



ONE COUNTRY

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

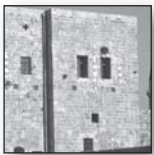
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Newsletter of the Bahá'í
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In Australia, Bahá'í religious classes in state schools find wide appeal

Bahá'í teachings about moral values and respect for other cultures and religions are appreciated by parents; classes are offered in some 300 public schools throughout the country.



In Perth, volunteer teacher Faeghe Evans is shown leading a Bahá'í Education in State Schools (BESS) class.

SYDNEY, Australia — Like many other parents around the world, Vicki Thomas very much wants her children to grow up with some kind of religious feeling.

"My children are very young, and they don't need anything too heavy at this stage, but it's important to me that they do have a faith education," said the 33-year-old resident of St. Ives, a northern suburb of metropolitan Sydney.

Her choice for such training may be somewhat surprising, however, given that she comes from a Catholic background. Even though she is not a Bahá'í, she chooses to send all three of her children to Bahá'í religious classes, which are held at their primary school.

"I liked the open-minded approach of the Bahá'í curriculum," she said.

Ms. Thomas is not alone among Australian parents, who have the option of enrolling their children in Special Religious Education courses at the state schools — thanks in part to a century-old law requiring schools to offer religious training if parents want it.

In all, nearly 6,000 primary school children attend Bahá'í classes in Australia, which are offered in more than 300 state-run schools throughout the country. The classes are offered in state schools primarily to provide religious instruction to Bahá'í children. Yet more than 90 percent of the children in Bahá'í classes are from families who are not members of the Bahá'í Faith — indicating the wide appeal of the Bahá'í approach to religious education.

As might be expected, many more children attend religious classes offered by Christians. Some 70 percent of Australians identify themselves as Christian, and many thousands

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No state is an island: Re-envisioning collective security

The modern nation-state was founded in part on the idea that the people within its borders will be more secure if they band together against outside threats.

The idea has worked pretty well. The most developed states have achieved high levels of security and even comfort in recent years — although citizens of numerous “failed” states have suffered greatly, from poverty, civil strife, and, all too often, from human rights violations at the hands of leaders that were supposed to protect them.

The powers of the nation-state, in fact, have been extended to protect its citizens against all kinds of threats — from concerns about the safety of food and water to deficits in social welfare to workplace hazards.

But in recent years, thoughtful people have also seen a great waning in the state's power to provide security. As our world has become more interconnected and interdependent, the nature of the threats to citizens of a nation-state — any nation-state — have become more diffuse, pronounced, and intractable.

The simple fact is that today some of the gravest threats to the well being of citizens everywhere come from small groups, devices or organisms that easily pass through the once secure borders of the once well-fortified nation-state.

This new reality figures prominently in the conclusions of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. Appointed by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the Panel is composed of 16 former heads of state, foreign ministers, and top government and private officials. Their expertise — and the power and frankness of their convictions — make the Panel's report mandatory reading for anyone concerned about long term peace and security. [See page 14.]

At the heart of the Panel's report is this observation:

“Today's threats recognize no national boundaries, are connected, and must be ad-

dressed at the global and regional as well as the national levels. No State, no matter how powerful, can by its own efforts alone make itself invulnerable to today's threats.”

In view of this, the Panel calls for an expanded and revised notion of collective security to counter wider threats such as terrorism, biological weapons, civil strife, transnational organized crime, environmental degradation, and infectious disease.

“What is needed today is nothing less than a new consensus between alliances that are frayed, between wealthy nations and poor, and among peoples mired in mistrust across an apparently widening cultural abyss,” the Panel concludes. “The essence of that consensus is simple: we all share responsibility for each other's security. And the test of that consensus will be action.”

The Bahá'í International Community has long said that collective security is humanity's only route to lasting peace. More than 140 years ago, Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.”

Bahá'u'lláh also said the essential condition for creating this underlying sense of unity is the recognition of our collective oneness and interdependence. “The Earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens,” He said.

And Bahá'u'lláh also made clear that a wide range of issues — from poverty to racial prejudice to equality of the sexes — must likewise be addressed for humanity to realize its full potential and for peace to be firmly established.

In this regard, the Bahá'í International Community has long supported international institutions that have sought to express and uphold the notion of collective security. Bahá'ís were early supporters of the concept of the League of Nations. And Bahá'ís were present at the founding of the United Nations and have since been active as an inter-

national non-governmental organization in support of its goals and principles.

At the same time, the Bahá'í International Community has also long recognized the shortcomings and limitations of the United Nations. In 1955, for example, the Community issued a statement proposing major revisions to the United Nations Charter.

Although many of the 1955 proposals concerned the Cold War crisis, many of the ideas — such as a call for broader membership in the Security Council and a more active General Assembly — seem to presage the current High Level Panel's report.

The introductory letter to the proposals, for example, outlines the broad principles by which Bahá'ís approach the issue of collective security:

“The Bahá'í recommendations are based upon three apparent truths: that real sovereignty is no longer vested in the institutions of the national state because the nations have become interdependent; that the existing crisis is moral and spiritual as well as political; and that the existing crisis can only be surmounted by the achievement of a world order representative of the peoples as well as the nations of mankind.”

The identification of a “moral and spiritual” crisis seems especially relevant today when perhaps the greatest threat to humanity comes, in fact, not from new technologies or even political ideologies but rather from the spread of religious fanaticism.

In the twentieth century, the greatest threats to the collective well-being of humanity came not in reality from bombs or bullets, but rather from ideologies that stressed the superiority of one group over another, whether race, nationality, or economic class. And in all cases, the main threat came largely from one state, against another state.

Today, however, some of the biggest threats to humanity's common security come from individuals or small groups acting against the state. And the underlying motivation for these threats often comes from religious intolerance and fanaticism.

