

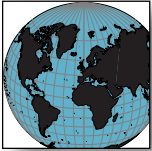


ONE COUNTRY

"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 2002
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Worldwide, the Bahá'í community issues an appeal for religious tolerance

In a letter to "the world's religious leaders," the Universal House of Justice warns of the danger posed by "the rising fires of religious prejudice" and calls for decisive action against fanaticism and intolerance.

NEW YORK — Expressing concern over the worldwide rise of religious prejudice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith has issued an appeal to the world's religious leaders, calling for decisive action to eradicate religious intolerance and fanaticism.

Issued in April and delivered to religious leaders around the world in May and June via the global network of national Bahá'í communities, the message warns that "[w]ith every day that passes, danger grows that the rising fires of religious prejudice will ignite a worldwide conflagration the consequences of which are unthinkable."

"Tragically, organized religion, whose very reason for being entails service to the cause of brotherhood and peace, behaves all too frequently as one of the most formidable obstacles in the path; to cite a particular painful fact, it has long lent its credibility to fanaticism," wrote the Universal House of Justice.

By the end of June, the six-page letter had been delivered to at least 1,600 leaders in more than 40 countries. And the response has, so far, been overwhelmingly appreciative, with religious leaders, academics who study religion, and specialists in related fields saying that the letter is a much needed and timely intervention on an issue of global concern.

"This is the message. This is the moment," said Professor Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Great Britain and the Commonwealth. "We are facing the greatest challenge that God has ever given us and this is the message we need."

Many leaders — whether Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Islamic or other — expressed hope that the message will spur religious leaders and their followers to action.

"I would hope that this letter will have consequences, that there will be people reacting to it," said Dr. Ulrich Dehn of the Protestant Center for Religious and Ideological Issues in Germany. Dr. Dehn added that he agreed generally with the letter's premise that religious leaders need to "clarify their position" on religious tolerance.

In some regions, the appeal received significant publicity in the news media. In India, for example, *The Times of India* and *The Hindu*, as well as several other newspapers, have featured articles on the message. One newspaper in New Delhi, *The Pioneer*, reprinted excerpts of the letter in two installments.

The letter begins its appeal for tolerance by pointing to the general rise over the last century of the consciousness of the oneness of humanity. It notes specifically that prejudices based on gender, race, or nationality, while persisting in many quarters, have nevertheless been widely recognized as unacceptable by people everywhere.

However, the letter continues, religious prejudice not only persists but has become a "formidable obstacle" in the "cause of brotherhood and peace."

"The crisis calls on religious leadership for a break with the past as decisive as those that opened the way for society to address equally corrosive prejudices of race, gender and nation," states the letter. [See page 2 for excerpts.]

The letter suggests that increased interfaith dialogue can be an important step in fighting religious prejudice, noting that the Bahá'í community has been a "vigorous promoter" of such dialogue. But the letter also warns that if interfaith dialogue is to be

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To the World's Religious Leaders

[Editor's note: The following is an abridged version of the April 2002 letter of the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders. The full text of the letter can be found on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.bahai.org/article-1-1-0-1.html>]

The enduring legacy of the twentieth century is that it compelled the peoples of the world to begin seeing themselves as the members of a single human race, and the earth as that race's common homeland. Despite the continuing conflict and violence that darken the horizon, prejudices that once seemed inherent in the nature of the human species are everywhere giving way. Down with them come barriers that long divided the family of man into a Babel of incoherent identities of cultural, ethnic or national origin.

Tragically, organized religion, whose very reason for being entails service to the cause of brotherhood and peace, behaves all too frequently as one of the most formidable obstacles in the path; to cite a particular painful fact, it has long lent its credibility to fanaticism. We feel a responsibility, as the governing council of one of the world religions, to urge earnest consideration of the challenge this poses for religious leadership.

The issue comes sharply into focus when one considers what has been achieved elsewhere. In the past, apart from isolated exceptions, women were regarded as an inferior breed, their nature hedged about by superstitions, denied the opportunity to express the potentialities of the human spirit and relegated to the role of serving the needs of men. Clearly, there are many societies where such conditions persist and are even fanatically defended. At the level of global discourse, however, the concept of the equality of the sexes has, for all practical purposes, now assumed the force of universally accepted principle.

The beleaguered battalions of nationalism face a similar fate. With each passing crisis in world affairs, it becomes easier for the citizen to distinguish between a love of country that enriches one's life, and

submission to inflammatory rhetoric designed to provoke hatred and fear of others. Even where it is expedient to participate in the familiar nationalistic rites, public response is as often marked by feelings of awkwardness as it is by the strong convictions and ready enthusiasm of earlier times. The effect has been reinforced by the restructuring steadily taking place in the international order.

Racial and ethnic prejudices have been subjected to equally summary treatment by historical processes that have little patience left for such pretensions. Here, rejection of the past has been especially decisive. Racism is now tainted by its association with the horrors of the twentieth century to the degree that it has taken on something of the character of a spiritual disease. While surviving as a social attitude in many parts of the world—and as a blight on the lives of a significant segment of humankind—racial prejudice has become so universally condemned in principle that no body of people can any longer safely allow themselves to be identified with it.

As the twentieth century opened, the prejudice that seemed more likely than any other to succumb to the forces of change was that of religion.... In the context of the transformation taking place in the human race's conception of itself, the most promising new religious development seemed to be the interfaith movement. In 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition surprised even its ambitious organizers by giving birth to the famed "Parliament of Religions", a vision of spiritual and moral consensus that captured the popular imagination on all continents and managed to eclipse even the scientific, technological and commercial wonders that the Exposition celebrated.

An imaginative leadership, it was confidently predicted, would seize the opportunity and awaken in the earth's long-divided religious communities a spirit of brotherhood that could provide the needed moral underpinnings for the new world of prosperity and progress. Thus encouraged, interfaith movements of every kind took root and flourished.

Alas, it is clear that these initiatives lack both intellectual coherence and spiritual commitment. In contrast to the processes of unification that are transforming the rest of humanity's social relationships, the suggestion that all of the world's great religions are equally valid in nature and origin is stubbornly resisted by entrenched patterns of sectarian thought.

...[T]he greater part of organized religion stands paralyzed at the threshold of the future, gripped in those very dogmas and claims of privileged access to truth that have been responsible for creating some of the most bitter conflicts dividing the earth's inhabitants.

The consequences, in terms of human well-being, have been ruinous....

