



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

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Newsletter of the Bahá'í
International Community
April-June 2000
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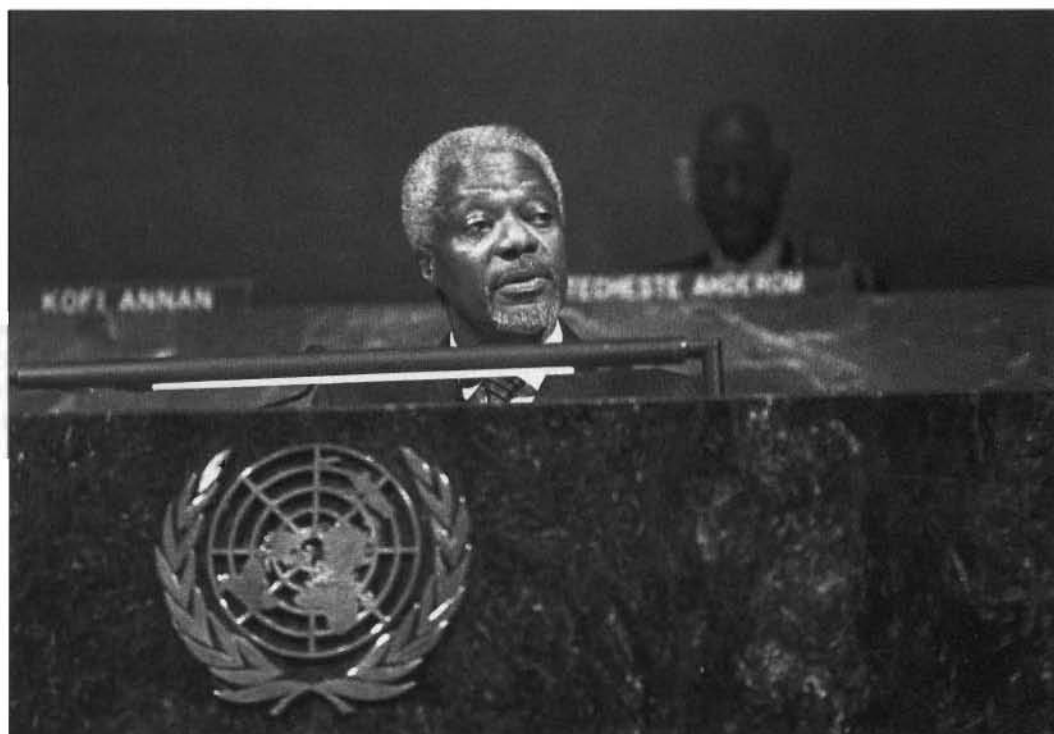


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UN Secretary General Kofi Annan addresses the opening session of the Millennium Forum.

UNITED NATIONS — Representatives of more than 1,000 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from more than 100 countries gathered here for five days in May to formulate a collective vision for the new century, focusing specifically on the role of the United Nations and civil society in the issue areas of peace, poverty eradication, human rights, the environment, globalization and the revitalization of the United Nations.

Organized by NGOs and convened as the Millennium Forum, the gathering drafted and adopted a strongly worded declaration outlining such a vision — and suggesting a series of concrete, practical steps that governments, the UN and civil society can take to achieve it.

"Our vision is of a world that is human-centered and genuinely democratic, where all human beings are full participants and determine their own destinies," states the We the Peoples Millennium Forum Declaration and Agenda for Action, which was adopted by the Forum on 26 May 2000. "In our vision 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, men and women, young and old, regardless of race, faith, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity or nationality."

The Declaration will be presented to world leaders gathered at the Millennium Summit

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

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ISSN 1018-9300

Printed on recycled paper ♻️

Linking Rights with Development

The trend toward the cross-linking of issue areas and policy agendas is increasingly accepted and necessary in today's interdependent world as leaders search for creative solutions to complex global problems.

Among the most potentially fruitful of such cross-connections is the convergence of human rights and development.

Historically, the human rights and development agendas have often followed divergent paths of analysis and action. Yet over the last decade, the global action plans emerging from the UN global conferences spanning from Rio to Istanbul have established basic links between the two areas. Recently the World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as influential thinkers such as Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen, have all sought to strengthen the connection.

This year's *Human Development Report* takes the connection further, bridging an important conceptual gap between the human rights and human development agendas, clarifying and codifying the linkage.

Both agendas, the report argues, are concerned with safeguarding fundamental freedoms and promoting human well-being.

"The basic idea of human development — that enriching the lives and freedoms of ordinary people is fundamental — has much in common with the concerns expressed by declarations of human rights," *Human Development Report 2000* states. "A more integrated approach can thus bring significant rewards, and facilitate in practical ways the shared attempts to advance the dignity, well-being and freedom of individuals in general."

The report outlines a potentially powerful recipe for fostering positive social change. It suggests that social development must increasingly be regarded as a process of "enhancing human capabilities" and expanding opportunities, while human rights are seen as giving rise to the idea that various social actors have duties to ensure that individuals and communities are indeed able to develop and exercise such capabilities and opportunities. A "rights-based" approach to development is proposed to bring together the methods and insights of these two dif-

ferent agendas in mutually reinforcing ways.

As the *Report* points out, a human rights perspective on questions relating to social progress can ensure that a full spectrum of human entitlements — political, civil, social, cultural, economic, educational, nutritional and medical — become integral to development planning and activity. A human rights focus also directly incorporates notions of family, community, corporate, media and institutional accountability and responsibility in the pursuit of development goals. In this way, the mechanisms and instruments of the international human rights regime can be enlisted to advance development priorities.

Within a human rights context, development gains are more likely to be equitable in their impact and not accentuate patterns of social exclusion or discrimination. Moreover, this concern with justice emphasizes the process as well as the outcomes of development. Such an orientation is vital if new forms of participation and action are to emerge at all levels of society.

The development field, in turn, has much to contribute to the universal recognition and achievement of human rights. Use of the qualitative and quantitative tools of development can provide an analytical framework for understanding both the resources and constraints that affect the implementation of rights. By taking account of evolving social and economic conditions, policy makers can clarify the most effective pathways toward attaining the full constellation of rights in any particular country.

Yet, however admirable its attempt to link the human rights and development discourses, the *Report* barely touches upon a fundamental question that lies at the heart of the social transformation that it envisions. While acknowledging that a focus on human rights brings a moral dimension to the development arena, the *Report* fails to explore how the spiritual and moral roots of human motivation can be tapped to secure human rights and achieve development.