This point was borne out in a letter two years ago from the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the worldwide Bahá'í community.

“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,” wrote the Universal House of

Justice in an open letter to the world's religious leaders.

“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,” the Universal House of Justice continued.

In its analysis of the global security situation, the High Level Panel identifies poverty and underdevelopment as underlying motivations for some of the potential threats to our common security. The Panel also points to the issue of religious intolerance.

“International terrorist groups prey on weak States for sanctuary. Their recruitment is aided by grievances nurtured by poverty, foreign occupation and the absence of human rights and democracy; by religious and other intolerance; and by civil violence — a witch's brew common to those areas where civil war and regional conflict intersect,” writes the Panel.

In considering the new vision of collective security offered by the Panel, it is important to see the picture in its widest view: that of our underlying oneness and essential interconnectedness.

The Panel lays out a number of structural changes at the United Nations. These include a larger Security Council, a reinvigorated General Assembly, and a revitalized Commission on Human Rights.

It also envisions a greater role for civil society, endorsing the recently released report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations/Civil Society Relations. “We believe that civil society and non-governmental organizations can provide valuable knowledge and perspectives on global issues,” said the Panel.

In the end, however, the success or failure of these reforms will hinge upon the degree to which world leaders — and the peoples they serve — fully recognize the degree to which we have become interdependent — and the degree to which the human race is one.

Only through the recognition of our essential oneness, a fact that is fundamental to our material and spiritual reality, will humanity find the motivation to break with the past and create the sense of global unity required for us to move to the next level of collective security.*

Today, some of the biggest threats to humanity's common security come from individuals or small groups acting against the state. And the underlying motivation for these threats often comes from religious intolerance and fanaticism.

In Israel, an historic renovation touches two communities deeply

This historic fortress, built upon Crusader foundations in the historic city of Acre, Israel, is where Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned for more than two years by the Ottoman empire. The windows on the upper right are to the room where Bahá'u'lláh was held.



The citadel's renovation offers a lesson on the art of compromise in historic renovation. The fortress-prison has historic significance not only to Bahá'ís but also to Jewish groups.

ACRE, Israel — In the late 1860s, Bahá'í pilgrims walked hundreds of kilometers from Persia, winding their way over barren mountains, past treacherous enemies, and though blistering deserts, to reach this ancient Mediterranean city in what is now northern Israel.

Their goal was to visit Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of their Faith, Who was being held prisoner in a fortress after His banishment to Acre by the Ottoman authorities. For many pilgrims, merely to gaze on His face was the most important experience of their lives.

Sadly, many came all the way from Iran only to be turned back at the gates of this walled city. They often stood beyond the moat and contented themselves with a glimpse of Bahá'u'lláh as He waved from a distant window.

Today also, Bahá'ís in the thousands come as pilgrims to this same city and to nearby Haifa, albeit by jet aircraft and motor transport. And it is likewise a high point in

their lives merely to visit the places here where Bahá'u'lláh lived during the years from 1868 until His passing in 1892.

Among the focal points of Bahá'í pilgrimage has been a visit to the room in the fortress where Bahá'u'lláh was held from 1868 to 1870, and where He revealed some of His best-known works, including a proclamation of His divine mission to political and religious leaders.

For nearly 10 years, however, the room and the adjoining areas were closed because of the need for extensive restoration and conservation work. That work was recently completed and, in June 2004, Bahá'í pilgrims were allowed to visit once again.

While the re-opening marks a significant event for Bahá'ís around the world, the research, careful thinking, and delicate negotiations behind the citadel's restoration also offer the world at large considerable insight as to the historical and scientific outlook of the Bahá'í Faith as a independent world re-

ligion that has arisen in modern times.

The story of the citadel's renovation also offers an instructive lesson on the art of compromise in historic renovation. In this case, the fortress-prison has historic significance not only to Bahá'ís but also to Jewish groups concerned with preserving the memory of Jewish activists who were incarcerated and executed there during the British Mandate.

"The most exciting thing about this project is that it has so many faces," said Erol Paker, a Jerusalem-based architect who served as a consultant on the project. "The building has a history that goes back a thousand years, and it had many different uses.

"It starts from Crusader times, and then it was abandoned for some time, until the Ottomans built a new fortification," said Mr. Paker. "It was a building where Bahá'u'lláh was held a prisoner. And in the 1920s, 30s and 40s, Jewish prisoners were held in it during the British Mandate."

Those different historical perspectives and uses gave rise to competing visions for how the renovation should be done, added Mr. Paker. "But we achieved something that was approved by all of the parties, without any conflict."

Acre in history

Acre is an historic city in its own right. It has been a principal base of the Romans, the Persians, and the Crusaders, who named the city St. Jean d'Acre and for whom it served as their last capital and foothold in the Holy Land.

The building where Bahá'u'lláh was held prisoner was erected by the Ottomans in

about 1797 on top of the hospice of the Hospitallers of St. John, one of the few surviving Crusader structures.

A commanding stone structure built near the shore of the Mediterranean, the citadel dominates the northwestern corner of the ancient walled city. At one point, it withstood a bombardment by Napoleon.

And the fact that the British used the fortress to imprison Jewish resistance fighters during the first half of the 20th century gives it a special significance in Israeli history.

About fifteen years ago, at the instigation of a group of survivors from among the Jewish prisoners, the Government agreed to transform the site into a museum. The Bahá'í World Centre, based in the Acre/Haifa area, asked that the sacred character of the place for Bahá'ís be given due consideration in the planning.

One key issue that quickly emerged was what time period the restoration should reflect. The Israelis wanted it to date to 1947, to coincide with the historic break-out of Jewish prisoners, while the Bahá'ís wanted it to reflect the time period around 1870, when Bahá'u'lláh was incarcerated.