Locked into preoccupation with agendas that disperse and vitiate human energies, religious institutions have too often been the chief agents in discouraging exploration of reality and the exercise of those intellectual faculties that distinguish humankind. Denunciations of materialism or terrorism are of no real assistance in coping with the contemporary moral crisis if they do not begin by addressing candidly the failure of responsibility that has left believing masses exposed and vulnerable to these influences.

The implications for today are summed up by Bahá'u'lláh in words written over a century ago and widely disseminated in the intervening decades:

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you. Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you.

Such an appeal does not call for abandonment of faith in the fundamental verities of any of the world's great belief systems. Far otherwise. Faith has its own imperative and is its own justification. What others believe—or do not believe—cannot be the authority in any individual conscience

worthy of the name. What the above words do unequivocally urge is renunciation of all those claims to exclusivity or finality that, in winding their roots around the life of the spirit, have been the greatest single factor in suffocating impulses to unity and in promoting hatred and violence.

It is to this historic challenge that we believe leaders of religion must respond if religious leadership is to have meaning in the global society emerging from the transformative experiences of the twentieth century. It is evident that growing numbers of people are coming to realize that the truth underlying all religions is in its essence one. This recognition arises not through a resolution of theological disputes, but as an intuitive awareness born from the ever widening experience of others and from a dawning acceptance of the oneness of the human family itself. Out of the welter of religious doctrines, rituals and legal codes inherited from vanished worlds, there is emerging a sense that spiritual life, like the oneness manifest in diverse nationalities, races and cultures, constitutes one unbounded reality equally accessible to everyone.

Together with the crumbling of barriers separating peoples, our age is witnessing the dissolution of the once insuperable wall that the past assumed would forever separate the life of Heaven from the life of Earth. The scriptures of all religions have always taught the believer to see in service to others not only a moral duty, but an avenue for the soul's own approach to God. Today, the progressive restructuring of society gives this familiar teaching new dimensions of meaning. As the age-old promise of a world animated by principles of justice slowly takes on the character of a realistic goal, meeting the needs of the soul and those of society will increasingly be seen as reciprocal aspects of a mature spiritual life.

The great advantage of the present age is the perspective that makes it possible for the entire human race to see this civilizing process as a single phenomenon, the ever-recurring encounters of our world with the world of God.

Inspired by this perspective, the Bahá'í community has been a vigorous promoter of interfaith activities from the time of their inception. Apart from cherished associations that these activities create, Bahá'ís see in the struggle of diverse religions to draw closer together a response to the Divine Will for a hu-

...[T]he greater part of organized religion stands paralyzed at the threshold of the future, gripped in those very dogmas and claims of privileged access to truth that have been responsible for creating some of the most bitter conflicts dividing the earth's inhabitants.

Perspective, continued on page 14

World leaders promise to create “A World Fit for Children” at UN Special Session

UNITED NATIONS — The world has changed greatly in the dozen years since world leaders last met to discuss how to better help and protect the world's children.

In particular, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the increasing use of children as soldiers, and the widening gap between rich and poor have all emerged as new threats to the health and well-being of young people around the world.

And so, while acknowledging that some progress had been made since the 1990 World Summit for Children, leaders gathered here in May for the 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children agreed that many recent trends had made things worse for young people.

“More than 10 million children die each year although most of those deaths could be prevented; 100 million children are still out of school, 60 per cent of them girls; 150 million children suffer from malnutrition; and HIV/AIDS is spreading with catastrophic speed,” stated the 180 governments represented at the Special Session, which was held 8–10 May 2002.

“There is persistent poverty, exclusion and discrimination, and inadequate investment in social services,” continued the gov-

ernments in the Session's final Declaration. “The childhood of millions continues to be devastated by hazardous and exploitative labor; the sale and trafficking of children, including adolescents, and other forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.”

In the face of these realities, governments called on “all members of society” to join them in a “global movement” to “help build a world fit for children.”

They adopted a Plan of Action that mainly reaffirms their commitment to the goals world leaders set two years ago in the Millennium Declaration to fight poverty and its effects but which also specifically calls for greater efforts to mitigate the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on children, to improve the opportunities for their education, to protect those affected by armed conflict, and to end their exploitation.

Reaching consensus on the Session's final Declaration and Plan of Action was by all accounts a difficult process. Although there was agreement on many points prior to the meeting, governments went into the Session sharply divided on several key issues. Among them were the degree to which to focus on the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the central legal framework for protecting children and the language on reproductive health issues.

In the end, however, consensus was reached and government leaders and officials from UNICEF — which organized the Session — called the meeting a success.

“We have adopted a Declaration that describes, very clearly, the steps we must take to build a new world fit for children,” said Ambassador Han Seung-soo of South Korea, President of the UN General Assembly. “It does so in a clear, concise and robust manner. It is a practical and achievable checklist, not only for a better future, but also for immediate action that will improve child well-being today.”

Added Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund): “I am enormously proud and pleased

In the face of new problems facing children and young people worldwide, governments met in New York in May 2002 and called on “all members of society” to join them in a “global movement” to “help build a world fit for children.”



UNICEF/HO02.01971 Susan Markisz

Pianist Eric Dozier (left, foreground) plays his composition, “Color Me Human,” at the 9 May 2002 gala concert during the Special Session on Children. He is accompanied by the UNICEF World Chorus and the National Youth Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela.

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Bahá'ís play key role behind the scenes in UNICEF concert at the UN Children's Summit

UNITED NATIONS — Although Hugh Locke and Jack Lenz grew up two years apart in the tiny farming town of Eston on the Canadian prairie in Saskatchewan, the two men never met until they became members of the Bahá'í Faith as young adults.

But since meeting, they have embarked on a number of collaborations, the most recent of which was the production of a major concert for world leaders at the United Nations during the United Nations Special Session on Children in May.

Mr. Locke served as executive producer for the event, which featured guest appearances by former South African President Nelson Mandela and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, while Mr. Lenz served as musical director.

And although the concert, which sought to feature mainly the voices and musical performances of children and young people, was sponsored entirely by UNICEF, both men feel strongly that their practice of the Bahá'í Faith and its principles of global interdependence and human unity gave them great inspiration.

"The theme of the concert was to have the voices of children giving a message to the leaders of the world — and that message was to urge them to put children first in all of their undertakings," said Mr. Locke, whose company, Locke Associates Inc., specializes in organizing international events and conferences.