Bahá'ís see the entire enterprise of civilization as a spiritual process involving the progressive awakening of humanity's

moral and creative capacities. While the recognition of human rights and new approaches to development are central to social advancement, Bahá'ís believe that meaningful social transformation cannot occur without touching those moral and spiritual forces that lie at the heart of human consciousness and purpose.

Indeed, without a focus on moral development — often ignored by thinkers and activists — the noble objectives of social justice and prosperity promised by the human rights and development agendas will never be fully realized.

This is so because the establishment of peaceful and progressive modes of living requires a reordering of the norms and social arrangements created by society's members. Such a reordering occurs only when people's inner lives are transformed. The creation of communities based on fairness, cooperation, reciprocity and genuine concern for others is ultimately a matter of the heart; it involves a change in basic attitudes and values that comes only through recognition of the essential moral and spiritual nature of the challenges that confront us.

Even those who may not be religious can recognize the innate dignity of human beings — that each human being is born into the world as a trust of the whole. This recognition of each person's inherent dignity is not sufficient to bring about conditions of equity, harmony, and freedom, however; genuine social progress can only flow from spiritual awareness and the inculcation of virtue. Thus the need for moral education programs that cultivate the qualities of nobility, goodness, and beauty that animate human nature.

Further, Bahá'ís believe, moral education is not only about shaping values and attitudes, but also about imparting skills and methods to foster constructive patterns of human interaction. Building up the moral fabric of collective life involves the development of a wide range of capacities. Among these are learning how to use methods of decision-making that are open, non-adversarial and inclusive; how to achieve unity of purpose and action among all members of a community; how to replace relationships based on dominance and competition with relationships based on respect, collaboration, and service to others; how to imbue social interchange with an acute sense of justice; and how to instill rectitude in private and public administration.



In Costa Rica, the country's President, Dr. Miguel Rodriguez, center, met with members of the Bahá'í community, Nidia Marin (left) and Mary Keillor (right), during a function held to discuss "An Agenda for Children and Adolescents: A Joint Project of the Government and Civil Society." The event took place at the President's headquarters on 24 December 1999.

The fact that the world community is pluralist in character should not deter governments and international agencies from giving serious attention to the question of moral development. For too long, certain deeply entrenched prejudices, falsely posing as values, have obstructed human freedoms and blighted social progress. The discriminatory treatment of women is a prime example. Today, at a moment when an interdependent world is taking form, all its inhabitants, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities."

In a very real sense the international human rights regime is the fruit of an ongoing process of moral dialogue among diverse nations and peoples. This cross-cultural undertaking has gradually given rise to a new ethos of human solidarity and collective responsibility. A "rights-based" approach to development is one of its latest manifestations.

But clearly the cooperative search for justice cannot stop here. The conceptual and practical integration of the rights and development agendas suggests something much more profound: the emergence of a true "civilization of character" in which the freedoms and innate capacity of every human being can at last be realized. *

The international human rights regime is the fruit of an ongoing process of moral dialogue among diverse nations and peoples. This cross-cultural undertaking has gradually given rise to a new ethos of human solidarity and collective responsibility. A "rights-based" approach to development is one of its latest manifestations.

Governments uphold fundamental rights of women at Beijing Plus Five

UNITED NATIONS — Despite concern by some women's groups that governments might pull back from commitments made at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, delegates from more than 180 nations upheld the fundamental importance of full rights for women worldwide at a Special Session of the UN General Assembly here in June.

Governments at the Special Session, which ran 5–10 June 2000 and was entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century," also made additional commitments to address issues which have gained significance in the past five years, such as women's health and violence against women.

"There was no backward movement on any of the Beijing language and commitments," said UN General Assembly President Theo Ben-Gurirab of Namibia, referring to the ground-breaking Platform for Action, an international agenda for women's empowerment that was adopted at the 1995 Conference, held in Beijing. "That Platform, with its numerous proposals for action, remains fully valid for national and international actions."

Amb. Ben-Gurirab and others said that in many ways the text negotiated and adopted by the Session updates the Platform, further strengthening the international community's commitments in the areas of violence against women; trafficking in women; health, including the right to sexual and reproductive health; education; human rights; poverty, debt relief and globalization; armed conflict; sovereignty; land and inheritance rights for women; and political participation and decision-making.

Nevertheless, some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) expressed disappointment, saying they had hoped governments would go farther in setting specific goals for promoting women's advancement.

"While there have been positive aspects to this review process, we want to register our disappointment," said a statement of

the Linkage Caucus, a coalition of NGOs focused on women's issues. "We regret that there was not enough political will on the part of some governments and the UN system to agree on a stronger document with more concrete benchmarks, numerical goals, time-bound targets, indicators, and resources aimed at implementing the Beijing Platform."

The goal of the Special Session, also known as "Beijing Plus Five," was to undertake a review of how well the Platform for Action has been implemented since its adoption five years ago. The Platform, unanimously adopted in Beijing by 189 countries, identified 12 critical areas for action: poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, the media, the environment and the girl child. Designed as an agenda for women's empowerment, the Platform's emphasis was not only on achieving equality and eliminating discrimination, but on the integration of women as full and equal partners in all policies and decision-making processes.

More than 2,000 representatives of NGOs attended the June Session, and thousands more participated in NGO-sponsored activities off-site at the Women 2000 forum. These activities included panel discussions, workshops and symposia on issues ranging from the girl child to economic empowerment for women.

Before the Session, governments, UN agencies and NGOs released a number of studies and reports indicating that although much progress has been made by women around the world since 1995, many goals have not been achieved, and in some cases the status of women has deteriorated.

For example, a report issued during the Session by UNIFEM (the United Nations Development Fund for Women) concluded that during the last decade only eight nations have successfully met global agreements to achieve both gender equality in secondary education

"There was no backward movement on any of the Beijing language and commitments. That Platform, with its numerous proposals for action, remains fully valid for national and international actions."
– UN General Assembly President Theo Ben-Gurirab

enrollment and at least a 30 per cent share of women's seats in parliament.

NGOs themselves issued more than 100 "alternative reports," which chronicled the views of NGOs around the world. The alternative report on women in Africa, for example, said that "Women continue to constitute the majority of the poor, lacking access to resources such as land, capital, technology, water and adequate and nutritious food. Global trade negotiations are reinforcing the marginalization of Africa, particularly in the area of property rights, patenting of resources and knowledge."