For years the discussions made little headway, but then it was realized that a major undertaking to excavate and restore the Crusader buildings below the citadel had weakened the structure. And so about ten years ago, the Israeli authorities embarked on a project to reinforce and renovate the citadel. Because of the citadel's importance to Bahá'ís, the Bahá'í World Centre offered to collaborate on the project.

"The authorities realized that the building was threatened," said Albert Lincoln, Secre-

"The most exciting thing about this project is that it has so many faces. The building has a history that goes back a thousand years, and it had many different uses. But we achieved something that was approved by all of the parties, without any conflict."

**– Erol Paker,
architect**



The restoration work in the room once occupied by Bahá'u'lláh. Many measures were taken to ensure the sacred and historic character of the citadel was respected.

The room where Bahá'u'lláh was held, after its renovation. Careful research was done to ensure the historical accuracy of the reconstruction work.



tary-General of the Bahá'í International Community, who handled the Bahá'í side of negotiations with Israeli authorities. "And basically they allowed us to review the engineering proposal, knowing of its importance to Bahá'ís."

"Ultimately, agreement was reached on a creative compromise under which the interior of the upper floor of the northwest tower [where Bahá'u'lláh was held] would be restored to the situation that existed in 1920, and the exterior of the building to its condition in 1947," Mr. Lincoln said.

Mr. Lincoln said the period for 1920 was chosen for the interior instead of 1870 because there was virtually no documentation from the time before the arrival of the British and it seemed unlikely that much changed during the last fifty years of Ottoman rule.

Another issue was authenticity. Photographs from the 1920s showed wooden partitions — not the usual bars one associates with a prison. "It turned out that the British had done the iron work in the 1940s," said Mr. Lincoln. "The Israelis didn't want the bars removed. 'They're essential to the atmosphere,' they said. But we said it is about authenticity."

Architect Paker said these sorts of issues and compromises arise frequently in any significant historic renovation. "All of the parties made some concessions in the end," he said.

Another aspect of the project involved the degree to which the restoration should reflect

modern building techniques and how an authentic appearance would be achieved.

In general, traditional materials were used to obtain as authentic a restoration as possible. For example, one part of the work involved installing false ceilings made of *katrani* timber, the dense and heavy wood used by the Ottoman builders, under the concrete roof.

White lime plaster of the type used in the 19th century was applied in the many places where the original had peeled off.

"The idea was that we didn't want to make the project look too new, but at the same time not look artificially old," said Orang Yazdani, a Bahá'í specialist in conservation architecture, who managed the project.

"In five years, it will look closer to what it was like in Bahá'u'lláh's time — as it gets older it will look more like that time," Mr. Yazdani said.

Another challenge was meeting modern safety codes, Mr. Yazdani said. "How do you deal with modern needs and requirements — especially safety — in an historical building without it looking too out of place?"

The solution involved using copper lanterns, discreet spot lighting, and smoke alarms that are tucked away. However, the cell of Bahá'u'lláh was exempted from such facilities owing to its sacred status.

Further, said Mr. Lincoln, research into the building's history and physical layout turned up a few surprises for Bahá'í historians. In particular, he said, some of the discoveries ran

Another issue was authenticity.

Photographs from the 1920s showed wooden partitions — not the usual bars one associates with a prison.

counter to traditional Bahá'í imagery about the deprivations faced by the Faith's chief figure during His imprisonment there.

"For decades, most Bahá'ís understood that Bahá'u'lláh was held in a jail cell, with bars on the window, and so on," said Mr. Lincoln. "But it turns out it wasn't a prison. It was a military barracks. And the floor where Bahá'u'lláh and His family were held had been the quarters of someone of high standing, probably a military commander.

"It was the process of research that led us to these conclusions," added Mr. Lincoln. "And it had become clear that if we followed the scientific evidence, some of the Bahá'í world would be disoriented, because it required a rethinking of the whole concept of what Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment here meant."

Traditionally, Mr. Lincoln noted, many Bahá'ís have understood Bahá'u'lláh's numerous references to His suffering primarily in relation to the material deprivations He faced during His imprisonment and exile — something that was also part of the pattern of persecution faced by all of the Founders of the world's religions.

"In fact, it seems, even though Acre was undoubtedly a horrible place, with heat and dysentery and filth, Bahá'u'lláh was given some of the best quarters available."

Mr. Lincoln was quick to point out that such an understanding does not detract from the injustice behind Bahá'u'lláh's wrongful imprisonment — or mitigate the fact that He was indeed held as a prisoner in a place that was notorious for its bad conditions.

In the late nineteenth century, Acre was used by the Ottomans as a prison colony, serving as a repository for some of the worst criminals in the empire. Banishment to the city was considered equivalent to a death sentence because of the filthy and plague-ridden conditions. Mr. Lincoln noted, for example, that one-third of a group of 86 Bulgarian prisoners died within one month of arriving in Acre in 1878.

"But the important lesson here may be that scholarship will always unearth new facts and new perspectives," said Mr. Lincoln. "This process of calling into question what we thought we knew reflects one aspect of the harmony of science and religion, which is a basic principle of the Bahá'í Faith.

"Other religious communities probably would have come to the same conclusion, because they are also living in the modern age," said Mr. Lincoln. "But it might have been more controversial."

On a personal note, Mr. Lincoln added that the new historical knowledge acquired through his involvement with the project had led him to a new understanding of the sufferings of Bahá'u'lláh.

"I went back and read in a completely different way what Bahá'u'lláh said about His suffering," said Mr. Lincoln. "For me, it is a matter of knowing that Bahá'u'lláh had the solutions for avoiding the First World War and the Second World War and the Holocaust and untold other sufferings for humanity — and no one would listen to him. And that is a different kind of suffering entirely."*

"The important lesson here may be that scholarship will always unearth new facts and new perspectives. This process of calling into question what we thought we knew reflects one aspect of the harmony of science and religion, which is a basic principle of the Bahá'í Faith."