"And once Jack and I started to shape the concert, we wanted to have a message that was universal in nature and hopeful for the future," said Mr. Locke, noting that they chose a number of songs written by Bahá'ís for the event — songs that feature themes of hope, oneness and human solidarity. "And there was a resonance in that with the tone and intention of what UNICEF wanted to do."

Held 9 May 2002 on the north lawn of the UN grounds in New York under a specially erected tent before an audience of some nearly 1,000 world leaders, UN officials and children's advocates, the concert featured the 300-voice UNICEF World Chorus — assembled by Mr. Lenz from youth choirs in metropolitan New York — and the 160-strong National Youth Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela.

The concert, titled "Change the World with Children," also featured a series of solo performances by some young or youthful singers who have already won fame for their talent, such as Billy Gilman, a 13-year-old country and western phenomenon from the USA, to Josefine Garline, an 11-year-old pop singer from Sweden. Also performing were Raffi, the internationally acclaimed children's singer

and songwriter, and Angelique Kidjo, one of the world's best-known African singers.

A number of international celebrities, composed mostly of UNICEF and UN goodwill ambassadors, also appeared on stage, with each presenting one of the "Say Yes for Children" campaign pledges, which were a focal point of the concert. Among those present were actors Michael Douglas, Roger Moore, and Cicely Tyson; singer Harry Belafonte; and chess master Anatoly Karpov.

The Say Yes for Children campaign was a focal point of the event. Worldwide, more than 94 million signatures have been collected as pledges to the campaign, which offers ten simple points — such as "Put Children First", "Educate Every Child", and "Protect the Earth for Children" — designed to help build a world where "all children should be free to grow in health, peace and dignity."

Appearing on stage with the adult goodwill ambassadors were members of the Children's Theater Company (CTC), a New York-based children's performance workshop that is operated as a Bahá'í-inspired project. Each

member of the CTC read out one of the pledges and then introduced his or her new "friend" — one of the famous goodwill ambassadors, who explained the importance of that pledge.

Many of the songs performed at the concert celebrated human diversity and interdependence. Among them were "Color Me Human," which was written and performed by Eric Dozier, a Bahá'í from Los Angeles, and "The Greatest Moments," written by Mr. Lenz himself, who is an internationally



Hugh Locke

known Toronto-based song writer, musician and producer.

"For Bahá'ís, the idea of unity in diversity is a key theme," said Mr. Lenz, who is now producing a video of the concert. "And as we worked with UNICEF officials to put the concert together, there was a lot of discussion about diversity and the importance of ensuring that the entire human race was reflected in this gathering. So I know that I, and the other Bahá'ís who worked on this, felt this concert was a significant event."✱

In Argentina, a Bahá'í-inspired NGO works to strengthen civil society in a time of national crisis

Psychologist Millaray Riquelme (standing) leads a UNIDA-run workshop for local women leaders entitled "Ethical Models for Leadership with a Gender-Related Perspective for Local Development." A Bahá'í-inspired non-governmental organization (NGO), UNIDA focuses on training programs aimed at strengthening civil society and promoting participatory development models.



A Bahá'í-inspired NGO that focuses on training programs for strengthening civil society, UNIDA has seen an upsurge in interest in its programs since the Argentinian economic crisis began last year.

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Last November, the people of this vast and cosmopolitan city took to the streets, banging on pots and pans, protesting the sudden economic collapse that sent one of Latin America's richest countries into a deep and continuing crisis.

In January, the protests took on a new form as people in many areas began to create "neighborhood assemblies" to talk about what they can do to solve their own problems. Neighborhood assemblies have undertaken projects ranging from the community purchases of food at reduced prices to organizing neighborhood banks.

Whether or not the phenomenon persists, the spontaneous organization of people in neighborhood parks and plazas in this city of 12 million people reflects an increasing conviction that only with the active participation of civil society can Argentina's eco-

nomic and social problems be addressed.

It is an idea that has long been advocated by UNIDA, a Bahá'í-inspired non-governmental organization (NGO) that focuses extensively on training programs aimed at strengthening civil society and promoting participatory development models. UNIDA has seen an upsurge in interest in its programs since the crisis began, reaching its highest level of enrollments ever by early June.

"These neighborhood assemblies were started because the people now believe that they must take responsibility for action into their own hands," said Haleh Maniei, coordinator of students and promotion for UNIDA. "And, accordingly, people know they need more education in this area of strategic planning for NGOs, how to start up their own projects, and so on. So many more people are calling and asking about UNIDA's

programs nowadays.”

Founded in 1996 by a group of Bahá'ís, UNIDA – Universidad de la Naciones, Integración, Desarrollo, and Ambiente (University for Nations, Integration, Development, and Environment) – offers post-graduate courses in four areas: sustainable development, social anthropology, human development, and organizational processes.

Participatory methods

The four programs take up the study of “human scale” development and the accompanying methodologies for grassroots, participatory decision-making that UNIDA's founders say are key to effective social action.

“Those four subjects are really just different gates to enter into and arrive at the same place,” said Lucio Capalbo, general coordinator of UNIDA and one of its founders. “At the heart of what UNIDA strives to do is to help make civil society stronger by training its leaders to use new consultative and participatory methods of decision-making that can help people function better in groups. And this is at the core of the empowerment of civil society.”

Last year, even before the current crisis, UNIDA won several significant grants. In November, it was one of eight NGOs to be recognized by the Women in Equality Organization in a competition for grant money from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). In that competition, UNIDA received US\$8,900 for a program aimed at giving local women leaders training in ethical leadership.

Earlier in the year, UNIDA received funding from the European Community to offer training in conflict resolution to local leaders serving impoverished communities. Also, the City of Buenos Aires offered a subsidy for a “New Labor Roles” project, aimed at training 20 unemployed persons in furniture recycling.

Since its founding, UNIDA's enrollment has risen steadily, reaching a high of 128 students early this year. And, despite the economic downturn, it has managed this year to expand its offerings to two other cities in Argentina: Rosario and Viedma.

“Our training programs are exactly what the country needs at this moment,” said Mr. Capalbo, explaining that the core of each program is built around participatory decision-making and strategic planning methodologies that are designed to empower lo-

cal organizations.

More specifically, UNIDA teaches in all of its courses a specific method of non-adversarial decision-making known as “consultation,” the principles of which are derived from the Bahá'í teachings.

