mr. Intawong on his initial forays into the district. "This is a large, large world and we shouldn't be in the dark and we shouldn't let others be in the dark. So we went to try to develop the community." ☉

"This is a large, large world and we shouldn't be in the dark and we shouldn't let others be in the dark. So we went to try to develop the community."

— When Chinawon

Tanyarak Sujipong, left, and Noina Sujipong, both 14 years old, are among four young girls from Pongdin village who will attend the district-run high school this year. They are the first to attend high school from their village, a place where the Omkoi Bahá'í Institute has been especially active.



In Nigeria, the Bahá'í Community of Ibadan sponsored an interfaith conference on "Women, Equality and Religion" at the University of Ibadan last year in June. The event reflects the wide range of activities Bahá'ís around the world have undertaken to promote the advancement of women in recent years. Representatives of Bahá'í, Christian, Hindu and Islamic communities took part in the conference.



Around the world, Bahá'í women's groups increase their activities

Among observances of International Women's Day this year, a celebration held in the village of Piplud near Indore, India, was likely among the most removed from metropolitan civilization.

Hosted by young tribal women, the event featured their dances, a sharing of personal experiences and a voicing of their concerns—including problems of alcoholism and illiteracy in their families.

It drew the attention of regional officials and news media. Shri V. R. Subramaniam, the District Collector of Dhar, a main speaker, said: "It is only when women are empowered that the country can move ahead with development."

Or maybe the gathering that qualifies as most far-flung was one in Chuuk, in the Federated States of Micronesia. A conference there drew more than 300 indigenous women from surrounding lagoon islands.

Held 8 March 1997, it was the second International Women's Day observance to be held in Chuuk, and a milestone for the region. The first celebration, held eight years ago, followed the local tradition of inviting only high ranking officials to make speeches. Hence, only men were at the podium. This year, the female organizers decided to make it a women's affair. "After

eight years," noted this year's keynote speaker, Ms. Betty Benson, "a new door has opened."

What ties together these two events—as well as hundreds of other observances, seminars, workshops and campaigns—is the involvement of Bahá'ís around the world in activities to promote the advancement of women, a trend that has mushroomed since the establishment at the international level of a Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women five years ago.

As of June 1997, some 30 national-level Bahá'í communities have established special offices or committees to promote the advancement of women. The trend reflects not only the global spread and diverse nature of the Faith, but also its fundamental commitment to women's equality.

A Spiritual Principle

"As a worldwide community, we are responding to Bahá'í scripture, which explicitly teaches that women and men are equal," said Mary Power, director of the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women. "As a spiritual principle, this was proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago, something that is unique among world religions.

"At another level, national Bahá'í com-

Fired up by the Beijing Conference and their own commitment to spiritual principles, Bahá'í communities worldwide have established special offices and committees to promote the advancement of women.

munities are responding to the creation of our international office, which was established by our supreme governing council, the Universal House of Justice, in 1992," Ms. Power added. "This has done much to stimulate, encourage, and support the development of similar offices or committees at the national level. Now we are really seeing the fruits of that, in terms of stepped-up local, national and regional activities."

An informal survey of Bahá'í activities at the national level turned up myriad projects and activities in support of women's advancement. Taken together, these portray a world community keenly engaged in reflecting on the issue within its own ranks—and energetically promoting its application in society at large.

The Women's Day observance in Piplud, for example, was organized by tribal women who have recently received training from the Indore Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women. The decision to commemorate the Day emerged from a two-week training session on family life, which had brought together some 18 couples from remote regions to discuss the importance of family and the need for equal responsibility in parenting.

In Chuuk, likewise, although the conference was not organized by the Bahá'ís, the keynote speaker, Mrs. Benson, is a Bahá'í—and she was invited because of grassroots work by Bahá'ís in the South Pacific to promote women's equality.

The Beijing Platform

Many of the activities undertaken by Bahá'ís aim explicitly to reaffirm and implement the Platform for Action adopted by the world's governments at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held September 1995 in Beijing. More than 400 Bahá'ís from at least 50 countries participated in the NGO Forum on Women, the parallel conference held that year in Huairou outside Beijing. Upon their return, these women and men brought home a fresh perspective and energy.