**– Albert Lincoln,
Secretary-General
of the Bahá'í
International
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UN again expresses concern about Iran's Bahá'ís

UN expresses concern about Iran's Bahá'ís

NEW YORK – For the 17th time since 1985, the United Nations General Assembly has passed a resolution expressing "serious concern" over the human rights situation in Iran, making specific mention of the on-going persecution of the Bahá'í community there.

The resolution, introduced by Canada, passed by a vote of 71 to 54 on 20 December 2004. It called on Iran to "eliminate all forms of discrimination based on religious grounds" and took note of the recent upsurge of human rights violations against Iran's Bahá'ís.

Specifically, the resolution noted the "continuing discrimination against persons belonging to minorities, including Christians, Jews and Sunnis, and the increased discrimination against the Baha'is, including cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, the denial of free worship or of publicly carrying out communal affairs, the disregard of

property rights, the destruction of sites of religious importance, the suspension of social, educational and community-related activities and the denial of access to higher education, employment, pensions and other benefits."

Bani Dugal, principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations, said the worldwide Bahá'í community is thankful for the support of the international community of nations.

"As noted by the resolution, the situation for Bahá'ís has been worsening this year, and expressions of concern by the international community such as this remain the chief means of protection for Iran's beleaguered Bahá'í community," said Ms. Dugal.

In Swaziland, saving a “virtual forest” with an efficient new stove design

MATSAPHA, SWAZILAND – Setting out to design a new fuel efficient wood-burning stove for developing countries, Crispin Pemberton-Pigott started out by imagining a “virtual forest.” He knew that conservationists often speak of “virtual power plants” when they promote various measures to conserve electricity. And so he began by imagining how many trees might be saved if one could invent an inexpensive and yet truly efficient wood-burning cooker.

“In a way, the Vesto stove began as a flight of fancy, to see if I could bring to market an innovative stove that ignored the nay-sayers who said a commercially viable, highly efficient stove cannot be made cheaply,” said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott, head of New Dawn Engineering here, an appropriate technology design and manufacturing company that serves southern Africa.

“If it worked, we could save a very large number of people the effort of cutting down trees, and at the same time avoid the need to plant a lot of new trees for fuel,” said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott. “So the idea of creating a virtual forest emerged.”

Mr. Pemberton-Pigott’s “flight of fancy” has paid off considerably. The stove burns just one-quarter of the wood needed to cook on an open fire, and it is virtually smokeless. New Dawn has sold more than 1,000 of the new stoves since its invention in early 2002.

Moreover, the stove was honored in September by the Design Institute of South Africa (DISA), taking the Chairman’s Special Award, calling it “an outstanding piece of design which is of the highest international standard.”

“The relatively low retail price brings the Vesto stove within reach of people at the lower end of the economic scale,” the Award citation reads.

Judging criteria included innovation, cost/value relationship, performance, safety and ergonomics, environmental impact, appearance, and ease of installation and maintenance.

“That is the highest such design award that we know of in Africa,” said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott. The stove was also a winner in the Houseware category of the annual event held by the South African Bureau of Standards.

The two new awards cement the reputations of Pemberton-Pigott and his New Dawn Engineering as among the most innovative and creative of appropriate technology companies in the world. Founded by Pemberton-Pigott and his wife in 1984, New Dawn makes a wide range of simple but highly efficient machines for use at the village level in Africa and other developing countries. In addition to the Vesto and other stoves, these machines include hand-operated oil presses and rock crushers, fence makers, and various and various brick and roof tile makers.

“We believe that labor-intensive equipment and virtuous social and economic development can be catalysts not only for third world countries, but for illustrating a better future for mankind,” said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott.

Mr. Pemberton-Pigott, who moved from Canada to Africa 27 years ago, cites his practice of the Bahá’i Faith as the inspiration behind New Dawn’s efforts to design and manufacture economical machines for Africa’s villages.

“The Bahá’i Writings speak of the importance of initiating ‘measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people,’” said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott. “They say there can be ‘no undertaking greater than this.’”

How it works

The portable Vesto stove burns wood and dung more efficiently and with less emissions than conventional stoves. Dung, especially, is a notoriously low-yield and smokey fuel but is used in some regions of Africa, such as Ethiopia, where no other fuel is available.

Crispin Pemberton-Pigott, principal inventor of the Vesto stove and director of New Dawn Engineering, poses with a display of the stove, which recently won the Chairman’s Special Award at the Design Institute of South Africa.



The key to this efficiency, said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott, is a design that pre-heats incoming air while at the same time using that air to insulate the fire, preventing heat loss.

"This increases the efficiency of burning low quality fuel, like dung, by up to six times," said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott.

The Vesto has three types of secondary air inlets, allowing it to function as both a charcoal-producing gasifier and a charcoal burning, wood burning, or dung burning stove.

Another feature of the Vesto design is that it can be manufactured relatively simply. "Its production does not require complex and expensive tooling or high capital expenditure," said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott.

"Many innovative stoves are so elaborate that they are almost impossible to make in a simple environment. In designing this stove, we sought both simplicity and extreme efficiency."

Based on a modified 25-liter paint can, the stove sells for about US\$40.00. If sales increase, and more units are produced, that price will drop further, said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott.

In addition to burning fuel more efficiently — a considerable benefit in a region where forests are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain — the stove also offers innovative safety measures.

"Stoves are a major source of health problems for women and children," says Pemberton-Pigott. "The Vesto addresses these by being safe to use — not very hot on the outside."

Unlike a paraffin stove, the Vesto contains its fire in a gas-insulated tin, which not only makes it cooler to the touch but confines the fire if the stove is ever knocked over.

