

ONE COUNTRY

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

Newsletter of the
Bahá'í International Community
January 2011-March 2011
Volume 21, Issue 3

HUMAN RIGHTS

Inside this issue

page 2

The education and training of women and girls and the betterment of society



page 6

In Israel, a historic restoration recaptures early industrial and religious history



page 10

In Uganda, the Bahá'í temple stands for 50 years of community progress



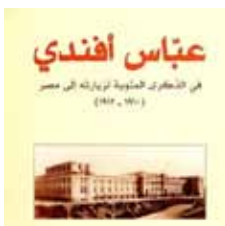
page 12

In Iran, a dramatic funeral shows support for imprisoned Bahá'ís



page 16

Abbas Effendi by Suheil Bushrui: a visitor's impact on Egypt 100 years ago is examined



Reflecting growing impatience on human rights, the UN revives a special investigator for Iran



The chamber of the UN Human Rights Council. In March, the Council approved a special investigator to monitor Iran's compliance with international human rights standards. (UN Photo by Jean-Marc Ferré)

GENEVA — For the first time since its creation five years ago, the UN Human Rights Council has decided to appoint a special investigator to monitor Iran's compliance with international human rights standards.

The decision reflects the world's growing impatience with Iran over its increasing violations of human rights, even among countries that have relatively friendly relations with Iran.

"We consider this resolution a reflection of a shared assessment that the human rights situation in Iran deserves the attention of the Council," said Maria Nazareth Farani Azevêdo, the delegate from Brazil.

Those who follow the workings of the Council said the vote in favor of the resolution, which passed by 22 to 7 with 14 abstentions on 24 March 2011, appears to reflect a new willingness by the Council to assert itself when human rights violations are particularly egregious in a specific country.

"This vote is quite historic," said Diane Ala'i, the representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in Geneva. "The decision today to create a new mandate to examine Iran's compliance with human rights standards marks a new stage in the Council's exercise of its responsibilities to uphold and protect the fundamental human rights of all peoples throughout the world," said Ms. Ala'i.

Council, continued on page 14

The education and training of women and girls and the betterment of society

IN BRIEF

- **The education and training of women and girls is critical to the well-being and advancement of communities and nations**
- **Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, as is participation in its generation, application and diffusion. Reforming the flow of knowledge from North to South, urban to rural, and men to women will free development from narrowly conceived conceptions of “modernization”**
- **Efforts to educate women and girls should be increased, and they should emphasize spiritual and moral principles, a rethinking of human nature, systematic participation, and global solidarity**

[Editor’s note: The following Perspective editorial is adapted from a statement of the Bahá’í International Community to the 55th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The statement is also available at [http://bic.org/statements-and-reports/bic-statements/education-and-training-for-the-betterment-of/](http://bic.org/statements-and-reports/bic-statements/education-and-training-for-the-betterment-of-)]

That the education and training of women and girls is critical to the well-being and advancement of communities and nations has been definitively established. The benefits of such education have traditionally been framed in terms of economic growth, but material well-being is but one of many conditions that impinge on women’s and girls’ participation in the shaping of society. Achieving any meaningful and sustainable increase in this participation will require a more fundamental dialogue about the nature of development, “modernity,” and the organization of knowledge-generating activity.

The human being is not only an economic and social creature but also a spiritual one with free will and a conscience that enables the search for meaning and for truth. Without the freedom to pursue this fundamentally human quest, neither dignity, nor justice, nor development—in its full sense—is possible. The Bahá’í International Community understands development to be a global enterprise of enabling all individuals to develop inherent capacities and spiritual qualities, and to contribute to the advancement of their community. Development is an enterprise that demands the efforts of both men and women working together to construct a social order characterized by justice, equity, reciprocity and collective prosperity. The systems of education,

science, and technology, then, must be arranged in a way that reflects both the material and spiritual dimensions of the human being — permitting each person to play her or his rightful role in the betterment of society.