At its core, consultation is a highly participatory process that encourages a diversity of opinion and yet seeks to unite various constituencies. Among its key principles are: the primary goal is always the good of all; information should be gathered from the widest possible range of sources and points of view; the exchange of ideas should be full and candid, while courteous; any ideas put forward become the property of the group; and once a decision is made, it will be supported by all participants.

“Once people understand the process of consultation, they start to think in a new way,” said Mr. Capalbo, explaining that UNIDA's founders believe many of the problems in society today stem from adversarial decision-making models that set various groups against each other. “They think in the way of unity in diversity, not partisanship or fighting or conflict. And what UNIDA teaches is how to make decisions and work with others in a consultative way, how to design, execute and evaluate participatory programs, built with the cooperation of everyone.”

According to UNIDA graduates, the result is a powerful and practical formula for social empowerment.

“It was extremely useful, especially due to the concept of human scale economy and the systemic approach, and some others tools for planning,” said Fabian Roman,

“What UNIDA teaches is how to make decisions and work with others in a consultative way, how to design, execute and evaluate participatory programs, built with the cooperation of everyone.”

– Lucio Capalbo

The staff of UNIDA. Shown, left to right, back row, are: Nur Saeed, volunteer; Shahin Said, treasurer; Lucio Capalbo, general coordinator; Horacio Russo, development and cooperation coordinator; and Gaston Arballo, law administrator. Front row: Adriana Nedel, technical secretary; Haleh Maniei, student coordinator.



“The tools offered by UNIDA, such as the new concepts of development, the conceptual technique of consultation and other elements, have served me well for the planning of the project.”

— Judge Mario Daniel Caputo

The UNIDA building in Buenos Aires.

head of Plan21, an environmental management NGO in Buenos Aires.

An adjunct professor of tourism, development and environment at La Plata University, Mr. Roman took a UNIDA course on environmental management and sustainable development in 1999. Mr. Roman said he now teaches consultation in his courses.

Mario Daniel Caputo, a judge in Buenos Aires Province, took UNIDA's course on human rights in 2000 and is now working to start up an NGO to help refugees and undocumented immigrants in Argentina gain access to education, health care and employment.

“The tools offered by UNIDA, such as the new concepts of development, the conceptual technique of consultation and other elements, have served me well for the planning of the project,” said Judge Caputo. “They accompany me like new baggage in a way that allows me to apply such concepts in a concrete manner.”

Genesis at 1992 Earth Summit

UNIDA grew out of a response by a group of Bahá'ís in Argentina to the 1992 Earth Summit. Mr. Capalbo and others were participants in the Global Forum at Rio, and saw firsthand the enormous power of civil society — but, at the same time, the lack of coordination, and, to some extent, a divisive partisanship.

An engineer by training, Mr. Capalbo felt

that NGOs concerned about the environment could be given better tools for organization and cooperation.

The group that founded UNIDA began by publishing a magazine, *Ecology and World Unity*, which achieved fairly wide distribution in Argentina. “When we came back from Rio, we wanted to make a publication to show that there are important connections between environmental matters and models of development, and between development models and the kinds of institutions we have, and, finally, with cultural and spiritual matters,” said Mr. Capalbo.

In 1994, the group began to organize a series of annual “Global Change Seminars.” Each seminar consisted of five to seven meetings held on consecutive Saturday afternoons, with three to five panelists discussing topics related to environment and development, human rights, world order, global change and spirituality. Each seminar drew from 200 to 300 people, from many levels and sectors of Argentine society. Since 1999, the seminar has been held in association with the United Nations Information Center for Argentina and Uruguay.

The success of the seminars led the group to create an on-going training program, giving birth to UNIDA and its program of post-graduate offerings. The first year, the program had 22 enrollments. Today, UNIDA has its own building and two satellite programs, with total enrollments of 128.

Because of the difficult economic situation in the country, UNIDA has been forced to cut its tuition and fees, and the staff has taken a cut in pay. But Shahin Said, UNIDA's treasurer and one of its founders, believes the organization will survive. “There really is no similar program on the market, with the concept of creating unity in diversity and offering a new point of view on how to serve society,” said Mr. Said.

Added Horacio Russo, UNIDA's coordinator of cooperation and development: “In the models of development the world has now, power is generally concentrated in a few people, and corruption has more opportunities to appear. In the model UNIDA offers, where the consultation is properly used, you have more people participating and involved in the decision-making process — especially the people that are affected by those decisions. This doesn't mean everybody will have the same responsibilities. But everybody will contribute to the final idea, so that the community becomes the protagon-



nist of its own future.”

For its faculty, UNIDA draws on a wide range of experts — including sociologists, economists, environmental engineers, and lawyers — with a core group of some 15 professors and about 70 affiliates. The majority are not Bahá’ís.

Gender Equality a common thread

“One of the reasons I participate in UNIDA is because of their concept of ‘development on a human scale’ that is the backbone of all its projects,” said Millaray Riquelme, a psychologist with the Argentinean Centre for International Cooperation and Development (CACID) who has been teaching at UNIDA for three years. “And the fact that in all of their courses there is a chapter about the equality of women and men. No other organization does this as systematically.”

Ms. Riquelme was the lead professor in the IDB-sponsored course for local women leaders, held in the spring and titled “Ethical Models for Leadership with a Gender-Related Perspective for Local Development.” One evening in March, about 15 women gathered at one of UNIDA’s classrooms for

the course and Ms. Riquelme presented the history of various models for development as they related to women.

The students were all leaders of local NGOs. For many, it was their first experience with a UNIDA course, but in interviews many said it promised to be extremely valuable, especially the ideas about how to consult and develop better cooperation among groups of people.

“The most important thing is to obtain good training in group dynamics, training to be able to suggest objectives for the group and to make a project work better,” said Lila Luna, an anthropologist who runs a small women’s group based in a local public library.

Likewise, Maria Rosa Fernandez Lemoine, director of Conciliar, a community mediation NGO, expects the methods taught by UNIDA to be helpful, especially in the current crisis. “The people have many complaints but they are disorganized and don’t listen to each other,” said Ms. Lemoine. “So this type of training and methodology will be useful to implement projects for training women and men in the communities about communication and negotiation skills.”*

“In all of their courses there is a chapter about the equality of women and men. No other organization does this as systematically.”
– Millaray Riquelme, psychologist

Lord St. John of Bletso delivers annual Bahá’í lecture at University of Maryland

COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND, United States (BWNS) — Lord St. John of Bletso, a member of the British House of Lords and noted authority on environmental policy, told an audience of some 250 gathered at the University of Maryland on 31 May 2002 that the environmental challenges facing the planet will require both a passionate commitment to action as well as a balanced approach that does not dwell on “gloom and doom” predictions.

