



ONE COUNTRY

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

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In a Millennium Declaration, the largest gathering of heads of state and government ever agrees to a values-based approach to promoting peace, prosperity and justice in the new century.



UN Photo

Group photograph of the some 150 heads of state and government gathered at the Millennium Summit.

UNITED NATIONS — Gathered at an historic Millennium Summit for three days in September, leaders from virtually every country in the world agreed on a set of common values for the new century and upheld the central role of the United Nations in promoting peace, prosperity and justice worldwide.

In the largest gathering of heads of state and government ever held, leaders at the Summit issued a final Declaration stating that freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility comprise "fundamental values" in international relations. The leaders said they are "determined to establish a just and lasting peace all over the world."

"We recognize that, in addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level," says the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which was adopted by consensus on 8 September 2000, the Summit's final day. "As leaders we have a duty therefore to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs."

"We reaffirm our commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which have proved timeless and universal. Indeed, their relevance and capacity to inspire have increased, as nations and peoples have become increasingly interconnected and interdependent."

As well, in their speeches to the Summit, the some 150 heads of state and government who attended repeatedly emphasized themes concurrent with the recognition of humanity's

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Signs of Hope for the New Millennium

At the United Nations in September, world leaders met in their largest gathering ever and signed a values-based Declaration upholding the primacy of peace, justice, equality and human dignity.

This was an historic event and a sign of great hope for the world.

Although cynical observers might say the Millennium Summit was mostly a "talk shop" that resulted in few concrete commitments, the mere gathering together of so many leaders, their resounding support for the United Nations and its principles, and their distinctive emphasis on certain key common values, specifically "freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility," make the event an important milestone in humanity's progress towards a peaceful, prosperous and just world civilization.

Likewise, in the companion Millennium World Peace Summit in August, the gathering together of more than 1,000 religious and spiritual leaders and their concurrence on a similarly values-oriented Declaration, calling for peace, tolerance, equality and religious freedom, is another historic event and sign of hope for the world community.

Indeed, in some respects, given the history of conflict and dissension among many of the world's religions and their various sects, the success of the religious Summit in reaching common ground on many issues is perhaps more surprising than the agreements reached at the Millennium Summit by world leaders.

To the Bahá'í observer, what is remarkable about both of these events — as well as an earlier Millennium Forum, held by civil society organizations last May also as a companion to the Millennium Summit — is the degree to which the main principles of agreement are congruent with the principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

More than 100 years ago, well before the new set of values discussed at all three Millennium meetings were in wide circulation, Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed that humanity had entered a new stage in its collective development.

When fully realized, this new stage

would fulfill ancient prophecies in all religions for an age of peace and enlightenment, Bahá'u'lláh said, and be marked by the wide acceptance of the following principles: the oneness (or interdependence) of humanity; the common foundation of all religions; the equality of women and men; the equality of all races and ethnic groups; the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty; the importance of individual dignity and human rights; and the need for an international institution to bring all nations together in the safety of collective security.

Any dispassionate analysis of the documents, including the speeches, that emerged from these three Millennium meetings, shows that the agenda of progressive social values and collective action called for by Bahá'u'lláh has now been essentially adopted by the world at large.

At the Millennium Summit, for example, world leaders stated that "the United Nations is the indispensable common house of the entire human family, through which we will seek to realize our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development."

As noted, the final declaration by world leaders emphasized the importance of certain key values. "We recognize that, in addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level," world leaders said.

At the religious Summit, religious and spiritual leaders proclaimed that "no individual, group or nation can any longer live as an isolated microcosm in our interdependent world, but rather all must realize that our every action has an impact on others and the emerging global community" and that "religious and spiritual traditions are a core source of the realization of a better life for the human family and all life on Earth."

Of special significance, religious leaders further stated explicitly that "men and women are equal partners in all aspects of life" — a view which has not historically been a teaching of most world religions.

And at the Millennium Forum, civil society organizations proclaimed that “we are one human family, in all our diversity, living on one common homeland and sharing a just, sustainable and peaceful world, guided by universal principles of democracy, equality, inclusion, voluntarism, non-discrimination and participation by all persons...”

One could argue, of course, that many of these same principles are largely embodied in the United Nations Charter and in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And one would be correct. Certainly both of these documents are visionary in nature.

But what makes these Millennial events so dramatic is the concurrent unfolding of events in the world over the last decade: the end of the cold war, the spread of democracy, the integration of the world's people and cultures, the widespread advancement of women; the steady victories of the new human rights regime, and the increasing prosperity of many people in many countries.

Of course, there remains a gap between the rhetoric on the mountain top and the reality in the foothills and plains below, where the majority of humanity dwells. It will undoubtedly be some time before all peoples are truly free, before all racial, religious and ethnic tensions are utterly eliminated, and before the world's poor have access to adequate food, water, shelter and health care, let alone a sense of genuine prosperity.

And, on the peace front, there is ever the sense of “two steps forward, one step back,” inasmuch as some world trouble spots continue to boil and the threat of wider conflict in some regions still remains.

Yet the trends toward peace, freedom, justice and prosperity are dominant. And the resounding affirmation of the United Nations and its principles by world leaders, gathered in the largest Summit meeting ever, brings this into focus.

It is now possible to say that peace is the norm in the world, whether within or among nations. The use of war to solve differences is now seen as abhorrent, a violation of human rights and, even, an ineffectual means of settling disputes. Consultation, arbitration and mediation are now the accepted means of resolving differences within and between nations. Moreover, the promulgation of peace is now understood to include



In Cambodia, a plaster model of the mouth was used recently to demonstrate the proper way to brush teeth in an oral hygiene education project carried out in Kandal Province by the Cambodian Organization for Research, Development and Education, a Bahá'í-sponsored non-governmental organization.

an emphasis on justice and actions to promote development.

We see great hope, then, in the proclamations issued by the Millennium Summit and its companion meetings. When they are set alongside the clearly emerging trends in world affairs, they offer signs of hope that, as Bahá'u'lláh promised more than a century ago, the world is moving inexorably towards an age of peace and prosperity for all humanity.

As the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote in 1985, in a statement entitled “The Promise of World Peace”:

“The Great Peace towards which people of good will throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet — in the words of one great thinker, ‘the planetization of mankind.’”*

The trends toward peace, freedom, justice and prosperity are dominant. The Millennium Summit, the largest such meeting ever, brings this into focus. It is now possible to say that peace is the norm in the world.

Religious leaders gather for their own UN Summit, also pledging to work for peace and tolerance

Dr. Albert Lincoln, Secretary General of the Bahá'í International Community, addresses the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in the UN General Assembly Hall.



Photo courtesy of Beliefnet, by Lyn Hughes

"This is very different than any interfaith meeting that has happened before. The United Nations is a global common ground. It changes the nature of the conversation."

— Professor Lawrence Sullivan, Director of the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions

NEW YORK — The images, broadcast around the globe by CNN and other major news networks, were compelling in their pageantry: some 1,000 religious leaders, representing every major world religion and resplendent in an array of saffron robes, purple vestments, white turbans and black cassocks, were gathered together in the stately General Assembly Hall of the United Nations.