Many government delegates admitted that they had not achieved everything promised in Beijing. "While progress has been recorded in certain areas, there have been difficulties in others," said Hajia Aisha M.S. Ismail, Nigeria's Minister for Women's Affairs and Youth Development, explaining that the burden of debt and the impact of globalization on the weak economies and institutional structures of developing countries had made it difficult for them to fulfill commitments that require more services for women.

Although most of the negotiations on the document took place in closed session, it was widely reported that some countries, influenced by fundamentalist religious groups and/or the Vatican, sought to reduce the scope of rights granted to women by the Platform for Action, especially in areas relating to reproductive health.

In the end, however, government delegates agreed that governments have a "duty" to "promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms" no matter what a country's "political, economic or cultural" system may be.

"The full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women is essential for the empowerment of women," states the Session's final text, known as the "outcome document." "While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Those areas of the document that go beyond the Platform for Action deal, in general, with issues that have gained significance in the last five years. The provisions related to women and health, for example, put strong



UN/DPI Photo by Evan Schneider

emphasis on the gender aspects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, sexually transmitted infections, malaria and tuberculosis, pointing out their disproportionate impact on women's and girls' health and calling for new policies and measures to address these challenges.

The outcome document also expands the discussion on violence against women, specifically encouraging governments to take steps against "all forms of domestic violence, including marital rape" and to develop measures "to eradicate harmful customary or traditional practices including female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage, and so-called honor crimes that are violations of the human rights of women and girls..."

"This is significant in that it is a step into the 'private' realm," said Amanda Sullivan of Equality Now, an international NGO that fights violence and discrimination against women, explaining that honor crimes include those when a female family member is harmed or murdered for alleged "immoral" behavior. "Many countries have laws or judicial decisions on the record that exempt marital rape from criminal prosecution. So it is really remarkable that we were able to get this language in."

The document makes repeated mention of the important role of NGOs. "The advances that have been made for women internationally since the beginning have largely come at the behest of NGOs," said Bani Dugal Gujral, director of the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women. "At this conference, we could see that the numbers and networking of women's NGOs are at an all-time high, and governments are without doubt increasingly recognizing the value of NGOs." *

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan addresses Women 2000, a forum organized by NGOs during Beijing Plus Five. Seven women representing Bahá'í NGOs or communities were accredited to the Session.

"[I]t is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms."

– Beijing Plus Five outcome document

In Geneva, globalization debate dominates Copenhagen Plus Five

"Unless the benefits of social and economic development are extended to all countries, a growing number of people in all countries and even entire regions will remain marginalized from the global economy."

– Copenhagen Plus Five final document.

GENEVA — The topic of globalization dominated the discussion at the "Copenhagen Plus Five" UN General Assembly Special Session, held here in June to assess progress in fighting poverty and achieving social integration since the 1995 World Summit on Social Development.

In statements by government ministers and in the text of the Session's final document, the processes of globalization were recognized as having both good and bad effects. The consensus was that the international community must work to ensure that the benefits of globalization and economic development are spread to all countries and regions, while the bad effects are reduced.

"Globalization and continuing rapid technological advances offer unprecedented opportunities for social and economic development," states the Session's final outcome document. "At the same time, they continue to present serious challenges, including widespread financial crises, insecurity, poverty, exclusion and inequality within and among societies.

"Considerable obstacles to further integration and full participation in the glo-

bal economy remain for developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, as well as for some countries with economies in transition," the document continues. "Unless the benefits of social and economic development are extended to all countries, a growing number of people in all countries and even entire regions will remain marginalized from the global economy."

Held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva 26 June–1 July 2000, the session was entitled "World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) and Beyond: Achieving Social Development for All in a Globalizing World." Representatives of more than 180 countries attended, including at least 26 Heads of State and Government. More than 2,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were also present.

In addition to globalization, the most difficult issues concerned human rights, debt relief, governance, and the international financial regime. Negotiations went past the scheduled end of the conference, which had been set for Friday, 30 June, and continued into Saturday before participants reached consensus on the final text.

On the whole, the final text generally upholds and/or reaffirms the commitments made at the 1995 Social Summit in Copenhagen, which endorsed a sweeping Declaration and Program of Action aimed at attacking world poverty, joblessness and social disintegration through a "people-centered" approach to social and economic development that stressed the need to empower women and marginalized groups and called on wealthy countries to devote more resources to the needy, both at home and abroad.

"The Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action will remain the basic framework for social development in the years to come," said the Session's final document. "We therefore reiterate our determination and duty to eradicate poverty, promote full and productive employment, foster social integration and create an enabling environ-



UN Photo

Inside the main conference hall at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

ment for social development.

"The maintenance of peace and security within and among nations, democracy, the rule of law, the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, effective, transparent and accountable governance, gender equality, full respect for fundamental principles and rights at work and the rights of migrant workers are some of the essential elements for the realization of social and people-centered sustainable development," the document continued.

The Session did break some new ground, however, especially in setting target dates for achieving certain goals. The final document calls for halving the number of persons living in extreme poverty by 2015 and for the achievement of free and universal primary education by 2015.

The document also urged that greater steps be taken to ease the debt burdens of developing countries. "We recognize that excessive debt-servicing has severely constrained the capacity of many developing countries, as well as countries with economies in transition, to promote social development," said the outcome document. "We also recognize the efforts being made by indebted developing countries to fulfill their debt-servicing commitment despite the high social cost incurred. We reaffirm our pledge to find effective, equitable, development-oriented and durable solutions to the external debt and debt-servicing burdens of developing countries."

Roberto Bissio, Secretary of Social Watch, a coalition of NGOs in 60 countries that monitors the implementation of the Copenhagen and Beijing agreements, said the references to debt were very significant. "This is something completely new in such an international document, and it can be understood as legitimizing some kind of moratorium on debt."

In many of the Session's discussions, the challenges of globalization could be seen as a main thread. National representatives charged repeatedly that the benefits of globalized economic progress were increasingly unequally distributed, that the world's poorer countries were falling farther and farther behind industrialized countries, and that official development assistance and debt-relief programs had to be expanded.

"We are concerned that developing countries have not been able to share in the benefits of globalization on an equal footing with



developed countries," said F. Chitauro, Zimbabwe's Minister of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare.