A hereditary member of the House of Lords since 1978, Lord St. John was at the University of Maryland as a guest of the Bahá’í Chair for World Peace to deliver the Eighth Annual Bahá’í Chair Lecture, on the theme of “Environmental Ethics and Public Policy.”

The Bahá’í Chair is an endowed teaching and research chair established in 1993 at the University’s Center for International Development and Conflict Management. Its mission is to develop alternatives to the violent resolution of conflict by identifying and applying universal ethical and moral principles.

“Environmental pressure groups have

started to believe that they must depict worst case scenarios, and exaggerate their dire predictions, to ‘scare’ the world into paying attention to this issue,” Lord St. John said, adding that such tactics often have the opposite effect by inducing a paralysis of will and a desire to ignore complex and seemingly intractable problems.

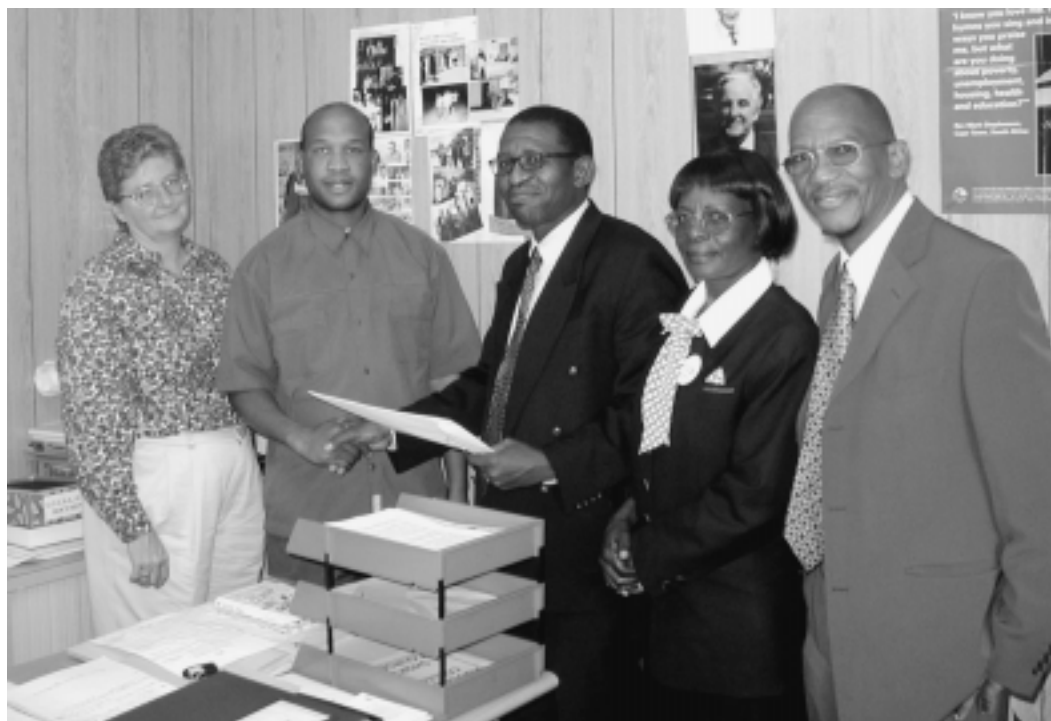
Instead, what is needed is a new global consensus that will engage and inspire people everywhere to make the changes and adjustments required to live in harmony with the earth’s life support systems, said Lord St. John. He pointed to the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, to take place in Johannesburg, South Africa, in August 2002, as an opportunity to forge this kind of consensus.

“It is crucial that the Summit succeed in showing that sustainability is far from being as abstract as it sounds, but rather is a life and death issue for millions upon millions of people around the world, and potentially the entire human race,” he said.*

— Bahá’í World News Service

Worldwide, the Bahá'í community transmits an appeal for religious tolerance

Members of the Bahá'í Community of Botswana present the letter of the Universal House of Justice to leaders of the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa (UCCSA). Shown left to right are: the Reverend Tim Colvin and the Reverend Mosweu Simane of the UCCSA; Dellah Barungwi; Josephine Tsapo; and Lefedile Molefe of the Bahá'í Community of Botswana. The presentation was made at the UCCSA headquarters in Gaborone, Botswana, on 15 May 2002.



Letter, continued from page one

effective, it must become far more vigorous and searching.

"Bahá'ís see in the struggle of diverse religions to draw closer together a response to the Divine Will for a human race that is entering on its collective maturity," the letter states. "[I]nterfaith discourse, if it is to contribute meaningfully to healing the ills that afflict a desperate humanity, must now address honestly and without further evasion the implications of the over-arching truth that called the movement into being: that God is one and that, beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one."

In the letter, the Universal House of Justice offers the assistance of the worldwide Bahá'í community in the creation of new efforts to foster such dialogue.

"Taken as a whole, the letter and its distribution amount to a global initiative by the worldwide Bahá'í community to assist humanity to overcome what has, at this stage

in history, emerged as a major obstacle to peace, security, and prosperity in the world," said Albert Lincoln, Secretary General of the Bahá'í International Community.

"In particular, the rise of religious fanaticism, as exemplified by terrorist attacks, attacks on houses of worship and the desecration of cemeteries, and civil wars spurred by religious differences, is becoming perhaps the dominant source of conflict in the world," said Dr. Lincoln, who represented the Community at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, held August 2000 at the United Nations. "So, as the Universal House of Justice itself explains in its letter, it felt obligated to 'speak frankly' to the leaders of other organized religions about the need to take action."

So far, the letter has been translated into 16 languages, including Afrikaans, Arabic, French, Hindi, Persian, Portuguese and Zulu. A great many more translations are in the works and the distribution of the letter

"Bahá'ís see in the struggle of diverse religions to draw closer together a response to the Divine Will for a human race that is entering on its collective maturity."

– Message of the Universal House of Justice

will be an on-going project.

For the most part, Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies around the world have focused first on distributing the letter to national level religious leaders, along with academics and journalists who specialize in religion. Local Bahá'í communities have also begun to join the effort by presenting the letter to the leaders of other religions at the local level.