Yet more significant than the imagery of the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, held 28-31 August 2000 at the UN and at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, was the substance of what was said — and the great symbolism of saying it at the United Nations.

"This is very different than any interfaith meeting that has happened before," said Professor Lawrence Sullivan, director of the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, who attended the Summit as an observer. "If you hold an ecumenical meeting in a church or synagogue or a mosque,

that is not common ground. But the United Nations is a global common ground. It changes the nature of the conversation."

And the essence of the conversation was this: that it is time for the world's religious communities to stop fighting and arguing amongst themselves and, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, to begin working together — in cooperation with secular leaders at the United Nations and elsewhere — for peace, justice, the eradication of extreme poverty, the protection of the environment, and social harmony.

"Humanity stands at a critical juncture in history, one that calls for strong moral and spiritual leadership to help set a new direction for society," states the preamble of a declaration issued by the Summit. "We, as religious and spiritual leaders recognize our special responsibility for the well-being of the human family and peace on earth."

More specifically, the declaration condemns all violence in the name of religion,

calls for the protection of the environment for future generations, urges religious communities to respect the right to freedom of religion, and recognizes "that men and women are equal partners in all aspects of life..."

A "Galaxy of Leaders"

The Summit was organized by a wide range of interfaith groups, non-governmental organizations, and private foundations, including Ted Turner's UN Foundation / Better World Fund, which gave US\$600,000 to the event. It drew, in the words of former UN Under Secretary General Maurice Strong, a veritable "galaxy of leaders" from all of the world's major religions, including the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism, as well as indigenous religions from nearly every continent.

"This summit of religious and spiritual leaders is without doubt one of the most inspiring gatherings ever held here," said UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, in an address to the Summit. "Whatever your past, whatever your calling, and whatever the differences among you, your presence here at the United Nations signifies your commitment to our global mission of tolerance, development and peace."

Among the leaders in attendance were Francis Cardinal Arinze, President of the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue; Meir Lau, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel; Abdullah al-Obaid, Secretary General of the World Muslim League; Konrad Raiser, Secretary General of the World Council of Churches; Metropolitan Pitrim of the Russian Orthodox Church; Eshin Watanabe, Patriarch of Tendai Buddhism; Hindu spiritual leader Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi; Jain scholar Dr. L.M. Singhvi; Sikh leader Jatehdar Joginder Singh; Firoze Kotwal, High Priest of Zoroastrianism; and Albert Lincoln, Secretary General of the Bahá'í International Community.

In all, some 50 "preeminent leaders," as Summit organizers termed them, were present. Together with hundreds of other delegates and representatives, many came from regions of significant religious conflict, including the Middle East, East Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and Eastern Europe. A good number of the Summit's participants had not been significantly involved in interfaith events previously, ac-

cording to Summit organizers.

"I've gone to many, many global interfaith gatherings, and what is unique about this gathering is many of the leaders are meeting face-to-face for the first time," said Bawa Jain, Secretary General of the Summit. "This is going to have a major domino effect. I think you will see the global interfaith movement really evolving from this Summit."

One goal of the Summit was to develop an "International Advisory Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders" that would offer "support to the United Nations and the United Nations Secretary General in peace-making and peacekeeping efforts." Such an advisory council, it was proposed, would also have counterparts at the regional and national levels.

In an interview six weeks after the Summit, Mr. Jain said that religious leaders had indeed begun forming national level councils in a number of countries, including India, Japan, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

Summit organizers are moving slowly, however, on putting together the proposed international advisory council, according to Mr. Jain. "There was a lot of pressure on me before the Summit to actually declare the formation of the council at the Summit," Mr. Jain said. "I was opposed to that. I think we need to engage in an extensive process. Otherwise people feel they are not consulted with."

Mr. Jain said he will now head up a small steering group to develop a "mission, purpose, criteria and structure," for the creation of an international advisory council. Any proposal would be widely circulated, he said, "to all of

"This summit of religious and spiritual leaders is without doubt one of the most inspiring gatherings ever held here."

– UN Secretary General Kofi Annan

Q'ero elders from Peru say an Inca blessing in the United Nations General Assembly Hall during opening day prayers at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders on 28 August 2000.



Photo courtesy of Beliefnet, by Lyn Hughes

"No individual, group or nation can any longer live as an isolated microcosm in our interdependent world, but rather all must realize that our every action has an impact on others and the emerging global community."

– Declaration of the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders

Sheikh Ahmed Tijani Ben Omar gives the Muslim call to prayer.

the delegates to the Summit and to religious communities for their input."

At the UN, formal engagement with world religions outside of the traditional consultative status offered to religious groups as non-governmental organizations is controversial. Some governments are wary of involvement in policy-making by religious leaders and the United Nations Secretariat has been careful to heed their concerns. Although the August Summit was held at the UN, UN officials and Summit organizers took pains to state that it was not an official UN event, but rather an event organized by non-UN groups which was allowed to take place at the UN.

As well, Mr. Jain was not invited to address the Millennium Summit, which was held a week later. He said several governments had blocked such a presentation.

Mr. Jain said, however, that he received supportive comments from many government delegations during the Millennium Summit and that he intends to proceed with the creation of the international advisory council. Such a council, he said, would be "autonomous and independent," with a focus on being "available as a resource to the UN." "We do not want to replicate the work of any of the other interfaith organizations," he said. "The focus is to help support and strengthen the UN."

While some governments want the UN

to keep its distance from religion, many UN agencies recognize the importance of working with religious organizations.

On the final day of the Summit, a panel of UN officials — including Nitin Desai, Under Secretary General for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Juan Somavia, Director General of the International Labor Organization — was nearly unanimous in acknowledging the spiritual dimension of the UN's work and the need to work more closely with religions.

"The unprecedented depth and breadth of participation at this event, bringing together leaders from nearly every faith and every corner of our world is a tribute to the extraordinary congruence between your shared goals and our own," said UNDP Administrator Brown.

The Declaration

Summit organizers said virtually all of the religious leaders present signed the Summit's main declaration, titled "Commitment to Global Peace," which acknowledges that religious beliefs have sometimes been used to "create divisions and fuel hostilities" but states firmly that "there can be no real peace until all groups and communities acknowledge the cultural and religious diversity of the human family in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding."

"[N]o individual, group or nation can any longer live as an isolated microcosm in our interdependent world, but rather all must realize that our every action has an impact on others and the emerging global community," states the declaration.

The declaration calls on religious leaders to do more to "awaken in all individuals and communities a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family as a whole and a recognition that all human beings regardless of religion, race, gender and ethnic origin have the right to education, health care, and an opportunity to achieve a secure and sustainable livelihood"; to "promote the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations, eradicating poverty and reversing the current trend toward a widening gap between rich and poor"; and to "educate our communities about the urgent need to care for the earth's ecological systems and all forms of life and to support efforts to make environmental protection and restoration integral to all development



Photo courtesy of Bellefret, by Lyn Hughes

For more information on the Millennium World Peace Summit, visit its website at <http://www.millenniumworldpeace.org>

planning and activity.”