"For me personally, participating in the Beijing events was an exceptional life experience," said Lyn Lane, director of the Australian Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women, which was founded in 1993. "It enabled me to really address issues from a global perspective rather than a national level which had predominantly

been my prior exposure; and it reinforced my commitment to working towards achieving equality between women and men."

Since Beijing, the Australian Office has engaged in follow-up activities, Ms. Lane said, such as working closely with CAPOW, a coalition of national women's organizations, to support task forces on "Women and Peace" and "Women in Decision-Making," two of the "critical issues" identified by the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Singapore Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women organized two workshops at the NGO Forum in collaboration with the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations. This year it is co-organizing a nine-month-long series of talks on women's health with the Council in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

In the United Kingdom, the Bahá'í National Women's Committee, in addition to following issues from the Beijing conference, has worked with other religious groups to support the passage of legislation that would bring to justice UK citizens who have been involved in the exploitation of children overseas. The Committee gathered nearly 10,000 signatures from 159 cities and towns in support of the legislation, which was known as the Action for Children Campaign, and the legislation was approved by Parliament in March 1997.

In the United States, the National Spiritual Assembly, the community's national governing body, is co-chair of an NGO working group composed of more than 100

In the United Kingdom, the National Women's Committee, in addition to following issues from the Beijing conference, has worked with other religious groups to support the passage of legislation that would bring to justice UK citizens who have been involved in the exploitation of children overseas. Shown left to right are: Lois Hainsworth of the UK Bahá'í Community, Sandra Khumbatta and the Rev. St. John Willey of the Action for Children Campaign, Member of Parliament Mark Wolfson, and Carmen Henry, Wendi Momen and Daniel Wheatly, of the UK Bahá'í Community.



“Men and women are becoming more aware of the importance of working together as equal partners and the importance of the contribution of competent women to the decision-making process.”

**— Cheryl Hum,
Singapore Bahá'í
Office for the
Advancement of
Women.**

Attendance at a series of talks on health, sponsored this year by the Singapore Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations and the Ministry of Health, has been good.

organizations pushing for Government ratification of the UN Convention on Women. The U.S. Assembly also recently issued a statement, “Two Wings of a Bird: Equality, the Foundation of All Human Progress,” to stimulate “broad discussion within and outside the community” on equality.

Grassroots action

In addition to projects at the national level, many Bahá'í women have risen to form local or regional networks.

In Denmark, a Bahá'í Association of Women formed in January 1996. “Our goal is to try to develop the potential of women, to put it simply,” said Ingegerd Bischoff, the Association's chairwoman. So far, the Association's members have organized a series of meetings in Copenhagen on such topics as “Women and AIDS” and “Female Genital Mutilation.”

In Germany, the Bahá'í Community established a Bahá'í Women's Forum a year ago and now has 130 members in 10 regions of the country. The Forum has formed a number of “topic groups” to promote the discussion of issues such as “women and art,” “the advancement of men” and “violence against women.” Said Gisa Meier-Floeth, secretary of the Forum: “There are great chances for the advancement of women — and of men.”

In France, an Association of Bahá'í Women for Development, Peace and Unity was founded in 1989 in Paris; it now has eight regional branches. “The creation of numerous branches is a sign of the vitality of women

in the country at large,” said Elaheh Locascio, the Association's secretary.

The specific issues that national-level Bahá'í women's groups and committees are involved in vary widely, often relating quite specifically to local or national concerns and conditions.

The Bahá'í Community of Equatorial Guinea, occupied with basic issues of social and economic development, sponsored a functional literacy course for women in Malabo and Bata from November 1996 to April 1997. Working with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, the Community used Bahá'í Centers for the courses, which taught literacy as well as reproductive health, nutrition, and basic mathematics.

In Ghana, the Bahá'í National Women's Committee has focused on programs aimed at promoting healthy families and helping women to realize their full potential. “In Africa,” said Rosemary Mills-Tetty of the Ghanaian Bahá'í community, “research has shown that women do a lot of the productive work, and yet at the same time their self-esteem is low.”