In Brazil, for example, the National Spiritual Assembly prepared a list of some 44 names of national religious leaders, theologians, and religious academics, and then sent the letter out by mail or personal delivery. As a second step, some 330 copies of the letter were sent to 66 local Spiritual Assemblies in Brazil, for distribution to local religious leaders.

"In Brazilian society, religious divisions are a problem," said Roberto Eghrari, secretary of external affairs for the Brazilian National Spiritual Assembly. "There are tensions between evangelical groups and other Christian denominations, and between Christians and Afro-based religious groups. So we believe the distribution of this message is very timely, that it has the potential to bring new understandings."

Mr. Eghrari said religious leaders have acted with much appreciation. Several groups had indicated a desire for some kind of collaboration or follow-up on the message with the 55,000-member Brazilian Bahá'í community. "It is not just a matter of people reading the message. They want to put it into action."

Reports from national Bahá'í communities indicate that Bahá'í delegations bearing the letter were treated with a high level of courtesy and dignity, which was seen as a reflection of the seriousness of the issue.

"We felt an extraordinary courtesy from them all, a response not so much to us in particular, but to the occasion itself and the inherent weight of the message," said Amy Marks, who was involved with the efforts of the local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Capetown, South Africa, to present the letter to more than a dozen religious leaders there.

Dr. Marks, who served as co-chair of the Parliament of the World's Religions, South Africa, which was the local host of the 1999 Parliament of the World's Religions, said she believes the letter's warm reception has come partly because of the rising tide of interfaith activity in recent years.

"In our region, at least, I believe that the interreligious work that has gone before, particularly the goodwill generated by the Parliament of the World's Religions here, has laid a foundation for people to respond in a very sincere and reverent way," said Dr. Marks. "I anticipate that this letter will help to open new doors for dialogue among the religions."

A number of religious leaders indicated that they will distribute the letter among other leaders in their own organizations. In one African country, the national Muslim council requested additional copies for distribution to all mosques in the capital. An academic dean at a Catholic-run Latin American university expressed interest in working with the Bahá'í community there to develop a program for professors and students at the university.

In the United Kingdom, George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury and head of the Anglican Church, wrote: "I very much share your view that we all need to address the question of how our different faiths can become forces for peace and justice. Much honest discussion between the communities will be required as we pursue this goal, and it is good to learn, from the message which you delivered, of the ways in which the Bahá'í community is seeking to engage with these matters."

In Tanzania, the Bahá'í community re-

"The letter and its distribution amount to a global initiative by the worldwide Bahá'í community to assist humanity to overcome ... a major obstacle to peace, security, and prosperity in the world."

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



At his home in London, Professor Jonathan Sacks, at right, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Great Britain and the Commonwealth, receives the letter from the Universal House of Justice from the Hon. Barney Leith, Secretary of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom.

In Brazil, Dom Cláudio Hummes, the Catholic Archbishop of São Paulo, receives the letter of the Universal House of Justice from Ms. Fariba S. Vahdat, representing the Bahá'í Community of Brazil.



ceived positive responses from many of the 30 some leaders who have officially received the letter, said Shabani Seffu, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly there.

For example, Biharilal Keshavji Tanna of the Hindu Council of Tanzania wrote: "I have read the document with great interest and feel that it contains a supremely important message not only to the leaders of the faith groups, but to all thinking individuals, who must shoulder the duty and responsibility of breaking down barriers amongst the various groups of the family of mankind."

Some recipients, while expressing a gen-

eral sympathy for the goal of tolerance, nevertheless voiced clear reservations about the idea that all religions are one.

"You will be pleased to know that the Catholic Church acknowledges that the Spirit of God is at work in the whole of creation leading all people to a wonderful destiny," wrote Bishop Peter J. Cullinane, president of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference. "But this does not mean that all religious beliefs and practices are the same.

"Our commitment to 'investigate reality', to 'live the truth', and to 'respect others', does not allow us to be indifferent as to whether people are led towards the whole of what God has revealed or are left to live with only some of it," continued Bishop Cullinane. "Christians believe God has revealed his wonderful purposes more fully and more explicitly in the person, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Others, however, welcomed the call to examine the oneness of all religions. "I've always been impressed by the idea that all the religions are essentially one," said Prof. Johann Figl, head of the Institute for Religious Science of the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Vienna. "Today I think that the members of all religions are part of mankind, which is a unity. On the other side the religious and cultural differences are a valuable addition.

"These two dimensions, difference and unity, are to be reconsidered in every age, so that liberty and individuality are preserved and – at the same time – this common ground is an enduring basis," said Prof. Figl.*

Faith groups, including Bahá'ís of Germany, meet on environment and climate concerns

GÖTTINGEN, Germany (BWNS) — At an interfaith meeting in May, representatives of the main religions in Germany, including the Bahá'í Faith, issued a joint memorandum stressing the common ground among the religions on the issue of climate change and the environment.

Chaired by Gottfried Orth, director of the Ernst Lange-Institute for Ecumenical Studies, and held under the auspices of the German Federal Environment Ministry, the meeting took place 6-7 May 2002 and was titled "Orientation dialogue of religions represented in Germany on environmental politics with reference to the climate issue."

The main goal of the meeting was to widen the dialogue between the government and various religions in Germany on environmental issues as part of a process to enhance the receptivity and responsibility of important pillars of society.

Participants included three representatives of Catholic and Protestant churches; the general secretary of the Central Muslim Council and an advisor; a member of the council of the Buddhist Union and two other Buddhists; and three representatives of the German Bahá'í Community. Observers from the World Conference on Religion and Peace and backers of the Earth Charter were also present.*

City Montessori School wins UNESCO Peace Education award

LUCKNOW, India (BWNS) — City Montessori School, a large private school with a Bahá'í-inspired curriculum that stresses world citizenship and religious tolerance, has been awarded the 2002 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education.

Awarded annually by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the honor was given to City Montessori School (CMS) this year “in recognition of its efforts to promote the universal values of education for peace and tolerance...at a time when these values and principles are increasingly being challenged,” according to a UNESCO press release dated 6 June 2002.

Founded in 1959, the school has a reputation for a high level of academic excellence — and for a distinctive program of moral and spiritual education.

“For more than 40 years it has educated students to respect the values of tolerance and peace and sought to make them citi-

zens of the world,” said the UNESCO release. “The school’s founders, Jagdish and Bharti Gandhi, inspired by the non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi, founded their school on four fundamental principles: universal values, excellence, global understanding, and service to the community.”