A number of smaller meetings among religious leaders dealt with regional issues, such as relations between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East and relations between Christians and Hindus in India. Mr. Jain said those meetings yielded several specific agreements and understandings.

A group of Hindu and Christian leaders, for example, negotiated and signed an “informal working understanding” on “Freedom from Coercion in Religion.” That agreement states that “the free and generous preaching of the Christian Gospel is welcome in India” but also condemns “the use of coercion and religious proselytism,” specifically rejecting “the exploitation of the issue of poverty in religious outreach and missionary work” and stating that “no altruistic work will be a means for conversion.”

Theme of Unity in Diversity

In their speeches, religious leaders stressed many common themes. Perhaps foremost among them was the idea that the world’s religions can work together if they emphasize their essential commonalities while respecting their diversity.

Dr. Lincoln of the Bahá’í Community, for example, called on the gathering to work for a “global community based on unity in diversity.” That could be done, said Dr. Lincoln, by working to identify the “core values that are common to all religious and spiritual traditions.”

Others echoed this call. “The spirit loves diversity,” said Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, a Hindu leader. “The time has come to love each other’s religions as one’s own.”

Rev. Nichiko Niwano, President of Rissho Kosei Kai in Japan, said: “We are members of one family. Our lives are sustained by one great light.”

Even secular leaders who addressed the Summit made similar points. “We are all one race, and there is only one God who manifests himself in different ways,” said Better World Fund’s Ted Turner, also the founder of CNN (Cable News Network), who was the Summit’s honorary chairman. “So maybe what we ought to do – what we have to do now is we have to work together.”

The Summit’s opening day began with several hours of prayers, one aim being to “spiritually prepare” the hall for the Millennium Summit. [See page one.]

“Above and beyond a remarkable maturation in interreligious dialogue, this meet-



Photo courtesy of Beliefnet, by Lyn Hughes

Ted Turner, founder of Cable News Network (CNN), helped underwrite the cost of the religious summit through a \$600,000 donation. He addressed the gathering on its second day, in the UN General Assembly Hall.

ing of spiritual leaders in the Chamber of the United Nations General Assembly, on the eve of the Millennium Summit of the world’s Heads of State and Government, marks an historic and vital step forward in creating the necessary mutual respect and cooperation between religious and political leadership, conditions without which world peace and the prosperity of humankind are probably unattainable,” said Dr. Lincoln of the Bahá’í Community.

“Our disordered world is in desperate need of a moral compass that is above passing fashion and untainted by the pervasive materialism of the modern era,” said Dr. Lincoln. “The convening of this summit suggests that the world has become aware of this need and of the capacity latent in the world’s religious traditions.”

Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of England, said the Summit was historic for its focus on peace among the religions. “We have just completed a millennium in which people too often killed other people in the name of God,” he said.

“In my view this meeting was one in which we crossed a threshold,” said Rabbi Sacks. “We can never again go back to where we were, because the leaders of 70 different faiths have come together in public assembly at the United Nations to commit themselves with their faith communities to an agenda of mutual respect and peace.”

“This is no quick fix,” Rabbi Sacks added. “Hatreds that have been inculcated for centuries are not going to evaporate overnight. But the commitment of religious leaders to religious pluralism here has been a momentous event that will send a signal of hope to the world.”*

“We crossed a threshold. We can never again go back to where we were, because the leaders of 70 different faiths have come together in public assembly at the United Nations to commit themselves with their faith communities to an agenda of mutual respect and peace.”

**– Chief Rabbi
Jonathan Sacks**

Reshaping “God’s holy mountain” to create a vision of peace and beauty for all humanity

Like a precious jewel in its setting, the Shrine of the Báb is the focal point for 19 surrounding garden terraces that climb nearly a kilometer up the side of Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel.



After sacrificially contributing some \$250 million over a decade, the worldwide Bahá’í community is set to open in May 2001 a series of monumental garden terraces that some are calling the “eighth wonder” of the world.

HAIFA, Israel — Many of the visitors who will soon wander the nearly completed gardens and terraces that extend almost a kilometer up the side of Mount Carmel are perhaps unlikely to notice what sort of stones lie at the bottom of the fountains.

But the fact that the color of the stones in a series of cascade pools almost perfectly matches the beige stonework of the surrounding ornaments reflects the enormous attention to detail surrounding the completion of a project that some say is destined to become a much visited wonder of the modern world.

In their shape and size, the stones are almost perfectly ovoid in contour and slightly larger than a human heart — aspects which further harmonize with the style and scheme of the project, a succession of 19 majestic terraces and associated gardens that have virtually reshaped the north slope of

what has been known since ancient times as the “Mountain of the Lord.”

It took some eight months of searching to find the stones, a quest that took place in three countries and ended on a remote beach in Cyprus.

“I wanted stones that had the same color and natural characteristics of the other elements of this project,” said Fariborz Sahba, the architect behind the project. “This is an example of the simple things that make the difference.”

Yet the attention to such details is but one sign of the great importance given to this project by the Bahá’ís of the world, who have sacrificially contributed some US\$250 million to build it over the last decade.

Scheduled to be opened to the world during public ceremonies in May 2001, the terraces and gardens are being offered to the world as a reflection of the Bahá’í standard

of beauty, peace and harmony. Those who have had an advance look say the project will undoubtedly take its place alongside the other great spiritual monuments constructed throughout history.

"You can go on a spiritual journey just looking at the gardens [on Mount Carmel], which are the equivalent of any great icon, great tantra, or any other of the great recognized works of religious art or architecture," said Martin Palmer, the author of several books on comparative religion, the most recent of which is entitled *Sacred Gardens*. "The Bahá'ís have created a vision, literally, of what it means to understand the Bahá'í Faith in both its historic setting and its contemplative spiritual message."

Spiritual and Administrative Center

Collectively known as the Mount Carmel Projects, the effort involves not only the construction of the 19 garden terraces on Mount Carmel — terraces that bracket the Shrine of the Báb, the second-most holy spot in the world for Bahá'ís after the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh — but the completion of two majestic new administrative buildings, which are also set high on the face of the mountainside.

These two buildings, known as the Center for the Study of the Texts and the International Teaching Center, have been built alongside the International Archives building, which houses relics, writings and artifacts associated with the lives of the

Faith's central figures, and the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the headquarters of the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith.

For Bahá'ís, the completion of the Mount Carmel Projects is the realization of a century-long dream to create a spiritual and administrative center, commensurate with the beauty of the Bahá'í teachings, that will fully and fittingly represent the Faith's position as an independent world religion, now the second-most widespread geographically after Christianity.

"Architecture is a language, and these projects carry a message," said Albert Lincoln, Secretary General of the Bahá'í International Community. "As a worldwide community, we believe we are the bearers of a very important message. And these gardens and new buildings offer an enduring testimony to the importance of this message — which, in its most fundamental form, is that God has sent a new Revelation aimed at addressing the problems of the modern age and ushering in an era of peace and justice for all humanity."