Other countries acknowledged globalization's potential benefits. "[G]lobalization has also brought about an amazing transformation for the better," said Prasong Rananand, Thailand's Minister of Labor and Social Welfare. "There has never been a better time for the peoples of the world to reach out to and help one another. These helping hands are neither partisan nor biased towards a certain race or color. The governing authority, the people, civil society and the non-state actor are drawn together. Each is under much closer scrutiny than before. The decentralization of power and authority as well as improved systems of checks and balances have contributed greatly to the development of a more accountable and transparent form of governance."

More than 3,000 representatives of civil society gathered at the Session's parallel NGO forum, which was called simply "Geneva 2000." NGOs sponsored more than 200 workshops, panel discussions and performances to highlight their concerns.

"As with other recent international fora, the Geneva event was notable for the striking convergence of thinking among government representatives and members of civil society," said Matthew Weinberg, the Bahá'í International Community's representative to the Session. "That the problems of humanity are interconnected and can only be resolved through processes of consultation, respect for basic human freedoms, the advancement of women, universal education, and an integrated approach to human development was accepted by virtually all in attendance." *

There was a solid Bahá'í presence at Geneva 2000, an NGO forum held in parallel with Copenhagen Plus Five. Shown above are members of the European Bahá'í Youth Council, who sponsored workshops on diversity. Other Bahá'í-sponsored NGOs at the forum included the European Bahá'í Business Forum, which sponsored six workshops on topics ranging from "Encouraging Women Entrepreneurs" to "Corporate Social Responsibility," the Bahá'í Medical Association, and the Association of Bahá'í Women for Development, Peace and Unity.

Millennium Forum convenes at the UN

The proceedings of the drafting committee for the Millennium Forum Declaration took on elements of a global town meeting. At right, participants are shown lined up to make comments on the draft Declaration at a "public hearing" held Thursday evening, 25 May 2000.



Forum, continued from page one

in September. The Forum was originally suggested by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and its output represents one of the main official contributions of civil society to the Summit, which is expected to be the largest gathering of heads of state and government ever held.

The Millennium Forum itself was viewed by some as an historic event. "I really have no hesitation at all in using the word 'historic,' because I don't believe that an event of this kind has ever been held at the United Nations," said Miles Stoby, an Assistant UN Secretary General and the Coordinator for the Preparations for the Millennium Summit and Assembly. "This is the first occasion when a global civil society forum has been convened to discuss the entire global agenda at the seat of the only truly global organization, the United Nations."

The Forum also highlighted the degree to which globalization has perhaps become the overarching issue of the new decade. The theme knitted together other issues in the Forum's Declaration, and the extent of the debate over its benefits and harms indicated a wide difference of opinion within civil society over exactly how to understand, characterize and assess the phenomenon.

"Globalization' needs defining," states

the Declaration's opening sentence in its section on the topic.

Many of those gathered at the Forum sought to reach a consensus, and the final Declaration cautiously acknowledges some of globalization's benefits. "Globalization and advances in technology create significant opportunities for people to connect, share and learn from each other," states the Declaration.

On the other hand, the Declaration also states that "globalization is a process of economic, political and cultural domination by the economically and militarily strong over the weak".

The Forum concluded that a stronger and more democratic United Nations — working in close partnership with civil society — can best deal with the harms caused by globalization and the other interconnected challenges facing humanity.

"Globalization should be made to work for the benefit of everyone: eradicate poverty and hunger globally; establish peace globally; ensure the protection and promotion of human rights globally; ensure the protection of our global environment; enforce social standards in the workplace globally," the Declaration states. "This can happen only if global corporations, international financial and trade institutions and governments are subject to effective democratic

The Forum highlighted the degree to which globalization has perhaps become the overarching issue of the new decade – and the existence of a wide difference of opinion within civil society over exactly how to understand, characterize and assess the phenomenon.

control by the people. We see a strengthened and democratized United Nations and a vibrant civil society as guarantors of this accountability."

Global diversity

Held 22–26 May 2000 at the United Nations headquarters building in New York, the Forum drew at least 1,350 people from more than 106 countries. While more than 1,800 organizations of civil society, with headquarters in 145 countries, registered to attend the Millennium Forum, a shortage of funds for travel prevented many from coming to New York. Some who could not attend participated in deliberations via the internet, watching as select events were broadcast over the World Wide Web and responding to documents by email as they were posted.

Participants' primary concerns ran across a wide range of issues, from peace to human rights, from women's issues to development. The groups they represented ranged from small locally based community organizations to international networks with millions of members. Moreover, representatives attended from at least 311 organizations with headquarters in some 85 nations in the developing world or regions considered "in transition" from Communist to democratic governments.

"This is a remarkable group," remarked Paul Hoeffel, chief of the NGO Section of the UN's Department of Public Information, surveying the crowd during the Forum's final plenary. "The diversity of NGOs is unprecedented, especially here in New York."

The Forum's overarching theme — "The United Nations for the 21st Century" — encompassed six main sub-themes: 1) Peace, security and disarmament; 2) Eradication of poverty, including debt cancellation and social development; 3) Human rights; 4) Sustainable development and environment; 5) Facing the challenges of globalization: achieving equity, justice and diversity; and, 6) Strengthening and democratizing the United Nations and international organizations.

Opening and closing plenary sessions took place in the UN's General Assembly Hall. The six sub-themes were dissected and discussed in a series of eight "interactive" plenary sessions and in numerous smaller working group sessions, held in various conference rooms at the UN and the UN Church Center building.

Papers on each sub-theme emerged from these sessions — and points from those pa-

pers were incorporated into the main Declaration. These and other Forum documents can be read in full on the Forum's website at <http://www.millenniumforum.org>.

"For me, one of the most important outcomes of the Forum was the advance that global civil society made in working together across issues," said Techeste Ahderom, Co-Chair of the Forum and the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations. "In the past, NGOs and civil society have been largely compartmentalized, working mainly on issues of their own local, regional or nationalistic concern. But as we have seen at other NGO forums, there is a worldwide process of networking and integration. And the Millennium Forum — as the final Declaration shows — has carried this process forward."

Globalization and colonialism

From the opening session, which featured speeches by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, International Labour Organization Director-General Juan Somavía, Council of Parliamentarians for Global Action Chair Maj-Britt Theorin and Third World Network Director Martin Khor, it was evident that globalization would be the most hotly discussed issue of the Forum.