The founders are also Bahá'ís — and they said that the Bahá'í teachings have likewise greatly inspired their work and the school’s curriculum. “We have been following the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and these teachings have led us to work more and more for world peace,” said Bharti Gandhi.

Mrs. Gandhi said when they founded the school, she and her husband were followers of Mahatma Gandhi. Both accepted the Bahá'í Faith in 1974, and since then they have increasingly incorporated principles of world citizenship and human oneness into the curriculum. “We rededicated ourselves to the cause of world unity,” said Mrs. Gandhi, who is the school’s director.*

“For more than 40 years it has educated students to respect the values of tolerance and peace and sought to make them citizens of the world.”

– UNESCO press release

A new volume of Bahá'í sacred writings, comprising Bahá'u'lláh's call to world leaders, is published

HAIFA, Israel, 13 June 2002 (BWNS) — A new volume of recently translated writings of Bahá'u'lláh, comprising a series of messages written to world leaders, has been issued by Bahá'í World Centre Publications.

Entitled *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, the 272-page book contains authoritative English translations of six major works written by Bahá'u'lláh in the latter half of the 19th century. Collectively, the works clearly enunciate Bahá'u'lláh's claim to prophethood and offer a prescription for peaceful and just leadership in the modern world.

“Never since the beginning of the world,” declares Bahá'u'lláh Himself in the book, “hath the message been so openly proclaimed.”

In addition to such pronouncements, Bahá'u'lláh calls on kings and rulers to reduce armaments, resolve international conflicts, and limit expenditures that place un-

necessary strain on their subjects, among other things.

Specifically, the book collects the *Suriy-i-Haykal* [Surih of the Temple], *Suriy-i-Ra'is* [Surih of the Chief], *Lawh-i-Ra'is* [Tablet of the Chief], *Lawh-i-Fu'ad* [Tablet to Fu'ad Pasha], *Lawh-i-Sultan* [Tablet to the Shah of Iran], and *Suriy-i-Muluk* [Surih of the Kings].

While portions of some of these works have been translated and published before, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* marks the first time full-length and fully researched translations of them have been released.

The collected volume represents only a fraction of Bahá'u'lláh's output during his 40-year ministry, during which He revealed thousands of tablets which altogether represent a volume more than 70 times the size of the Qur'an and more than 15 times the size of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.*

Leaders promise to create “A World Fit for Children”

Children, continued from page 4

at what has been accomplished this week. If leaders keep the promises they have made, we can bring about enormous positive change in the world in less than a generation.”

However, some of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that attended the Session expressed disappointment at the outcome. In particular, some NGO representatives said governments should have put more emphasis on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As well, some NGOs felt language on reproductive rights was vague. And many felt the document could have been even more specific in outlining commitments to be undertaken by governments.

“The major disappointment of NGOs was that the Convention on the Rights of the Child was not clearly designated as the legal framework for children’s rights worldwide,” said Mary Purcell, co-chair of the NGO Steering Committee for the Session. “If you move away from it, you make it more dilute.”

On the other hand, said Ms. Purcell, who is UN representative of the International Federation of University Women, the Session did strengthen the commitment of governments in areas of key importance.

“Ten years ago, at the Children’s Summit, the focus was much more on health, immunization, clean water, and the like,” said Ms. Purcell. “This document moves for-

ward into the reality of the new millennium, where things like armed conflict and HIV/AIDS are major problems for children.”

NGOs sponsored a number of side events and workshops in connection with the Session. According to Ms. Purcell, about 1,700 NGO representatives were accredited to the Session, and NGOs sponsored some 80 workshops and panel discussions. “They provided a wonderful place for networking and building future coalitions,” she said.

Another feature of the Session was the presence of children. For the first time in UN history, according to UNICEF, children addressed a plenary session of the UN General Assembly. The children came from a special Children’s Forum, which brought some 300 children from around the world to New York. A concert featuring children from around the world was also a distinctive feature of the Session. [See page 5.]

“Just bringing all of these children to New York, to be heard and seen, was very important,” said Bani Dugal, the main representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the Session. “It has given the whole issue of accountability a different meaning, by showing to governments the kind of impact their policies can have on children and hearing directly from the children that are affected by these policies.”

Among the delegates to the Children’s Forum was 15-year-old Anjali Mody, a member of the Bahá’í community of India. In a speech to the Children’s Forum, she talked about the importance of rights for women as a key issue in helping children. ✱

To the World’s Religious Leaders

Perspective, continued from page 3

man race that is entering on its collective maturity. The members of our community will continue to assist in every way we can. We owe it to our partners in this common effort, however, to state clearly our conviction that interfaith discourse, if it is to contribute meaningfully to healing the ills that afflict a desperate humanity, must now address honestly and without further evasion the implications of the over-arching truth that called the movement into being: that God is one and that, beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one.

With every day that passes, danger grows

that the rising fires of religious prejudice will ignite a worldwide conflagration the consequences of which are unthinkable. Such a danger civil government, unaided, cannot overcome. Nor should we delude ourselves that appeals for mutual tolerance can alone hope to extinguish animosities that claim to possess Divine sanction. The crisis calls on religious leadership for a break with the past as decisive as those that opened the way for society to address equally corrosive prejudices of race, gender and nation. Whatever justification exists for exercising influence in matters of conscience lies in serving the well-being of humankind. At this greatest turning point in the history of civilization, the demands of such service could not be more clear. “The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable”, Bahá’u’lláh urges, “unless and until its unity is firmly established.” ✱

“Ten years ago, at the Children’s Summit, the focus was much more on health, immunization, clean water, and the like. This document moves forward into the reality of the new millennium, where things like armed conflict and HIV/AIDS are major problems for children.”

– Mary Purcell, co-chair, of the NGO Steering Committee

Review: *Humanitarian Intervention*

Review, continued from back page

Doing so “adds a degree of persuasive weight to these principles as legitimate foundations for a fresh approach to humanitarian intervention and international law suitable for a multicultural world,” writes Prof. Lepard, who is an associate professor at the University of Nebraska College of Law. “Like normative statements of fundamental ethical principles in written and constitutive legal documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, revered moral texts are looked to by many believers as expressions of their highest ethical aspirations.”

In terms of human rights and humanitarian law, the “preeminent ethical principle is the unity of all human beings as equally dignified members of one human family, who in turn can, within a framework of unity, develop and take pride in individual, national, ethnic, or religious identities,” writes Prof. Lepard.