Certainly, for the world at large, the completion of the Mount Carmel Projects offers a glimpse of the type of world that Bahá'ís are working for: one that expresses in its harmonious blend of architectural and horticultural styles the principle of unity in diversity, emphasizes in its beauty the precedence of spiritual values over materialism, and, in its open invitation to all, embraces

"Architecture is a language, and these projects carry a message. These gardens and new buildings offer an enduring testimony to the importance of this message — which, in its most fundamental form, is that God has sent a new Revelation aimed at addressing the problems of the modern age and ushering in an age of peace and justice for all humanity."

**– Albert Lincoln,
Secretary General
of the Bahá'í
International
Community**



One of the many fountains that grace the newly completed terraces on Mount Carmel.



The completion of the garden terraces above and below the Shrine of the Báb has reshaped the north face of Mount Carmel, which is sacred to Judaism, Christianity, and the Bahá'í Faith. It has also brought a corridor of striking beauty to the heart of urban Haifa.

all peoples and cultures.

"I think it is really becoming a landmark, not only in Haifa, but also one of the spots in Israel that is a must-see," said Mirko Stefanovic, Yugoslavia's ambassador to Israel, who has visited the Bahá'í World Center many times. "It is something of an oasis in the desert. As everyone knows, the Middle East is a hectic place, full of contrasts and conflict. The Bahá'í gardens are kind of like an island of tranquility and peace."

Ma'ariv, Israel's second-largest newspaper, reports that the project has earned the appellation "the eighth wonder of the world."

The Significance of Mount Carmel

As far back as 1600 BC, Mount Carmel was mentioned as a "holy mountain" in Egyptian records. In the Bible, it is the site of Elijah's confrontation with the worshippers of Baal. It was also sacred to the early Christians and is where the Carmelite Roman Catholic monastic order was founded in 1150.

"Mount Carmel and Elijah have a very important place in both the Christian and Jewish traditions," said Moshe Sharon, a

professor of Middle East Studies who holds the Chair of Bahá'í Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. "Elijah is supposed to come before the Messiah, and there are hundreds of traditions and stories connected with Mount Carmel, which give it a unique place in more than one religious tradition."

For Bahá'ís, the mountain was given supreme significance when Bahá'u'lláh visited it in the early 1890s and revealed an important tablet designating Mount Carmel as the site of the Faith's spiritual and administrative center. [See page 15.]

The development of the Bahá'í World Center, as the complex of buildings, gardens and holy places here is officially known, has proceeded slowly over the last century. Significant events include the construction of the Shrine of the Báb and the interment of the Báb's sacred remains in its mausoleum in 1909; the completion of the golden-domed superstructure of the Shrine in 1953; the erection of the International Archives building in 1957; and the completion of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice in 1983.

With the construction of the gardens and terraces that now surround the Shrine of the

Báb, along with the other administrative buildings on Mount Carmel, Bahá'ís believe a major goal of their Faith has been fulfilled.

"Our scriptures tell us that the very construction of these facilities for housing these institutions will coincide with several other processes in the world," said Douglas Samimi-Moore, director of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information. "One of these processes is the maturation of local and national Bahá'í institutions. The other is the establishment of processes leading to political peace for humanity, and we feel this synchronicity is obvious if you look broadly at the way things are going in the world."

Bahá'ís believe the completion of the terraces and gardens and new administrative buildings on Mount Carmel offers a reflection of the spiritual principles that must be applied to world problems if humanity is to create a truly peaceful world.

"Bahá'ís have gone about building these structures from a spiritual motivation, stemming from an underlying belief in the benefits to the world at large that they think will come from them," said Mr. Samimi-Moore. "They believe these new structures will contribute to the unification of the planet."

Gardens and Terraces

Without doubt, the most striking feature of the new projects is the series of terraces and associated gardens that now run from the foot to the crest of Mount

Carmel, entirely reshaping its countenance. In all, the gardens cover some 200,000 square meters of land. After May 2001, they will be open to people of all religious beliefs, background and nationalities, like other Bahá'í holy places.

Since the 1950s, the golden dome and gleaming white marble superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb, located almost exactly halfway up the north slope of Mount Carmel, has been a familiar landmark in Haifa, Israel's third largest city.

The 19 terraces — one on the same level as the Shrine of the Báb, nine extending above it and nine extending below it — form a grand series of brackets, which accentuate the Shrine's position in the heart of the mountainside.

Architect Sahba compared the new structures to the setting for a precious jewel. "If a diamond is not set properly, its value does not show," said Mr. Sahba. "The terraces provide both physical and spiritual setting for the Shrine. Everything directs your eyes towards the Shrine."

The terraces are designed with a series of stairs running from the base of Mount Carmel almost to its summit. The staircase, made of beige-colored local stone, is flanked by two streams of running water, forming a man-made brook that gently cascades down the mountainside, pausing in shallow pools — containing the ovoid stones mentioned above. Mr. Sahba said he had teams search in Israel, Italy and India, before finding

"Bahá'ís have gone about building these structures from a spiritual motivation, stemming from an underlying belief in the benefits to the world at large that they think will come from them. They believe these new structures will contribute to the unification of the planet."

– Douglas Samimi-Moore, Bahá'í International Community



A photograph, taken in the 1950s and looking up Ben Gurion Avenue towards the Shrine of the Báb, shows how extensively Mount Carmel has changed in recent years.

stones in Cyprus that met his vision for that particular detail.

"It has not been our aim just to build beautiful architecture, or merely beautiful, landscaped gardens," said Mr. Sahba, who also designed the widely recognized lotus shaped Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, India. "There are so many beautiful gardens in the world. The whole aim was to create beautiful, spiritual gardens; gardens that touch the spirit, so that a visitor may pause and think, 'This place is different, there is something special about it.'"

Mr. Sahba said he sought to express a sense of spirit through the interplay of light, water and color. "At night, it is as if waves of light are emanating from the Shrine, which is the center of illumination," Mr. Sahba said. "During the day these movements are created by sunlight filtering through the lines of cypress trees, and reflecting on the curved parallel surfaces of the emerald green lawns.

"Another element is water," he continued. "As you walk down the terraces, water accompanies you. The oasis of water attracts birds, and in harmony with the

song of the birds creates the best camouflage for the noise of the city, gives the space the tranquility that one needs to be separated from the day to day reality of life."

The terraces, which feature decorative stone balustrades, fountains, benches and statues, are intensively cultivated. The gardens on each terrace feature plants and flowers indigenous to Israel.

"If one wants to imagine what the Hanging Gardens of Babylon must have looked like, come to Mount Carmel and you will see something more nearly than anything else on earth to what we understand they were like," said Mr. Palmer, who is also secretary general of the Alliance on Religion and Conservation.

The formality of the design of the gardens merges into the mountain's natural en-

vironment on either side of the central axis defined by the staircase.

"Nature is very ordered near the center of the path — but the further you move away from it, it becomes more wild, more natural," said Mr. Palmer. "So you have this fascinating model of bringing order out of chaos. There is also a sense that the wilderness is a place where you can find God, so as you move away from the center, you find larger trees and bushes and you can lose yourself spiritually."