Mr. Annan said that growing advocacy and action of NGOs worldwide in recent years amounted to an "NGO revolution" and that the UN welcomed NGOs as partners. He noted, however, that many NGOs have begun to protest the processes of globalization, which he said has come to be the defining issue of our new age.

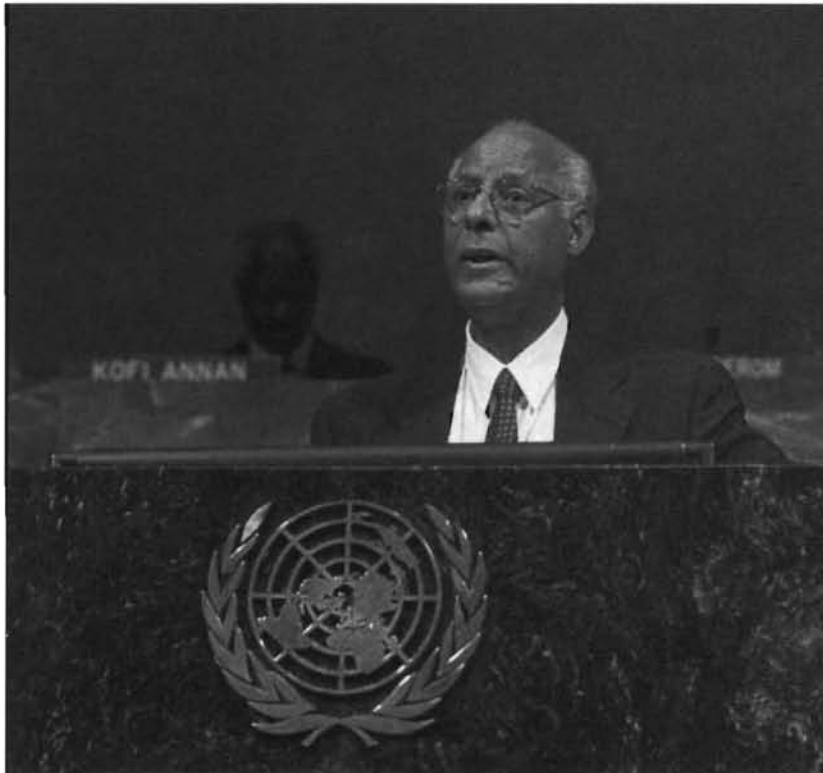
"I think the protesters [at the WTO meeting last year in Seattle] were sending a

"I believe the poor are poor not because of too much globalization, but because of too little — because they are not part of it, because they are excluded."

— UN Secretary General Kofi Annan

UN officials said the Forum was among the most diverse gatherings of NGOs ever at the UN headquarters. The women pictured below are not necessarily from Finland and Fiji; participants seated themselves randomly.





Techeste Ahderom, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, was the Co-Chair of the Millennium Forum. In support of his role, the Community provided substantial assistance to the Forum, including computer and database management, media and communications outreach, and administrative support to the Forum's Executive Committee. Mr. Ahderom is shown here making his opening day speech to the Forum in the UN General Assembly hall.

message that many people feel lost and vulnerable in this fast-changing world — that we need to reach out and explain to them the link between the local and the global,” said Mr. Annan. “In the world of the 21st century, not only people and nations are interconnected; issues are, too.”

“The cure does not lie in protesting against globalization itself. I believe the poor are poor not because of too much globalization, but because of too little — because they are not part of it, because they are excluded,” said Mr. Annan.

Mr. Khor's speech, however, set the tone for much of the week when he compared globalization to colonialism, saying that it amounted to little more than a process by which large corporations and banks in the developed world seek to open markets in the developing world solely to increase profits — much as colonialism in an earlier era stripped the developing world of raw materials and labor without much reciprocal benefit.

“It has become a cliché that globalization has benefits, but the benefits accrue to only some, and what we need to do is have a better distribution of benefits,” said Mr. Khor. “The problem is that this is only half the truth. The people that win through globalization may actually be causing the losses of those who lose. I am sure you will not make a critique of colonialism to say that some benefit from colonialism and [there-

fore] we want to distribute the benefits of colonialism better.... The globalization we have today is a globalization that re-promotes colonialism.”

Mr. Annan, Mr. Khor and many other speakers indicated that whatever one's view of globalization, the world needs strong and genuinely democratic international institutions to control its effects, and the best candidate for that task is an empowered United Nations.

“We need to rebuild the power of the United Nations as a truly democratic and participatory institution, not only by bringing in the NGOs like ourselves, but making sure that the developing countries have a proper voice and decision not only in the United Nations but in the global system of finance, economics, trade, investment and social policies,” said Mr. Khor.

Concrete points for action

Throughout the plenary sessions and workshops, Forum organizers asked participants both to dream about their vision of a better world and to propose concrete actions that can be undertaken by governments, the United Nations, and civil society itself. In the final Declaration, these actions were linked to each of the Forum's six main sub-themes.

In the section on poverty eradication, the Declaration states that “poverty is a violation of human rights” and that “with some 1.3 billion living in extreme poverty, it is the most widespread violation of human rights in the world.” Among the action steps proposed are the establishment of a “Global Poverty Eradication Fund,” aimed at ensuring full access to credit for the poor worldwide; the full implementation of the commitments made at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development; and cancellation of the debts of developing countries.

On the issue of peace, the Declaration calls for the creation of a universal culture of peace, through general global disarmament and the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, full acceptance of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and promotion of universal peace education. The Declaration also urges the establishment of a corps of professionally trained mediators and an international, non-violent, inclusive, standing volunteer Peace Force to assist in conflict prevention and resolution in conflict areas.

The Forum's Declaration stresses the “indivisibility, interdependence and interre-

latedness of all human rights," calling on all governments to ratify without reservation the main internationally recognized human rights treaties. It calls on governments "not to justify neglect of one set of rights over the other; but to ensure that all individual and collective human rights are safeguarded in the pursuit of sustainable development, investment and trade." The document demands that human rights defenders be protected, stresses the importance of ending all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, and urges greater emphasis on human rights education worldwide.

In the area of sustainable development, the Declaration upholds the importance of Agenda 21 and urges governments to return to the commitments made at the Earth Summit, including the promise that developed nations would allocate 0.7% of their GNP to overseas development assistance. The Declaration also emphasizes the importance of a stronger partnership between government and civil society in carrying out Agenda 21.