In addition, the fact that the Vesto burns virtually any biomass type fuel means that households can move away from the use of expensive charcoal.

"African cities use huge amounts of charcoal, produced at despairingly low conversion rates from virgin forests," said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott. "No one has even converted a large urban population from charcoal back to wood."

"Doing so would also save a very large amount of forest because the wood is so much more efficient in terms of the total heat in the fuel and the total amount of cooking done by it compared with charcoal."

"To achieve this, it would be necessary to have a stove that burned charcoal well and wood very well," said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott. "People might buy it as a charcoal stove then sooner or later they would run out of charcoal, and try burning wood."

"They would immediately realize that the lower cost wood was a good or even better fuel than the charcoal had been," said Mr. Pemberton-Pigott.

The Moya Center for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Swaziland recently received a donation



of four Vesto stoves for its child-headed households.

"All of these children have been using firewood and an open fire to cook their food," said Jane Cox, director of the Moya Center. "And their 'kitchens' they are a smoke trap and particularly unhealthy."

"I have been back to these households [since they got stoves] and they speak with one voice," said Ms. Cox. "They use a fraction of the firewood they had been using, with the amazing result of water boiling within 10 minutes and no smoke visible. The children light up as they speak of the Vestos stove."

Designed around a modified 25-liter paint can, the Vesto stove sells for about US\$29 and is some four times more efficient than an open fire. So far, more than 1,000 have been sold.

"African cities use huge amounts of charcoal, produced at despairingly low conversion rates from virgin forests. No one has ever converted a large urban population from charcoal back to wood."

– Crispin Pemberton-Pigott, New Dawn Engineering



Cutaway model of the Vesto stove shows the various chambers that help to pre-heat the incoming air, boosting the stove's efficiency.

In Australia, Bahá'í religious classes in state schools find wide appeal

New Zealand recording artist Grant Hindin Miller gave a concert for a group of BESS students in 1999 at the Rainworth State School in Brisbane, Queensland.



Nearly 6,000 primary school children attend Bahá'í classes, in more than 300 state-run schools throughout Australia. Ninety percent are not members of the Bahá'í Faith — indicating the wide appeal of the Bahá'í approach to religious education.

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of children attend Christian classes in state schools. For example, a 2001 article in *Alive* magazine said there were Christian classes in 1,000 schools in New South Wales, Australia's largest state. By comparison, last year Bahá'í classes were held in some 150 schools in New South Wales. Classes are also offered in Australia by Buddhist and Muslim groups, among others.

Moral values stressed

In accordance with the Bahá'í belief that all the world's great religions share the same divine origin and have been revealed progressively to humanity, the approach of Bahá'í Education in State Schools (BESS), as the program is known, includes an introduction to the world's other great religions.

BESS classes also stress the development of moral values as taught in all world religions, such as patience, honesty, and compassion, as well as broad social principles, such as the oneness of humanity, the equality of women, and the promotion of racial

and religious tolerance.

"Parents appreciate that we teach the students to respect the different cultures and religions of the world in the classes," said Yvonne Perkins, a spokesperson for the Bahá'í community of Australia, which has about 10,000 members.

"They also like the moral basis of the program, and the fact that we encourage children to look at their own behavior and how improving it helps them to contribute to a better world," said Ms. Perkins.

In Australia, unlike some countries around the world, religious education in public schools is not strictly prohibited as a violation of church and state separation. General Religious Education, covering religious traditions in a broad sociological context, is often part of the curriculum — although prayers are not said and no one religion is singled out as the truth.

In addition, the law in most states and territories allows students to obtain specialized religious education, relating to a specific belief system, in the school setting. This

is known as Special Religious Education (SRE). It is offered by specific religious groups, approved and administered at the state level.

In Western Australia, for example, the Department of Education and Training reviews the curriculum plans of the various religious groups that wish to offer Special Religious Education classes.

"The Bahá'í Special Religious Curriculum — the Peace Pack — has been reviewed and subsequently endorsed by the Department for trained Bahá'í personnel to deliver," said Brian Rogers, principal curriculum officer for the Department.

"In endorsing the program, the Department looked at general issues such as pedagogical approach rather than specific information, which is left to the individual religious bodies to decide," added Mr. Rogers.

Informal Bahá'í classes have been taught at schools in Australia since the 1960s, begun by some Bahá'í mothers who started classes in their local schools to provide spiritual education for their children. The BESS program was formally established in the late 1980s, when the Bahá'í community was approved by the New South Wales State Government as a provider of Special Religious Education.

Today, BESS classes are taught by hundreds of Bahá'í volunteers in most states around the country. They receive ongoing training in religious education, undergo child protection training, and are registered according to the policy of state-level education departments. They use a variety of curriculum resources specifically developed for BESS classes by Bahá'ís who are professional educators.

Kath Podger, former head of the Australian Bahá'í community's Office of Education, said that many volunteers run more than one class and are often parents themselves.

"As parents, they recognize the need to provide spiritual education for their own children and to offer it to everyone as a service to the community at large," she said.

An emphasis on values

In addition to the basic teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, BESS classes cover peace studies and the great variety of religions, cultures, and festivals around the world. Children share their own cultural heritage through song and craft. Prayers and meditation are also incorporated.

Government officials have indicated that they recognize the need for religious and

values education in an increasingly multicultural Australia.

"The Society and Environment Learning Area statement acknowledges that a focus on the diversity of interaction between cultures, beliefs and practices in the past and present is important for all year levels," said Mr. Rogers of the Western Australia Education and Training Department, referring to the state-level curriculum statement that encourages students to develop a respect for cultural heritage and a commitment to social justice.

The BESS program places a strong emphasis on encouraging each individual child to identify those virtues he or she already possesses, and those he or she needs to focus on developing.