Other issues of special focus around the world include violence against women and promoting partnership between women and men.

Community transformations

The proliferation of women's activities has also brought changes within the Bahá'í community. In Austria, for example, a national Task Force on Women has organized a nationwide series of seminars on themes of “Encouragement,” “Change,” and “Service.” Said Daniela Hlavac-Marcak, secretary of the Task Force: “After four years of work, we believe that the general awareness of the connection between the issues of women and other topics of high relevance, for both the Bahá'í community and also the whole society, has been raised.”

In Singapore, where a Bahá'í Women's Committee has existed since 1972, there has been a gradual transformation of attitudes of both women and men in the community. “In the past many women often did not attend Bahá'í events, study classes and so on, because they had to look after their children,” said Cheryl Hum of the Singapore Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women. “And at the events it was usually the women who prepared and served the refreshments and cleaned up



afterwards. In our administrative decision-making bodies, we saw a predominance of men elected.

"This has changed quite substantially over the last few years as the men and women are becoming more aware of the importance of working together as equal partners and the importance of the contribution of competent women to the decision-making process," said Ms. Hum. "More women are now being elected to the administrative bodies in Singapore, men and women work side by side on committees and at Bahá'í events, men and women share hospitality duties and cleaning up after functions, and husbands often look after their children so that their wives also have the opportunity of participating in events, serving on committees, joining study classes and so on."☉

South African Bahá'í wins Mandela Award

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa—Roslyn Mazibuko, Director of the Primary Health Care Services for the Northern province of South Africa and a member of the South African Bahá'í Community, was recently given the Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights.

In ceremonies on 29 May, Ms. Mazibuko was one of three recipients of the annual award, which recognises outstanding contributions and commitment to improving the health and the health care of disadvantaged populations. The award recipients are selected by a committee constituted in consultation with President Mandela.

Ms. Mazibuko's organization was instrumental in the development of a manually operated stone breaker, appropriate technology that was featured in a recent issue of ONE COUNTRY. [See "New hope for Africa's beleaguered stone breakers," July-September 1996]☉

Review: *Wisdom of Love*

(Continued from back page)

thiness, both among its workers and its customers, writes Dr. Marcic. As a result, she says, H-P (as the company is known) benefits in numerous ways, from the willingness of suppliers to put H-P's orders

first (because they trust that their contracts will be honored) to an ability to recruit the best workers (who know they will be treated with respect). H-P shipments are even cleared faster by customs agents at international borders, she says, because of the company's reputation.

Likewise, she writes, Semco, the largest marine and food-processing company in Brazil, benefits in the marketplace because of corporate policy which treats employees with respect and trust. Company president Ricardo Semler, she says, has introduced methods to promote employee participation, profit-sharing and information exchange. "By turning over most power to his employees, Semler has catapulted his company into incredible growth in revenues over ten years, despite incredibly harsh and unpredictable economic conditions in Brazil," writes Dr. Marcic. "At Semco, people are self-propelled, instead of being pushed forward."

Dr. Marcic uses extensive citations from other like-minded management theorists to bolster her views, and thus offers a superb summary of the best thinking in the new genre. But perhaps the most useful aspect of the book are the numerous tables and lists by which she categorizes and codifies this thinking. In this regard, it excels as a concise workbook for managers who wish to quickly digest and understand the best of various spiritual management theories.

Dr. Marcic, who is a Bahá'í, concludes that such new management techniques cannot be adopted halfheartedly. She cites a study saying that half of all organizational change efforts fail. "To be real, to be lasting," she writes, "change must be genuine and must spring from the deepest, most basic level of human needs and values."

Unless managers themselves are sincere, she says, unless they genuinely seek to implement "the wisdom of love" in their own lives, "all the strategies, slogans, and training programs in the world will not help."