In the section on globalization, the Declaration urges governments to make serious "commitments to restructure the global financial architecture based on principles of equity, transparency, accountability, and democracy, and to balance, with the participation of civil society organizations, the monetary means to favor human endeavor and ecology." It also urges governments to pay "particular attention to eradication of unequal taxation, tax havens, and money-laundering operations and to impose new forms of taxation, such as the Tobin tax." It urges international financial institutions to "eliminate the negative conditionalities of structural adjustment programs."

The Declaration also calls for measures to strengthen the United Nations. It urges that the Security Council be reformed through enlarged membership, enhanced flexibility, transparency and accountability, and eventual elimination of the use of the veto.

Global Civil Society Forum

One objective of the Forum was to discuss how worldwide civil society could become better represented at the UN.

The final paragraph of the Declaration proposes "the creation and funding of a Global Civil Society Forum to meet at least every two to three years in the period leading up to the annual session of the General Assembly, provided that such a forum is conducted democratically and transparently and

is truly representative of all sectors of civil society and all parts of the world."

Little progress was made, however, in defining exactly what shape such an ongoing Forum might take. Ideas ranged from asking the UN to convert the little-used Trusteeship Council into a "Global People's Assembly" to simply continuing international networking that emerged as such a powerful tool for NGOs in the 1990s.

In the final minutes of the Forum, participants adopted a resolution appointing the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with ECOSOC (CONGO) to convene a meeting to continue discussions on how to establish such a Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF).

The rather loosely worded and hurriedly constructed resolution also indicated that representatives of the DPI/NGO Executive Committee (which represents NGOs recognized by the UN's Department of Public Information) as well as the Millennium Forum Executive Committee, should be involved. Comments from Co-Chair Ahderom suggested that any GCSF should establish its own secretariat, its own leadership structure, and its own procedural methods.

The drafting process that led to the Declaration was among the Forum's liveliest activities. Although the Forum's organizers had intended that points for inclusion into the Declaration emerge from the main plenary sessions and workshops, a series of "public hearings" were also held by members of the Declaration's drafting committee during the Forum.

Pera Wells, a Forum participant who came from the Center for Indigenous Education in Australia and who joined the Declaration's drafting committee, saw the Declaration drafting process as an exercise in participatory democracy on a global scale.

"It wasn't democratic in the sort of careful, deliberate sense you would associate with a formal democratic procedure, because there was no time for reflection and evaluation," said Ms. Wells. "What happened around the drafting of the Declaration is that the conference found its way towards establishing the dynamics of a global village."

"It was a bit like a marketplace," Ms. Wells continued. "It was entirely open and it allowed for the possibility for anyone to put forward their point of view in a way that seemed to me very healthy. The process wasn't based on who you represented. It was based on the value attached to the idea you presented." *

"It was entirely open and it allowed for the possibility for anyone to put forward their point of view in a way that seemed to me very healthy. The process wasn't based on who you represented. It was based on the value attached to the idea you presented."

- Pera Wells, Forum participant

In Atlanta, USA, Bahá'í couples buck a trend of "white flight," consciously seeking to promote racial unity

Larry and Carole Miller in their new home in Lithonia, Georgia.



"We felt there has to be a new model. We want to show that, if people have the right principles and if they have faith, racial segregation can be reversed."

– Larry Miller

LITHONIA, Georgia, USA — With their children grown and out of the home and a solid retirement income assured, Larry and Carole Miller were at a point in their lives when they could choose to live wherever they wanted.

But when the Millers decided two and a half years ago to build a new home, they moved to this largely African-American district of southern DeKalb County in metropolitan Atlanta.

What makes that unusual is that Mr. and Mrs. Miller are white — and their move runs against the decades-long exodus of white families from this area, a phenomenon known to demographers as "white flight."

"For other people in our position, I suppose, we would be considered odd," said Mr. Miller during an interview in his new custom-built home on a quiet cul-de-sac here. "Because we could live anywhere in the world.

"But we felt there has to be a new model," said Mr. Miller, who at age 54 is now semi-

retired, having recently sold his management consulting firm. "We want to create a pluralistic and diverse community in which people learn to live together voluntarily, as opposed to through government programs or intervention. And we want to show that, if people have the right principles and if they have faith, racial segregation can be reversed."

In this regard, the Millers are among a small group of people who are striving to build a new and unified society in America, one that demonstrates the possibilities for complete racial integration. They, like many others in this group, are followers of the Bahá'í Faith, which stresses the principle of the oneness of humanity and teaches a personal ethic that goes beyond mere tolerance, advocating active efforts at genuine unity among the races.

Indeed, on a national level, the Bahá'í community of the United States has in recent years launched a major campaign to promote race unity. Elements of this cam-

paign have included the production and extensive broadcast of a video program entitled "The Power of Race Unity," the holding of intensive training seminars and workshops on how to promote race unity, and numerous local activities, such as the observance of an annual "race unity" day in many communities around the nation each year in June.

The metropolitan Atlanta area has seen much activity by Bahá'ís and others in this regard, owing to its prominent location in the southern United States where the issues of racial prejudice and segregation have for so long taken center stage. Atlanta, for example, is the home to the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center, a nationally recognized organization aimed at eliminating poverty, racism and war through non-violent social change.

Yet, despite years of government programs aimed at promoting de-segregation, metropolitan Atlanta remains a place where neighborhoods and communities are often quite sharply defined by race. Although DeKalb County as a whole is split roughly 50 percent white and 50 percent black, this ratio varies greatly by neighborhood. At Lithonia High School, for example, 96.9 percent of the students are black. In other districts of DeKalb County, less than 7 percent of the population is African-American. In the greater Atlanta region, there are similar divisions. The city of Atlanta itself is more than 70 percent black. To the north, Cherokee County is more than 95 percent white.

"Historically, we still continue to live in segregated neighborhoods," said Douglas Bachtel, a sociologist and demographic specialist at the University of Georgia. "While public institutions became integrated — the schools, public facilities and the workplace — neighborhoods really never became integrated."

In DeKalb County, say residents, a process of "re-segregation" took place during the 1970s and 1980s as whites fled in the face of an increasing black in-migration from urban Atlanta. "Basically, white flight revolves around education and the real and perceived problems in the school system," said Prof. Bachtel. "And a lot of that is racially motivated."