The classes adhere to the Bahá'í principle that education should facilitate an individual's capacity to think independently and objectively. Hence, BESS teachers do not seek to convert or indoctrinate their students, but rather to encourage them to question and explore ways of serving humanity.

As well, children from families who are not Bahá'ís can only attend BESS classes with parental permission.

"We've experienced an enormous growth of interest and numbers in BESS classes over the past decade in particular," said Ms. Perkins, the national Bahá'í spokesperson. "The classes have expanded in number and size largely through word of mouth, and through the results that parents see in chil-

"Parents appreciate that we teach the students to respect the different cultures and religions of the world in the classes."

**— Yvonne Perkins,
Bahá'í community of
Australia.**

A BESS class at the Fig Tree Pocket State School in Brisbane. Teacher Shidan Toloui-Wallace is at right. Only one of the children in the class comes from a Bahá'í family.





dren who attend them.

"Children love the way the classes are taught — the program is quite varied, with a lot of arts and crafts, meditation, and stories, so it keeps their imagination stimulated," Ms. Perkins added. BESS teachers also incorporate singing, dancing, games, and other participatory activities in their classes.

Many teachers draw heavily on a Bahá'í curriculum initially developed by professional teacher Georgina Sounness and illustrator Terri Turner, known as the "Peace Pack."

The two women began writing the books after more than 40 children turned up at a BESS class they opened in Perth in 1993.

"It was quite daunting, because we realized the classes could get even bigger than that, and there wasn't much in the way of formal material for other volunteers to use," Ms. Sounness said.

The "Peace Pack" is a four-part course for varying age groups, accompanied by a CD of songs for children prepared by Western Australian musician Greg Parker. It focuses on themes such as racial unity, gender equality, the need to end abject poverty, and the importance of education as key to building international peace and prosperity.

"The whole purpose of it is to empower children to believe that peace is achievable and to give them the tools to become peace-makers and assist them in bringing it about," said Ms. Sounness.

To help children imagine what a peaceful world might look like, the authors use the idea of building a "Peace House."

In that exercise, children use cardboard,

paint, and felt to build a dwelling that would keep its "world citizen" occupants happy and snug — whether it be equality between women and men, economic well-being and education for all, or awareness and understanding between people of different faiths.

"Children find the idea charming, and it's very hands-on; they get to build the house using cardboard, or felt, or ice cream sticks, and then they understand that if one of the tiles is missing, the house isn't complete," Ms. Sounness said. "If the oneness of mankind is missing, or gender equality is missing, there will still be an absence of peace."

Changes in behavior

The response from parents to the BESS classes has been overwhelmingly positive.

"I've had parents call to thank us for giving their children a spiritual education," said Ms. Sounness. "They want to give that to their children but are often at a loss on how to approach this.

"They've given written permission for their children to attend the classes, so they know what they're receiving, but beyond that they fall in love with the curriculum, too."

Ms. Perkins said many parents have commented on how their children's behavior has improved through attending BESS classes.

"Our teachers work from the view that while a child's qualities might be masked by poor behavior that's developed over time, everyone nevertheless possesses something wonderful — and Bahá'í teachers actually search for those good qualities in the children, to show the children the wonderful qualities they have,

"This year I began with three pupils, one of whom was my own son, but the parents at the school where I teach know me and they know my children, and as people got to hear about the classes, they enrolled their kids – so I finished the year with 29 students."

**– Venus Nasrabadi,
BESS teacher**

ignoring labels like 'poor concentration' or 'badly behaved,'" said Ms. Perkins.

"For a child, to have someone encouraging you to develop your good attributes once a week instead of focusing on what's wrong with your behavior — this can all make a dramatic change to a child's life."

Robert Chivers, a 50-year-old software developer in Perth who has been teaching BESS classes for three years, said parents often say they see improved behavior after the classes.

"Parents notice the difference on the days the children have Bahá'í classes — for example, their children are calmer, and talk about using virtues," he said.

BESS teacher Venus Nasrabadi began volunteering when her own children needed a class and has now been teaching for eight years. She said the number of pupils in her class has risen dramatically over time.

"This year I began with three pupils, one of whom was my own son, but the parents at the school where I teach know me and they know my children, and as people got to hear about the classes, they enrolled their kids — so I finished the year with 29 students," she said.

"Children really do recognize God, in the sense that they have a feeling for their own spirituality, and I give them a lot of creative activities which illustrate the themes they're learning.

"For example, in teaching about Moses, we made paper baskets to illustrate the story that His parents had to put Him into a basket and place him in a river, and that helped introduce our study of Moses and His achievements and the Jewish faith.

"For Mother's Day, the children made gift cards containing a prayer for mothers from the Bahá'í writings, and covered them with sequins, shells and colors. Later, their mothers told me that they absolutely loved this craftwork partly because it is a gift thanking them for their service as parents, and also because their children are learning respectfulness," said Ms. Nasrabadi.

Michelle Ostowari, 47, is married to a Zoroastrian and chose BESS classes for being "the closest thing" she could find to a Zoroastrian class.

"It's great because otherwise we'd send our children to non-scripture class, where they just sit and do nothing," said Ms. Ostowari. "My daughter's been going since she was in kindergarten, and now she's in grade 5, and my son will start attending when he begins school next year.



"It's been very good for my daughter; she has become genuinely tolerant towards everyone, no matter whether they're Jewish, Muslim, or whatever — she gets on with everyone, and we're delighted that, for her, religion will never be a barrier to friendship.

"This year there were just four children in the class, but after the teacher gave a short presentation at the school to let parents know more about what was on offer in the curriculum, she was deluged with another 40 enrolments — and now she's having to go and find another teacher to help her cope," said Ms. Ostowari, expressing some amusement at the extra work they've created for the BESS teacher.