Many of the terraces are cut into the mountainside in such a way that, when one is standing on one, the other terraces — as well as the buildings on either side — cannot be seen. For the most part, the only visible reference points are the sky, the blue waters of the Bay of Haifa below, the surrounding gardens, and the Shrine itself.

"It is an amazing use of perspective," said Mr. Palmer. "Everything else is cut out. You don't see the streets above or below. You are in a sense caught up in the seventh heaven. It is as though you have left earth and been transported to paradise."

Mr. Palmer also noted that the gentle sound of the water gurgling down the two sides of the central staircase drowns out the sounds of the outside world.

"For me, this is symbolic," said Mr. Palmer, who is a Christian. "To quote from my Scriptures: you need to hear the 'still small quiet voice' of God, which is what Elijah himself heard on Mount Carmel. And with the trickling water, gently drowning out the urban hubbub all around, hearing that voice becomes possible."

For Bahá'ís, the whole design is evocative and symbolic.

"When you ascend the terraces from the bottom, the Shrine of the Báb, which is your goal, is always visible, right in your line of sight, at the center of your devotion," said Lasse Thoresen, a renowned Norwegian composer who has spent much time in the gardens as part of a commission to write a symphony for the opening ceremonies. "This is a beautiful kind of contemplative feature."

"At the same time, for me, the waters coming down from the top of the mountain symbolize the living water that is the grace of God, that is God's vitalizing energy, spoken of in the Bahá'í writings and in the Bible and other scriptures, that descend from Heaven," said Dr. Thoresen.

Suheil Bushrui, who has visited Haifa off



Architect Fariborz Sahba, who designed the terraces and gardens, examines one of the terrace fountains containing the hard-sought ovoid stones.

and on since his childhood and who currently holds the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland, USA, said he believes the gardens and terraces offer a new model for sustainable development.

"These projects on Mount Carmel provide an example of man's shaping of the physical environment in accord with a religious teaching that emphasizes the importance of the natural world and upholds the value of beauty and the virtue of excellence," said Prof. Bushrui. "They show a glimmer of the extent to which material and spiritual elements can complement each other, to the mutual benefit of each, and with favorable consequences for the environment."

New Administrative Buildings

While the terraces are without doubt the most visible feature of the new developments on Mount Carmel, the completion of two new nearby administrative buildings are for Bahá'ís of equal significance, inasmuch as they signalize the formal emergence of two important institutions designed to assist the Universal House of Justice in providing guidance and governance for the rapidly growing worldwide Bahá'í community.

Together with the Seat of the Universal House of Justice and the International Archives building, the International Teaching Center and the Center for the Study of the Texts form an arc on the face of the mountainside. As one faces the

mountain, that arc sits slightly to the left of the axis defined by the central stairway of the terraces.

The Center for the Study of the Texts building will house an institution of scholars, whose role is to study the Bahá'í sacred writings. "The Bahá'í writings are extensive, encompassing more than 100,000 documents," said Mr. Samimi-Moore. "The Center stands to serve the needs of the Universal House of Justice by researching the sacred writings, historical documents and other related materials. It will also translate texts, prepare compilations, and draft commentaries as required."

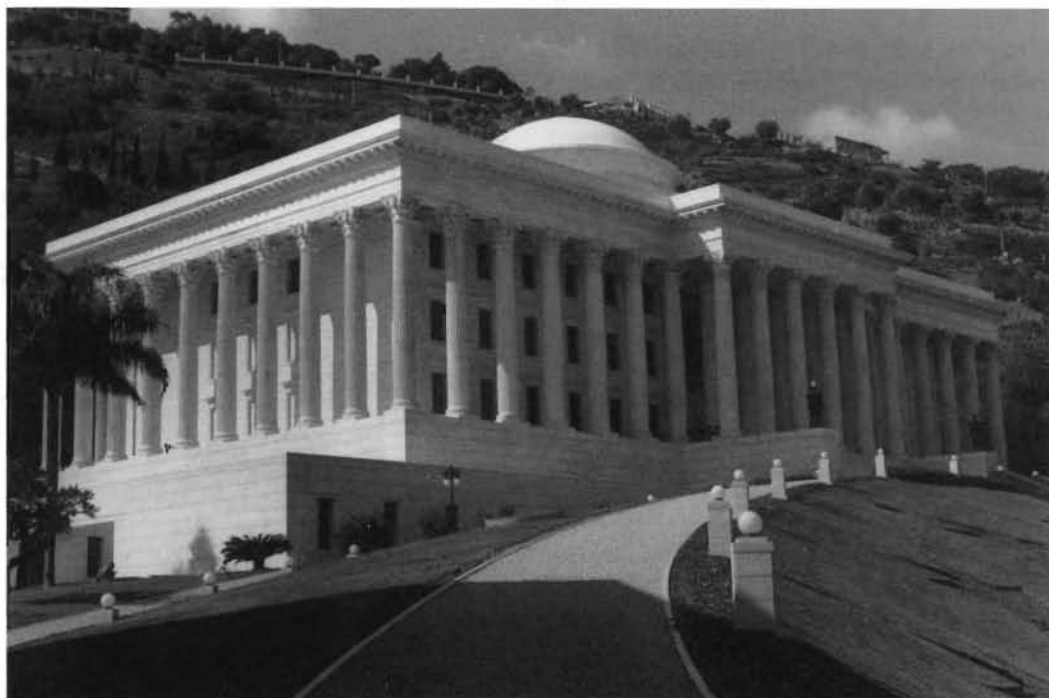
The International Teaching Center building will house a body of appointed individu-

Above, the Center for the Study of the Texts is set into the side of Mount Carmel, designed to appear like a garden pavilion.



The International Teaching Center also looks out over the Bahá'í gardens on Mount Carmel, and faces the Shrine of the Báb, which sits slightly below and several hundred meters to the west on the mountainside.

The Seat of the Universal House of Justice. Completed in 1983, this building houses the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. The recently completed International Teaching Center building sits slightly below this building on the left and the Center for the Study of the Texts sits slightly below on the right.



"I saw how nicely the classic style fits into this surrounding of serene gardens... we Bahá'ís think beauty is an important factor in design, because beauty is so important to the human soul."

– Hossein Amanat, Architect

als who function collectively to assist the Universal House of Justice and also to provide guidance to the worldwide Bahá'í community through a network of fellow "Counselors" who reside around the world. "They promote the ideas of the Faith, which include unity and education," said architect Hossein Amanat, who designed the two new buildings, as well as the Seat of the Universal House of Justice.

Like the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the two new buildings were designed in a classic Greek style that harmonizes with the design chosen roughly 50 years ago for the International Archives building.

"Originally, I thought there might be a kind of contemporary style which could fit into the environment there," said Mr. Amanat, who started designing the Seat of the Universal House of Justice in 1972 at age 30 after winning a design competition for a major monument and associated complex in his native Iran. He noted, however, that Shoghi Effendi, who headed the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to 1957, had chosen classic Greek style because it had proved enduringly beautiful through the ages.