The principle, he writes, is implicit in the UN Charter — as in the preamble’s “we the peoples of the United Nations” and in various human rights documents. More recently, he notes, the Millennium Declaration of the UN General Assembly refers to the UN as “the indispensable common house of the entire human family.”

Proposing, then, to use the principle of “unity in diversity” as the lodestone by which the necessity of humanitarian intervention can be judged, Prof. Lepard goes on to show how other basic principles of human rights law can be likewise derived from it. The equal dignity of all human beings, for example, is implied by unity in diversity, as is the right to life and physical security.

But in what may be the most insightful aspect of the book, Prof. Lepard then goes on to show how the overarching principle of unity in diversity and its corollary principles can likewise be supported by the sacred texts of world religions. Specifically, he has combed through the essential texts of the Bahá’í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism — religions whose followers together represent three-quarters of the world’s population.

The texts of all of these religions, he writes, give strong support to the idea of human oneness. “For example, the

Bhagavad Gita affirms that the whole world is united in God,” writes Prof. Lepard. “In the words of one Hindu scholar, central to Hinduism is thus the belief that the ‘whole human family is one and basically indivisible.’... Moreover, the Hebrew Scriptures affirm: ‘Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?’ (Malachi 2:10)”

Religious texts also support the idea of a cherished diversity within that oneness, he writes. The Qur’an, for example, says that one of the signs of God is the creation of “the variety of your tongues and hues.”

Prof. Lepard goes on in some detail with respect to the other major ethical principles outlined in UN human rights documents and, likewise, shows how religious texts support them. The iteration extends to such principles as the idea of “just war” and the “obligation to undertake humanitarian intervention in extreme cases.”

He also explores the ramifications of this new approach, and draws out a framework for deciding when and how to intervene. He examines, for example, the legal legitimacy of the Security Council in exercising jurisdiction over so-called Chapter VII interventions under the UN Charter in terms of when human rights violations constitute a breach of the peace and the degree to which such interventions might violate the long-standing norm of “impartiality” of the UN.

Prof. Lepard also considers whether the Security Council and member states are “in fact legally or morally obligated” to intervene in certain cases of human rights violations, and he investigates rather controversial issues surrounding the command and composition of multinational forces for such missions. He also discusses the role of the veto power and offers suggestions for how the Council might improve its consultation.

At 496 pages, the book is at times quite legalistic. Yet its preponderance of evidence and thoroughness of consideration make the book one that policy makers concerned with the topic cannot afford to ignore.

Over the last decade or so, the connection between international policy and religion has been strengthened, notably in the arena of environmental conservation, and, more recently, in the area of poverty eradication, as exemplified by the World Bank-sponsored World Faiths Development Dialogue.

In making an explicit connection between international human rights law and religion, Prof. Lepard has taken this trend to the next level.*

“Like normative statements of fundamental ethical principles in written and constitutive legal documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, revered moral texts are looked to by many believers as expressions of their highest ethical aspirations.”

– Brian Lepard

Balancing human rights and state sovereignty in a multicultural world

Rethinking
Humanitarian
Intervention

By Brian D.
Lepard

The
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USA

One of the thorniest issues faced by the United Nations in recent years has been how to balance state sovereignty with human rights. At the core: when does the world have the right to tell a government how to treat its people?

The question is made even more difficult when discussed in the context of using outside military force to rescue people from grievous rights violations, something known as “humanitarian intervention.”

The discussion is not abstract. There have been recent humanitarian military interventions in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, Kosovo, and East Timor.

In some cases, as with Rwanda, intervention was too late and too weak to prevent a humanitarian crisis. The deployment of a small UN peacekeeping mission in the mid-1990s was virtually useless in preventing ethnic violence between the Tutsi and Hutu that took some 800,000 lives.

In Kosovo, a NATO force used aerial bombing in 1999 to intervene on behalf of ethnic Albanians in that Yugoslavian province. The Yugoslavian government ultimately reined in those responsible for violations against the Kosovo Albanians, but an estimated 500 civilian lives were lost to NATO bombs.

Indeed, in virtually all such cases, the moral and policy choices are difficult.

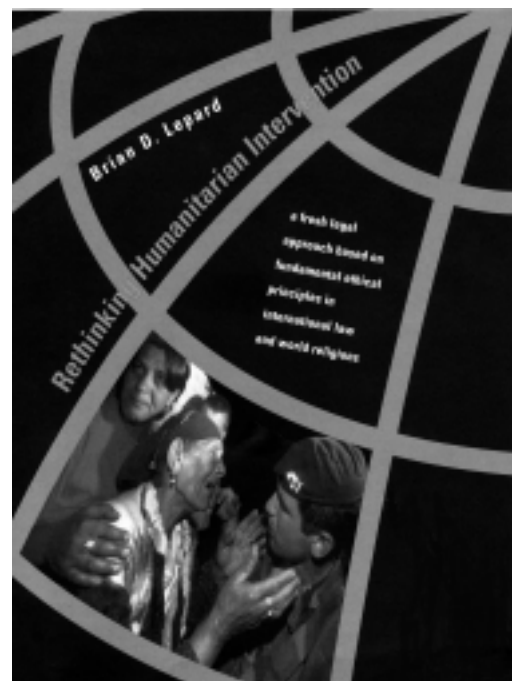
Part of the conundrum is that international law is mixed. While some parts of the UN Charter clearly uphold the concept of state sovereignty, other passages allow the Security Council to use military force such as “may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.”

Likewise, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that it is “essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,” a statement often interpreted as upholding state sovereignty. But it also proclaims that “[e]veryone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can

be fully realized,” granting in the minds of some a moral entitlement to human rights — not in the least of which is to life, liberty and security of person.

Into this quandary comes Brian D. Lepard and his important new book, *Rethinking Humanitarian Intervention*, which seeks to do just what its title implies: reconsider the fundamental legal and ethical issues surrounding the use of force across international borders to rescue people facing egregious rights violations.

The outcome of Prof. Lepard’s considerations is enormously significant. Among the main offerings of the book is a new methodology for reconciling the competing provisions of international law.



More specifically, Prof. Lepard suggests that competing claims can be reconciled by looking beyond the words contained in the law and instead to fundamental ethical principles — principles which, he further suggests, can be derived from and supported by the revered texts of the world’s major religions.

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