Jan Heath, a 46-year-old teacher in Brisbane who is not Bahá'í, sends her son to BESS classes at the Fig Tree Pocket State School. She feels the class has helped him develop respect and tolerance for others.

"My son certainly seems to be heading towards growing into a caring young man," said Ms. Heath. "He may have done this anyway, but constant reminders and praise in Bahá'í classes can only help. I feel that the teachings reinforce our family values."

Ms. Thomas, of the Sydney suburb of St. Ives, likewise said her children seem to enjoy the Bahá'í classes.

"There is an emphasis on peace and unity in the Bahá'í teachings, which the children love," said Ms. Thomas.

"They come home with beautiful work and beautiful quotations, and there's a real gentleness of spirit that comes across, which is really beneficial for them," said Ms. Thomas. "It's definitely one of the highlights of the week, they look forward to their Tuesday mornings so much!" ❀

— By Corinne Podger

Last March, a group of Bahá'í teachers came together in Brisbane to share ideas and resources for BESS classes. All work as volunteers.

"It's been very good for my daughter; she has become genuinely tolerant towards everyone, no matter whether they're Jewish, Muslim, or whatever — she gets on with everyone, and we're delighted that, for her, religion will never be a barrier to friendship."

– Michelle Ostowari, parent

High Level Panel calls for a new vision of collective security at the UN

UNITED NATIONS — Saying threats to global security have evolved far beyond traditional war, a panel of high-level experts has called on the United Nations to embrace a new and more encompassing definition of collective security, one that recognizes the interconnectedness of all peoples and nations.

“The biggest security threats we face now, and in the decades ahead, go far beyond States waging aggressive war,” said the 16-member group, in a report released 2 December 2004. “They extend to poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation; war and violence within States; the spread and possible use of nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons; terrorism; and transnational organized crime.”

This new reality, the Panel concluded, requires a “new and broader understanding” on collective security between the nations and peoples of the world.

“Today’s threats recognize no national boundaries, are connected, and must be addressed at the global and regional as well as the national levels,” said the Panel. “No State, no matter how powerful, can by its own efforts alone make itself invulnerable to today’s threats. Every State requires the cooperation of other States to make itself secure.”

The Panel, which included former heads of state, foreign ministers, security, military, diplomatic and development officials, called for greater cooperation among states to achieve this sense of collective security. It also proposed a number of reforms at the United Nations itself, including:

- Strengthening the General Assembly’s role in forging global consensus on important policy issues by, among other things, including greater participation by civil society.
- Broadening, in some way, the membership of the Security Council, so as to bring more countries, especially from the developing world, into its decision-making process.
- Creating a “peacebuilding commission” to better assist countries with the transition from war to peace.

- Expanding the membership of the Commission on Human Rights so that it encompasses all member states, with the aim of eliminating political “tensions” over membership and underscoring the commitment of all nations to human rights.

The Panel also called for a strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and a major push to rebuild public health at all levels, from the global to the local, not only to help to stem disease and epidemics, but also to form a bulwark against bio-terrorism.

“The central challenge for the twenty-first century is to fashion a new and broader understanding... of what collective security means,” said the Panel.

“The attacks of 11 September 2001 revealed that States, as well as collective security institutions, have failed to keep pace with changes in the nature of threats,” the Panel said.

“The technological revolution that has radically changed the worlds of communication, information-processing, health and transportation has eroded borders, altered migration and allowed individuals the world over to share information at a speed inconceivable two decades ago. Such changes have brought many benefits but also great potential for harm. Smaller and smaller numbers of people are able to inflict greater and greater amounts of damage, without the support of any State,” the Panel said.

Beyond reforms to strengthen collective security, the Panel stressed the importance of meeting the Millennium Development Goals, which aim to end poverty and promote sustainable development as part of a long-term strategy to address terrorism and civil conflict.

Development, the Panel said, is “the indispensable foundation for a collective security system that takes prevention seriously. “It helps combat the poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation that kill millions and threaten human security. It is vital in helping States prevent or reverse the erosion of state capacity, which is crucial for meeting almost every class of threat.”*

Culture of Contest

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operation,” he writes. “Which of these potentials is more fully realized is largely a product of our cultural environment — as demonstrated by the fact that different societies vary considerably in their expressions of conflict and cooperation.”

Acknowledging that there will be a considerable number of skeptics who will remain wedded to the idea of contest, competition, and the efficiency of self-interest, Dr. Karlberg then examines various past and present forms of “mutualism.” In particular, he suggests that the various strands for a new kind of cooperative global culture are emerging in such areas as the feminist and ecological movements, modern systems and communications theories, and alternative systems for dispute resolution.

“[M]any environmentalists, while working for ecological stewardship, are also working to cultivate more cooperative models of political practice,” he notes.

In systems theory, too, he sees new modes of cooperation and mutualism. “Complex systems are integrated wholes that are more than the mere sum of their parts,” he writes.

Ultimately, however, Dr. Karlberg suggests that none of these strands can be fully integrated without an overall change in our culture as a whole — which, in turn, will require a re-conception of human nature and social structures.

What is needed, Dr. Karlberg writes, is “an alternative cultural formation” in which mutualism replaces adversarialism. And he suggests a “case study” for such a model in the worldwide Bahá’í community, “which has over a century of experience applying non-adversarial models...in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner.”

With some five million members, organized into some 11,700 local self-governing councils in more than 180 countries, Dr. Karlberg writes, the worldwide Bahá’í community can be seen as a “vast social experiment that is testing the assumptions about human nature, social organization, and social change” that prevail in the adversarial system.

“[T]he Bahá’í community has emerged as a global phenomenon worthy of both public and scholarly attention,” he writes.

Dr. Karlberg, who is a Bahá’í, notes that the Bahá’í community follows a set of teachings that emphasizes cooperation, harmony,

and unity. Moreover, he writes, its institutional structures are built around a non-partisan yet fully democratic electoral system that likewise embodies non-adversarialism as one of its highest principles. In that system, he observes, there are no nominations, no campaigning, and no underlying concept of interest groups or constituencies.