"I saw how nicely the classic style fits into this surrounding of serene gardens," continued Mr. Amanat. "The reason is this: in our modern life, we are rushing everywhere. And there is no time for looking at the details of a classic building. But the classic style is meant for a society that is more relaxed, that is taking time to meditate and pray. Modern buildings evolved after the

industrial revolution, which is when the material life took over from the spiritual. But we Bahá'ís think beauty is an important factor in design, because beauty is so important to the human soul."

Although both of the new buildings rise some three stories above ground level, much of their structure is tucked into the mountain slope. "The idea is that the buildings are pavilions adorning this garden," said Mr. Amanat. "They should not impose on it."

The total floor area of the two new buildings combined is some 35,000 square meters, reflecting their importance as administrative centers for the more than five million Bahá'ís around the world.

"Essentially, the people who will work in these buildings have the goal of serving a growing worldwide community," said Mr. Samimi-Moore.

The funds for the completion of the two new buildings, the terraces and all of the other structures on Mount Carmel came entirely from members of the Bahá'í Faith.

"No money has come from outside," said Secretary General Lincoln. "And we are not a community that is rich. The funds for these projects have come from donations by thousands upon thousands of individuals, who have given sacrificially over many years.

"Three-quarters of the worldwide Bahá'í population resides in the third world," added Dr. Lincoln. "It is not unusual to visit a mud hut in an African village and find a photograph of this project on the wall, along with a receipt for some small contribution."*

The Bahá'í Faith and its connection to Israel

Founded in Iran, the Bahá'í Faith today has its spiritual and administrative center in Israel because of historic forces that led to the exile of its Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, to the city of Acre, located across the bay from Haifa.

After a series of banishments from His native Iran, Bahá'u'lláh, along with His family and a small group of followers, was sent in 1868 to Acre, then a bleak penal colony under Ottoman rule.

Although prisoners, the Bahá'ís eventually came to be regarded as a respected religious community in Acre. Over time, Bahá'u'lláh was granted limited freedom and, during a visit to Haifa in 1891, He designated Mount Carmel as the site for the world headquarters of His Faith. Bahá'u'lláh also directed that the remains of the Báb, the Faith's Herald and a Prophet in His own right, be buried on Mount Carmel.

With Bahá'u'lláh's passing and burial in the vicinity of Acre in 1892, the location of the spiritual center of the Bahá'í Faith was likewise fixed. Bahá'u'lláh's burial place at Bahjí, north of Haifa near the city of Acre, is the holiest place on earth for Bahá'ís.

In 1909, the Báb's remains were interred in a stone mausoleum on the side of Mount Carmel. In 1953, the golden-domed, white marble superstructure was erected over the mausoleum, completing the Shrine that is the second holiest place for Bahá'ís.

Over the years, Bahá'ís have built a series of gardens, encompassing other holy monuments, as well as other administrative buildings in the Haifa/Acre area. All are funded entirely by contributions from the worldwide Bahá'í community.

Today, more than 800 Bahá'ís serve as volunteers at the Bahá'í World Center. They come from all over the world, serving for specified periods of time, and are engaged solely in the care of the Bahá'í Holy places and the internal administration of the Bahá'í world community.

The city of Haifa and the government of Israel have welcomed the Bahá'í presence and the new construction. The Mayor of Haifa, Amram Mitzna, recently wrote that the nearly completed Gardens and Terraces for the Shrine of the Báb offer "unforgettably stunning panorama" for the "appreciation of all beauty lovers."*



The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, located north of Haifa near the city of Acre, is the holiest place on earth for Bahá'ís.

At the Millennium Summit, world leaders uphold UN as key to peace

The United Nations building, lit up to say "Thank You NY," after the Millennium Summit, held there 6-8 September 2000. Between motorcades and security concerns, traffic was snarled for days in the United States' largest city, prompting the thank you sign.



UN Photo by Eskinder Debebe

Summit, continued from page one

oneness, speaking of the world as a global village, of humanity as a single family, and of the importance of global solidarity.

"In earlier times, philosophers, poets and other visionaries recognized the existence of one human family," said Prime Minister P. J. Patterson of Jamaica. "It is a concept which our people have grown increasingly to accept. Photographs from space, showing a single Earth suspended in space, have served dramatically to confirm the sense of one borderless world, giving a powerful stimulus to the spread of this perception of human unity and global oneness. Acknowledgment of this reality must be the starting point of this Assembly as we mark the start of a new Millennium."

Other themes of the Summit included the moral imperative and necessity of ending extreme poverty; the importance of understanding that globalization is more than an economic phenomenon, that it has both positive and negative impacts, and that it must be justly and democratically regulated in order to benefit all; the importance of giving special attention to the development needs of Africa; the imperative to take action on climate change and the dire consequences of sea-level rise resulting from in-

action; the need to reform the Security Council as well as the international financial and trade system; and the importance of involving civil society and the private sector in development efforts.

Many leaders called for debt relief, stressed the importance of combating HIV/AIDS, and upheld the imperative of achieving equality between the sexes. As well, a number of speakers were forthright in acknowledging problems that their countries face, from corruption and the effects of civil war, to the challenges of building democratic societies since the collapse of Communism.

Without doubt, however, the overriding theme of the Summit was the importance of the United Nations.

"The clear message of the Summit has been that the world and its people need the United Nations," said Tarja Halonen, the President of Finland and one of the Summit's two co-chairs, in closing comments. "At the same time it is clear that we need to strengthen it and make it meet the needs of people in the outside world."

Largest Summit Ever

The theme of the Summit was "The Role of the United Nations in the Twenty-First Century." Of the 189 UN member states, 187 took part. Other official delegations to the

The full text of the UN Millennium Declaration can be read at <http://www.un.org/millennium/index.html>

Summit included Switzerland and the Holy See in their status as UN observer states, the Palestinian Authority, several intergovernmental organizations such as the European Commission and the League of Arab States, and representatives of three non-governmental organizations. [See following page.]

Altogether, there were nearly 200 delegations, represented by 99 heads of state, 47 heads of government, three crown princes, five vice presidents, and various deputy prime ministers, foreign ministers and ambassadors. More than 5,000 members of the press and 60 NGOs were given passes to enter the UN building during the Summit, for which security was extremely tight.

During the Summit, leaders signed, ratified or acceded to some 40 international treaties and, in a special session of the Security Council, pledged to strengthen peace-making and peacekeeping efforts at all levels, from conflict prevention to post-conflict peace-building, promising also to give "special attention" to Africa.

The Summit also featured four roundtable discussions — a new format for UN summitry, designed to allow world leaders in gatherings of 30 to 50 to exchange views freely. Although the discussions were closed to observers, their chairmen hailed them as a distinctive new adjunct for global consultations, a change from the stock exchange of prepared speeches in plenary sessions.