Seeking to counter these trends, and to demonstrate the possibilities for increased racial unity, are the Millers — and two other Bahá'í families who have recently relocated to largely black areas of southern DeKalb County. Jeffrey and Sarah Streiff moved into



a mostly black Decatur neighborhood with their three children in August 1998. Cliff and Wendy Owens-Leech relocated to Stone Mountain in December 1995.

Although localized demographic statistics for these neighborhoods are hard to find, the Stone Mountain high school is less than 6 percent white, according to figures from the DeKalb County School District.

The Streiffs chose their Decatur neighborhood, which they say is roughly 90 percent black, because it is near the Bahá'í Unity Center. They returned to the United States in 1998 after living in China for three years, where both worked as school teachers — which is how they are currently employed.

"We moved here because it is distinctive for a white family to move into an all- or almost-black neighborhood," said Sarah Streiff, who is 52. "It seems that whenever the percentage of whites in a given community goes below 50 percent, it causes tension in whites and they flee. That is what happened here."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Streiff said living in a largely black neighborhood has forced them to confront many of the racial images they had grown up with as whites in America.

"I was afraid to stay by myself at first," confessed Mrs. Streiff. "I brought with me all of the stereotypes about what a black neighborhood would be like." Those preconceptions included the idea that crime and violence would be a daily threat.

But living here for two years without incident has put those fears to rest. "It's just like any other middle class neighborhood,"

The Streiff family. Left to right, on the couch, are Cory, Jeffrey, and Sarah. On the floor are Micah and Daniel.

"I was afraid to stay by myself at first. I brought with me all of the stereotypes about what a black neighborhood would be like."
— Sarah Streiff



Cliff Owens-Leech, center, and his wife, Wendy, second from the right, with some friends as they paint a float for the annual Martin Luther King Day Parade in Atlanta.

"Moving here for us is part of a journey through life. If you are always in your comfort zone, you are not going to be growing and you are not going to be dealing with the disease of racism."

- Wendy Owens-Leech

said Mrs. Streiff. "It's not what most white people expect it to be."

They have also discovered a great diversity within the African-American community itself. "Now we are having the best time here, because it is so rich in culture," said Mrs. Streiff. "There are Africans from every country living here. From Senegal, from the Congo, from the Caribbean, from the East Indies. You can't make assumptions about anyone you see."

A sign of their commitment was their purchase, in August 1998, of a three bedroom, 2,200 square foot home here. They also send their three sons, ages 15, 12 and 9, to public schools in the region.

"The Bahá'í Faith has given me a desire to get over the problems of the past and to get to know my neighbors, whatever color or culture they come from," said Mr. Streiff. "To get to know and love them. And my hope for my boys is that they will grow up not even thinking in terms of color."

Cliff and Wendy Owens-Leech

The Owens-Leeches are the only white family on their street, in a subdivision of 1,500 homes with a population that is 90 percent black, 5 percent white and 5 percent other ethnic groups.

"The purpose was to model race unity," said Mrs. Owens-Leech, a 52-year-old freelance photographer. "And part of that is to show that white people can live here and nothing untoward will happen to them."

Unlike the Streiffs, both Mr. and Mrs. Owens-Leech had lived in areas with large African-American populations previously, and so they did not have as many precon-

ceptions to overcome. However, they have faced many comments and questions from white friends and family who, according to Mrs. Owens-Leech, have said things like: "Aren't you worried about your property values?" or 'Something is going to happen to you,' or 'You'll get broken into,' or 'You're not safe there.' "

"But the reality has been fine," said Mrs. Owens-Leech. "Our neighbors have been wonderful and very friendly towards us. We watch each other's homes when we're on vacation. We mow each others lawns."

More than a good place to live, the couple sees their action as part of a lifelong process of personal growth, one that in this case is partly aimed at overcoming any lingering feelings of racism or prejudice that they may unconsciously harbor.

"The other benefit of living here is that you are able, as a white person in this country, to work on the sense of racism that is taught to you from the time you are a child," said Mrs. Owens-Leech. "As white people we have been taught that we are part of the privileged class, rather than a part of humanity."

"The whole idea of racism is that one part of humanity is superior to the other, and that is simply not true. God created us as one humanity and we are the ones who create the divisions."

"So moving here for us is part of a journey through life," Mrs. Owens-Leech said. "You have to be willing as a human being to stretch yourself. If you are always in your comfort zone, you are not going to be growing and you are not going to be dealing with the disease of racism."

Adds Mr. Owens-Leech, a 48-year-old financial advisor and insurance agent: "Racism is a disease, one that humanity is afflicted with. For us, one way of confronting this disease is by demonstrating our commitment to the oneness of humanity by moving into an all-black neighborhood."

"An incredibly simple thing"

Likewise, the Millers saw moving to Lithonia as a way to put their beliefs on the line. Before moving here in January 1999, they lived in Alpharetta, a wealthy and largely white suburb north of Atlanta.

"To me, it is actually an incredibly simple thing," said Mr. Miller of their decision to move here. "If you are a Bahá'í and you have any notion of what the Faith is about, you

would naturally look for ways to put your principles into action. And of course there are many ways of doing that. But for us, we want to live our lives in a way that promotes unity in diversity.”

The Millers looked extensively at various homes in the area but finally decided to build a custom-designed 5,000-square-foot home. Most homes in the area are smaller and less expensive.

“We thought about buying a less expensive home but we decided that that wasn’t us,” said Mr. Miller. “Diversity means accepting others for who they are and accepting yourself for who you are. We didn’t want to pretend to be someone else. We built the house that met our own taste and financial ability.”

Like the Streiffs and the Owens-Leeches, they have found much to appreciate about moving to an area that would ordinarily be outside their cultural norm.

“We feel very fortunate at this time of our lives that we can, hopefully, be of service to this community,” said Mrs. Miller, who is currently Director of Domestic Projects for Mottahedeh Development Services, a Bahá’í-sponsored social and economic development foundation. “And, frankly, if we had stayed in our other community, there wouldn’t be as many opportunities for service, for setting an example.”*

Review: Years of Silence

Review, continued from back page

about five by seven meters, and had no windows,” Mr. Alizad writes, describing the cell that was to be his home for the next 22 months. “A hole about 50 by 80 centimeters had been made in the ceiling. This hole was so small, the ceiling so high and the area so vast that neither any light penetrated nor was there any ventilation.”

Gradually, the number of prisoners in the cell increased until it reached 95, and the prisoners were forced to sleep head-by-feet, packed in like sardines. The only toilet facility was an open 20-liter tank, which quickly filled up each day. “The foul smell permeated the air and created a living hell for those who had to live in the room,” he writes. He also notes that in 22 months, the prisoners’ clothes were never changed or washed.