Throughout the book, Dr. Marcic draws on the holy scriptures of all the world's religions for quotations to illuminate the virtues that she believes are most needed by modern managers. Accordingly, people of virtually any faith will find the book relevant and inspiring.☉

"Some people think that spirituality and daily practical life are separate issues. One of the purposes of this book is to show that spiritual behaviors should be practiced in a factory as much as in a temple."

— Dorothy Marcic

How prophets lead to profits

Managing with the Wisdom of Love: Uncovering Virtue in People and Organizations

By Dorothy Marcic

Jossey-Bass
Publishers

San Francisco

Between increasing global competition for market share, growing pressure from stockholders for profits, and expanding expectations for greater quality from customers, the business world has become vastly more complex in recent years.

These trends have, in turn, spawned a whole new genre of literature: books about fresh ideas in business management that seek to address the challenges faced by modern corporate leaders.

These books can be crudely divided into two categories. First there are those that take a mainly materialistic approach, arguing that money and profit are what business is all about and the best way to motivate workers and organizations is by the time-tested carrot

Review

and stick. The second category argues that altruistic values and moral principles are what really make people and companies work better.

Inasmuch as the first category is the most traditional one, embodying the largely discredited maxim that "the boss is always right," it is the second classification, with its paradigm-shifting ideas about the importance of moral values in business, that has gained the most attention of late.

Into this fold comes Dorothy Marcic with a new book entitled "Managing with the Wisdom of Love: Uncovering Virtue in People and Organizations." Published in May by Jossey-Bass, a subsidiary of Simon and Schuster, the 130-page book offers a superb overview of the "spiritual management" paradigm — as well as numerous keen insights in its own right.

Dr. Marcic, who recently returned to the United States after a four years at Czechoslovak Management Center in Prague under a Fulbright scholarship, essentially argues that business and commerce are governed by the same laws that rule other human relationships and, in this regard, it is the age-old wisdom of the golden rule — along with other cardinal virtues — that produces the best results.

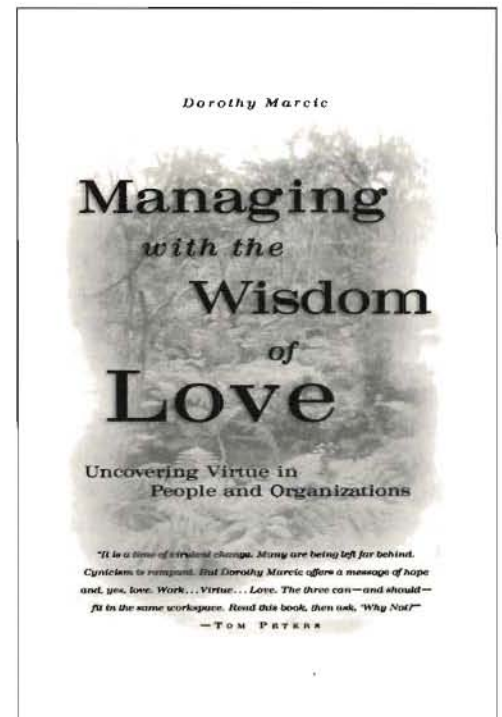
"Some people think that spirituality and daily practical life are separate issues," she writes. "One of the purposes of this book is to show that spiritual behaviors should be practiced in a factory as much as

in a temple."

She then outlines some of the key values — including love, justice, dignity, respect and service — that comprise the "new management virtues" that are needed in the contemporary workplace. These virtues, she writes, are more than subsidiary niceties: they are the path to long-term corporate survival and success.

"Companies that break spiritual laws, that lack love, integrity, justice, and respect, will over time show negative effects in some way," she writes. "They may initially be successful, or even successful for quite a while, particularly if they have clever managers or little competition. However, the results of lovelessness, injustice, and disrespect will eventually make the organization less productive than it might have been. In the long run, the company will suffer alienation of workers, disenfranchisement of customers, loss of community respect, and so on."

Drawing on some 20 years of experience as a professor of business and man-



agement, she backs this theme up with numerous anecdotes about companies that have followed the path of virtue and thrived. Hewlett-Packard, a major American computer and electronics manufacturer, has a wide reputation for honesty and trustworthiness. (Continued on page 15)