"The real accomplishment of the Summit was the broad reaffirmation of and re-dedication to the processes of peace that are already well established," said Lawrence Arturo, a Bahá'í International Community representative to the UN. "While little new ground was broken conceptually, legally or institutionally, the coming together of the world's leaders to affirm their vision of a peaceful, prosperous and united world and to renew their commitment to the UN and its work will undoubtedly accelerate the pace of peace."

Globalization the key challenge

In speeches and in the main Declaration, much was made of the impact of globalization. "We believe that the central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's people," leaders said in the Declaration. "For while globalization offers great opportunities, at present its benefits are very unevenly shared, while its costs are unevenly distrib-

uted. We recognize that developing countries and countries with economies in transition face special difficulties in responding to this central challenge.

"Thus, only through broad and sustained efforts to create a shared future, based upon our common humanity in all its diversity, can globalization be made fully inclusive and equitable. These efforts must include policies and measures, at the global level, which correspond to the needs of developing countries and economies in transition and are formulated and implemented with their effective participation," the Declaration said.

In speeches, leaders echoed this sentiment, stressing the singular role of the UN.

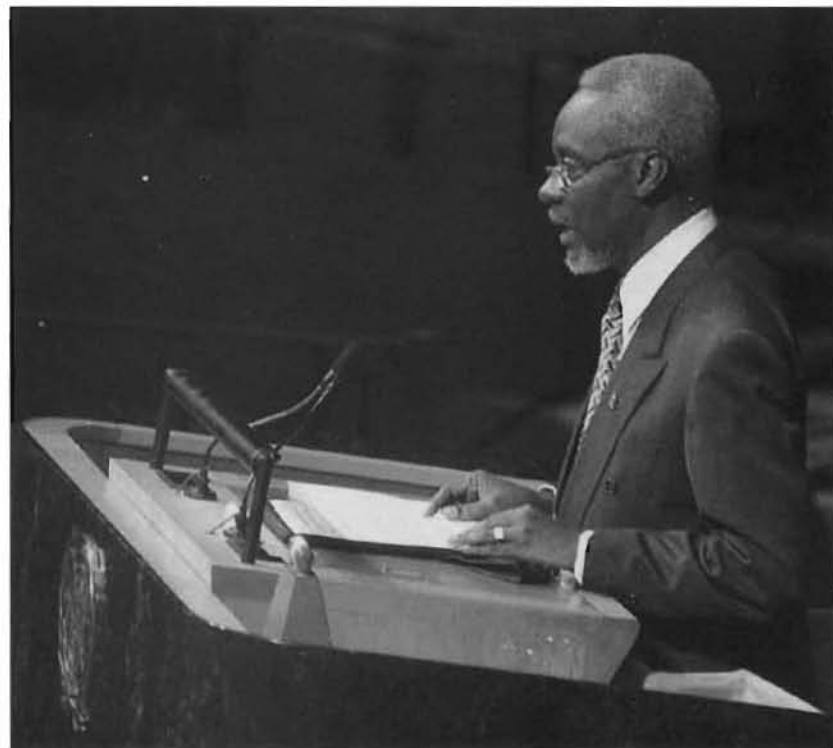
"It has become more evident that along with greater opportunities globalization has created situations of heightened vulnerability and all the more so for the weak and poor nations, thus leading to their further marginalization," said Natsagiin Bagabandi, the President of Mongolia. "The question is how to manage the inevitable process of globalization, so that it incorporates the human dimension in its seemingly unruly trends. Mongolia believes that with its impartiality and universal legitimacy as well as its Charter-based prevalence over any other international agreement, the United Nations is uniquely placed to provide an overarching general guidance to the process of globalization so that its benefits could be

Summit, continued on page 19

"The clear message of the Summit has been that the world and its people need the United Nations."

**– Tarja Halonen,
President of Finland**

Below: P. J. Patterson, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, addresses the Millennium Summit.



UN Photo

Role of NGOs upheld at the Millennium Summit

UNITED NATIONS — Although security concerns meant limited access for representatives of non-governmental organizations at the Millennium Summit, their role in world affairs was not forgotten.

In their speeches and in the Millennium Declaration, world leaders recognized the importance of partnership with civil society in meeting global challenges.

"The work of civil society is important to us, and to the United Nations," said Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh. "The strength of the partnership we forge with them will enable us to realize our objectives."

In the Declaration, world leaders resolved to "give greater opportunities to the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society, in general, to contribute to the realization of the Organization's goals and programs." They also resolved to "develop strong partnerships with the private sector and with civil society organizations in pursuit of development and poverty eradication."

Representatives of civil society were among the few individuals who were not heads of state or government that were allowed to address the Summit. Specifically, representatives of two NGOs with observer status — the In-

ternational Committee of the Red Cross and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta — spoke to the Summit.

Addressing the Summit on behalf of civil society at large, and representing a wide range of issues and organizations, was Techeste Ahderom, in his role as the co-chair of the Millennium Forum, a civil society gathering held at the United Nations in May as a parallel NGO conference to the Summit.

In his remarks, Mr. Ahderom reminded world leaders of the significant role that worldwide civil society has had in shaping global institutions and global policy and he reported on the outcome of the Forum, which brought together some 1,350 representatives of NGOs for five days and addressed six themes: peace, poverty eradication, human rights, sustainable development, globalization and "strengthening and democratizing the United Nations."

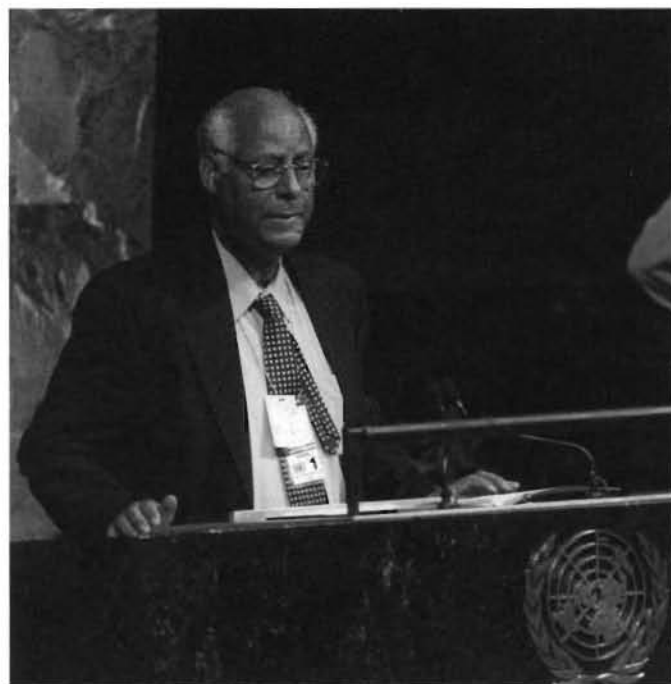
"This historic Summit may well be remembered as having opened the door to a long-awaited era of peace, justice and prosperity for all humanity," said Mr. Ahderom, who is the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations. "This new era will, of course, require concrete deeds and not just words. We in civil society stand ready to work with you and your governments, side by side, in a strong new partnership to create this new world."