On top of those conditions, prisoners underwent frequent interrogation, beatings and torture to force them to sign “statements” confessing their “crimes.” Accord-

ing to Mr. Alizad, the statements bore no relation to the truth. “The authorities were intent on building up a file and documentation against the Faith by every means possible so that [it] could be held up as a movement opposed to the government,” he writes. “The political department was determined to coerce [the Bahá’ís] to falsely declare that the Bahá’í Faith was a movement in defiance of the government.”

In late 1939, many prisoners were given their “freedom” — they were sent to work camps in Siberia. Conditions in Siberia were preferable to imprisonment, in that the exiles could move about the countryside with relative freedom, but the hard labor, harsh climate, and intense poverty claimed many lives.

The first winter was the worst for the exiles, who were completely unprepared for the cold temperatures. “The protection for our feet consisted of the same shoes and cotton socks that we had worn when we arrived,” writes Mr. Alizad, describing a day when the temperature was 25 below zero Celsius. “When we walked on the soft snow, our shoes sank into it and when we pulled them out, they were filled with snow. When the wind blew, it was as if needles passed through the fabric: it penetrated our clothes and reached our skin. The unfortunate thing was that with the onset of the cold weather, our meat ration was reduced from 500 grams to only a hundred grams, which was insufficient to keep our bodies warm.”

The Bahá’ís shared what little they had, he says, whether food or clothing. “As soon as the weather turned cold, the Bahá’ís took practical steps to help each other,” he writes. “Everyone placed whatever he had on a platter and offered it to his friends. Mr. Akbari had an old coat, out of which he made a hat for me and one for himself. Mr. Aminu’llah Akhgar gave me his boots. Another one had an extra shawl which he offered to his friend. This enabled all of us to be better prepared for the winter. We also extended help to our sympathetic Muslim friends.”

Mr. Alizad spent some five years in Siberia, and was repatriated to Iran in 1946. Much of the book profiles fellow prisoners, with short accounts of how they fared in such conditions. While many did not survive, many did, and the impact is uplifting. For, as in the above account, the overall story is one about how cooperation and selflessness in the face of extreme hardship can bring out the best in the human spirit.*

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“As if needles passed through the fabric...”

**Years of Silence:
Bahá'ís in the
USSR 1938–1946**

**By Asadu'llah
Alizad**

George Ronald

Oxford

In his poignant account of life as a prisoner of conscience in the former Soviet Union, Asadu'llah Alizad gives numerous examples of how small acts of unselfishness made all the difference between survival and non-existence in the harsh system that flourished under Stalin.

Take, for example, this account of sharing an egg with a fellow Bahá'í and Siberian exile, presented in Mr. Alizad's recently published memoir: *Years of Silence: Bahá'ís in the USSR 1938-1946*.

“He asked me to have breakfast with him,” Mr. Alizad writes of his last encounter with Ali-Asak Usku'i, who was dying of tuberculosis. “He prepared hot water, placed some bread on the table and joyfully offered me the only egg, which was his meal that day. When he put the egg in front of me and with genuine love and sincerity invited me to eat it, such a feeling came over me that I cannot describe. I removed the egg-shell, divided the egg into two, gave him one half and ate the other. I have attended, before that breakfast and since, many banquets and large feasts but never have I felt the inner happiness, joy, spiritual feeling and closeness that existed that day between the guest and his host. I did not see Mr. Usku'i again as he passed away some time after our meeting.”

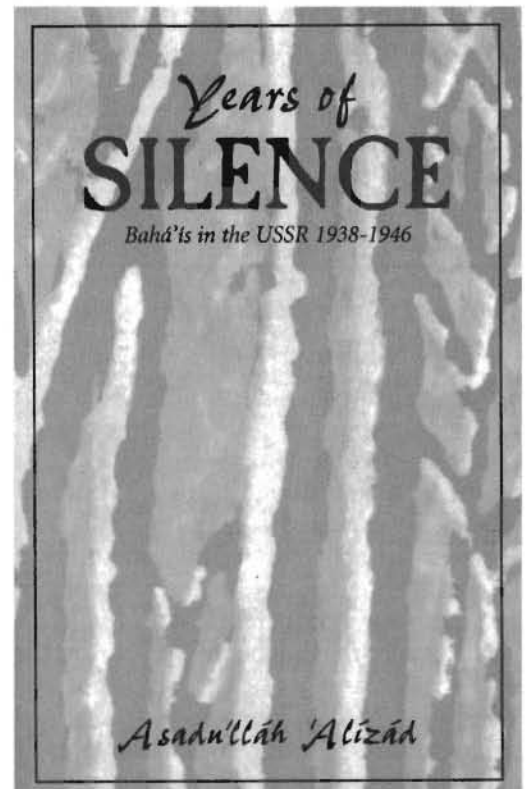
Written in a simple and spare style, Mr. Alizad's memoir preserves for posterity the kinds of sacrifices and hardships endured by the small community of mostly Iranian-born Bahá'ís who remained in Russia after the 1917 Revolution, intent on living the principles of their Faith in an adopted land.

Further, as one of the first published accounts of the experiences of Bahá'ís inside the former Soviet Union, *Years of Silence* also documents a hitherto largely unknown episode of religious persecution — and the heroic response of those who endured it.

Mr. Alizad begins by telling how Iranian-born Bahá'ís established a flourishing community in Russian Turkistan before the Revolution. In the city of Ashgabat (also known as Ishqabad or Ashkhabad), the community numbered more than 4,000 and

had built there the world's first Bahá'í House of Worship. They had also established an elementary school, a medical clinic, and a highly developed community life, featuring libraries, social clubs and societies devoted to drama, gymnastics, and other pursuits.

The problems for the community began in 1927, Mr. Alizad writes, when government officials — as they had done with other churches and temples in the Soviet Union — sealed the doors to the House of Worship and gradually began to crack down on Bahá'í activities. In 1929, all nine members of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ashgabat, the freely elected local Bahá'í governing council, were arrested and de-



ported to Iran. Over time, many Bahá'ís were dismissed from their jobs.

The main blow came in February 1938, when about 80 male Bahá'ís were arrested one night, including Mr. Alizad. At first, most were held, along with a number of Muslims, in a local prison in severe, overcrowded conditions. “The room was ...

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