“[T]he Bahá’í electoral system embodies neither a contest nor the pursuit of power,” he writes. “In contrast to partisan electoral systems the process is unifying rather than divisive. Since no one seeks election, there is no concept of ‘winning.’ At the same time, the electoral process remains eminently democratic.”

Dr. Karlberg also examines the principles of “consultation,” the non-adversarial decision-making system that is used by all Bahá’í institutions. In part, consultation is “an inclusive model of collective decision-making that involves all segments of society in conceptualizing, designing, implementing, and evaluating the policies and programs that affect them,” he writes. It also seeks to “transcend the adversarial posturing and partisanship” and “patterns of negotiation and compromise” that mark traditional adversarial decision-making.”

As a social experiment, Dr. Karlberg observes, the Bahá’í experience is only in its earliest stages. Yet, he concludes, “although individual Bahá’ís struggle with varying degrees of success in their efforts to subordinate their immediate self-interests to the long-term welfare of the entire social body, the history of the Bahá’í community is, by and large, a history of individual self-sacrifice and dedication to collective interests. In and of itself, this history presents a significant challenge to the assumption that human nature is incorrigibly selfish and aggressive.”

In the end, Dr. Karlberg believes that the nature of global interdependence requires just such new modes of mutualism and cooperation in human endeavor.

“Because our reproductive and technological success as a species has led to conditions of unprecedented interdependence, no social group on the planet is any longer isolated,” writes Dr. Karlberg. “Under these new conditions, new strategies are not only becoming possible, they have become essential. An interdependent social body cannot coordinate its collective actions as long as its component members are locked in adversarial relationships.”*

“The history of the Bahá’í community is, by and large, a history of individual self-sacrifice and dedication to collective interests. In and of itself, this history presents a significant challenge to the assumption that human nature is incorrigibly selfish and aggressive.”

– Michael Karlberg

How everyone can win

Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence

By Michael Karlberg

George Ronald

Oxford

In the West, it is pretty much taken for granted that the best way to settle political, economic, or legal differences is by putting two or more sides together in a contest and letting the best (or biggest, truest, cleverest, richest, or most popular) side win.

But the adversarial system has distinct flaws. There is always a “winner” and a “loser.” Somewhere along the line, compromises are usually made, which may not be in the best interests of the whole. And there is always the possibility — and an increasing one as corruption of various forms creeps into the system — that money or power will win out instead of truth or justice.

What if there is a better way?

In considering this question, Michael Karlberg’s *Beyond the Culture of Contest* is a ground-breaking and much needed book. It calls into the question the series of assumptions on which the adversarial system is based, asking whether they are not more products of culture than of our underlying nature. Moreover, it offers a hopeful new model of “mutualism” in which non-adversarial decision-making could become the norm.

“[A]dversarialism has become the predominant strand in contemporary western-liberal societies,” writes Dr. Karlberg, an assistant professor of communication at Western Washington University. “Throughout the contemporary public sphere, competitive and conflictual practices have become institutionalized norms.... Because of this it is often difficult for people to envision alternatives.”

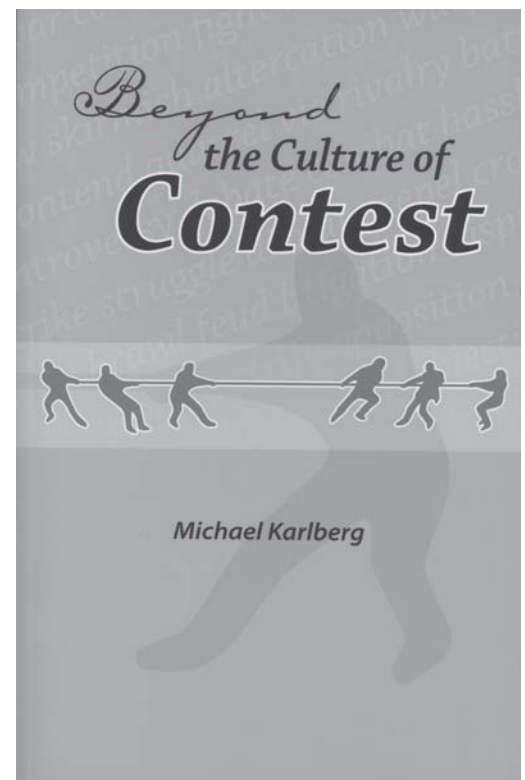
But, Dr. Karlberg writes, “a proper accounting should reveal that while oppositional strategies have reached a point of diminishing returns, non-adversarial strategies are emerging as the most effective methods for lasting social change in an age of heightened social and ecological interdependence.”

Making the case that humanity can, indeed, move “beyond the culture of contest,” Dr. Karlberg starts with a critique of the current system of “normative adversarialism” — the “assumption that contests are normal and necessary models of social organization.”

In Western societies, he writes, there are

three “core institutions” of society: politics, economics, and the legal system. Each is structured as a contest, he writes, designed to pit various parties, interests, or litigants against each other. And all three institutions are based on the notion of self-interest as the primary motivation.

“[T]he political arena has been structured much like the capitalist free market,” he writes. “It is an arena within which individuals, and the parties they construct, try to advance their particular ideals and interests in a self-interested and competitive manner.”



The norm for adversarialism goes largely unquestioned, Dr. Karlberg adds, because it has become part of our “culture.” And that has occurred largely because of an assumption that human beings are by nature essentially selfish and aggressive.

The key to re-evaluating the culture of contest, then, is to re-evaluate our conception of human nature, Dr. Karlberg writes. “[H]uman beings appear to have the developmental potential for both conflict and co-

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