Mr. Ahderom asked Summit leaders to carefully review the Millennium Forum Declaration and Agenda for Action, a document that was drafted and adopted at the Forum last May by NGOs and civil society organizations from more than 100 countries. The full Declaration can be read at <http://www.millenniumforum.org>

The Forum's Declaration, he said, "offers a bold vision for humanity's future and outlines a series of concrete steps that the United Nations, governments, and members of civil society themselves can take to address the global problems facing humanity today."

Mr. Ahderom emphasized the important role civil society has played in promoting positive social change. "Throughout history, from the abolition of slavery to the recognition of the equality of women and men, most great social movements have begun not with governments but with ordinary people," Mr. Ahderom said. "In 1945, civil society again played an important role in shaping many of the key articles found in the Charter of the United Nations, especially in the area of human rights."

"More recently," Mr. Ahderom said, "NGOs have played a leading role in shaping and supporting an International Criminal Court, in the movement for debt cancellation, and in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines."*



UN Photo

Techeste Ahderom, co-chair of the Millennium Forum, representing a diversity of NGOs from around the world, addresses the Millennium Summit. He is also the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations.

Millennium Summit

Summit, continued from page 17

enjoyed by all, especially by the small states.”

Support for UN Reform

The Declaration pledged to make the United Nations “a more effective instrument” but offered few specifics, other than to “re-affirm the central position of the General Assembly as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations,” to urge wider cooperation among all agencies within the UN system, and to promise to “intensify our efforts to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects.”

Many speeches went farther. “We must reform the Security Council to make it more representative, effective and legitimate,” said Marco Maciel, Vice President of the Federative Republic of Brazil. “No longer can we tolerate anachronistic decision-making structures that are not only selective but fail to reflect the dynamics of worldwide transformations in the last few decades.”

Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, called for the United Nations to become a “platform of joint, solidarity based, decision-making – by the whole of humankind – on how best to organize our stay on this planet.”

President Havel called for the creation of a second UN assembly, “consisting of a group elected directly by the globe’s population in which the number of delegates representing individual nations would, thus, roughly correspond to the size of the nations.” With the General Assembly, he said, it could “create and guarantee global legislation.”

Common Values

Even if agreements on specific new structures for the United Nations were not reached, there was concurrence on six “fundamental values” for governance in the new century: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility.

The significance of each value is summarized in a short paragraph, but in their totality they suggest a new vision of collective responsibility by all for all.

“Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of

violence, oppression or injustice,” reads the paragraph on Freedom. “Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights.”

“No individual and no nation must be denied the opportunity to benefit from development,” reads the paragraph on Equality. “The equal rights and opportunities of women and men must be assured.”*

Review: A New Mind

Review, continued from back page

sponsive and respected channel for systematic planning, encouragement, and guidance while at the same time allowing the full freedom of individual initiative that lies at the heart of social transformation.

In the book’s final section, Mr. Lample describes the role of the community in building a new civilization.

“The Bahá’í teachings do not envision society in terms of a mere set of interactions among individuals and institutions,” he writes. “Another entity, subtle in its constitution, plays an important role... This entity is the community, which... is more than the sum of its component parts.”

He continues, the “various elements of the community work together in an organic whole in a manner comparable to the functioning of the human body.”

Ideally, he writes, organic communities in this mode should be unified in thought and action, be built around concepts of devotion and service, provide fellowship and support for individuals, and seek to manifest excellence and distinction.

“The conscious effort of individuals and institutions to develop within the Bahá’í community the characteristics of organic life make it a rich environment that cultivates appropriate relationships, creates opportunities for fellowship and worship, guides individuals and families in the practice of Bahá’í ideals, and addresses social and material problems,” Mr. Lample writes. “Such efforts expand and consolidate the community and channel the forces of collective transformation that will yield, in due course, the fruits of a new civilization.”

Although Mr. Lample’s book is clearly written for an audience familiar with the Bahá’í teachings and institutions, its message has deep relevance for anyone concerned with personal and social transformation.*

“The Bahá’í teachings do not envision society in terms of a mere set of interactions among individuals and institutions. Another entity, subtle in its constitution, plays an important role... This entity is the community, which... is more than the sum of its component parts.”

Community – more than the sum of its parts

Creating a New Mind: Reflections on the Individual, the Institutions and the Community

By Paul Lample

Palabra Publications

Riviera Beach, Florida, USA

The idea that we can transform the outer world by first changing our inner consciousness is a recurrent theme in many of the world's religious and spiritual traditions.

In *Creating a New Mind*, Paul Lample brings a fresh approach to this idea by considering what the Bahá'í sacred writings say about individual and collective transformation.

In the process, Mr. Lample undertakes a detailed consideration as to how the principles, teachings and administrative structures of the Bahá'í Faith could help create a new global civilization not only through the instrumentality of personal change but also through new institutions and principles that are capable of bringing fundamental change to communities as a whole.

"Human reality is bounded by the limits set in the mind," Mr. Lample writes. "Change in mind becomes change in deed and change in the world."

Mr. Lample, an educator who currently serves at the Bahá'í World Centre as director of the Faith's international-level Office of Social and Economic Development, begins with an analysis of the specific virtues or capabilities that the Bahá'í teachings prescribe for individuals who wish to surmount the obstacles that contemporary society places in the path of change. These virtues include humility, the desire to acquire knowledge, the responsibility to champion justice, selfless giving, and purity of motive.

Passages from the Bahá'í writings on each virtue are offered, and Mr. Lample's analysis shows how each plays an important role in overall social transformation.

For example, he finds the virtue of humility largely ignored in today's society, writing that the "desire to advance oneself over others as a motivating force in one's life is a defect of human character that, unfortunately, is being promoted by certain social theories as a praiseworthy trait. Aggression and unbridled competition are considered inherent in the human condition."

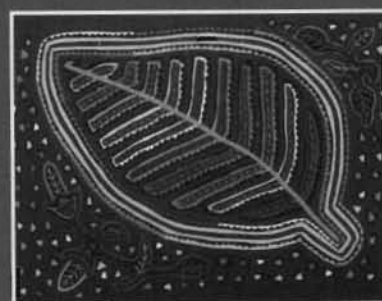
Mr. Lample believes that is a wrong view and suggests that a remedy can be found in the divine teachings, through which "the urge

to indulge the self through dominance over others is subdued by spiritual competition to serve the well-being of all."

But it is in Mr. Lample's exploration of how the processes of transformation are aided by new administrative institutions and features of community life, unique to the Bahá'í Faith, that new ground is broken.

He begins by briefly outlining the distinctive manner in which Bahá'í local, national and international bodies are elected and the distinguishing features of their deliberative process. With no clergy — nor any nominations or campaigning — the Bahá'í system, he writes, "marks a revolutionary departure from previous religious practice."

Creating A New Mind



Reflections on the Individual the Institutions & the Community

Paul Lample

"The freedom of individuals and the authority of institutions are simultaneously upheld," he writes, "while disunifying elements of authority, unbounded individualism, partisanship, and electioneering are muted or suppressed."

These features and others, he writes, enable Bahá'í institutions to provide a re-

Review, continued on page 19