The division of the world into producers and users of knowledge is a deficient characteristic of the current world order — one with deep implications for the quality and legitimacy of education, science, and technology as well as governance and policy-making. If most of humanity continues to be regarded as users of technology created elsewhere, it is unlikely that sustainable and meaningful development will take root. If access to knowledge is the right of every human being, participation in its generation, application and diffusion is a responsibility that each individual must shoulder and be empowered to shoulder. Reforming the present flow of knowledge — from “North” to “South”; from urban to rural; from men to women — will free development from narrowly conceived conceptions of “modernization.”

Only when the equality of men and women – working side by side for the betterment of their communities—is raised to the level of principle can the true potential of the human spirit begin to be tapped.

The experience of the worldwide Bahá’í community in the field of education and community building has shown that several concepts are particularly salient to guiding educational processes, including curriculum development,

towards their ultimate goal, namely the transformation of individuals and their communities. These concepts include:

- **Spiritual and moral education.**

In the realm of education, spiritual and moral development has often been divorced from intellectual and vocational training. This division has often sprung from high-minded intentions of tolerance and respect. Yet it must be acknowledged that all societies are characterized by political, economic, and cultural interests that promote corrosive patterns of thought and behavior among young people. Imparting the ability to reflect on and apply spiritual, moral, and ethical principles will therefore be indispensable to the task of building a prospering world civilization.

- **Rethinking students, rethinking teachers.** Every educational program rests on fundamental assumptions about human nature. Achieving sustainable development will therefore hinge on rethinking underlying conceptions of both teachers and students. A child — far from an empty vessel waiting to be filled — must be seen as “a mine rich in gems of inestimable value,” their treasures being revealed and developed for the benefit of mankind only through the agency of education. Similarly teachers—their laudable profession far too long overlooked and underappreciated — must likewise acknowledge that if they wish to effect a transformation on the level of character as well as intellect, they must, before all else, embody and model the principles they teach.

- **Systematic learning and participation.** The concept of participation also emerges in a new light. Effective participation requires a systematic process of learning within each community, in a way that enables the community to identify its strengths and its needs; to experiment with new ideas and methods, new technologies and processes; and ultimately, become the primary agents of their development. One of the first steps in establishing participatory development is to promote the engagement of an increasing number of individuals in processes of learning—characterized



Agriculture is an important subject at the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women in Indore, India.

by action, reflection on action, and collective deliberation — in a constant effort to generate and apply knowledge to improve the conditions of community life.

- **Individual and social transformation.** The transformation of human society requires both the transformation of the individual and the deliberate creation of new societal structures. Individuals must be educated and empowered, but attention must be given to the cultural, scientific and technological, educational, economic and social conditions that shape them. The continuous interaction between the development of the individual and the establishment of new social structures provides a path of social change and avoids both complacency and violence.

- **Global solidarity.** The challenges associated with removing obstacles to education and training for girls and women will require a global governance system that promotes collective security, the promotion of human rights, environmental sustainability, and an equitable and just economic order. Among its distinguishing features will be adherence to the principle of collective trusteeship and the understanding that the advantage of any of its parts can best be secured through the advantage of the whole.

or economics. Rather, it requires nations and communities to address a far wider range of assumptions about development, human nature, processes of knowledge generation and sharing, progress, and modernity. Political agreements alone will prove insufficient, as will the strategies and tactics of pure pragmatism. Only when the equality of men and women—working side by side for the betterment of their communities — is raised to the level of principle can the true potential of the human spirit begin to be tapped. As principles of equity, justice, and generosity become the metrics of program evaluation, and human nature in its totality, rather than just its material dimension, is considered, will true development begin.

Enabling an increasing number of girls and women to access education and training, to play an active role in the production and application of science and technology is not solely a matter of technology

Rethinking education for girls and women explored at UN

IN BRIEF

- During the 2011 UN Commission on the Advancement of Women, Bahá'í delegates focused on issues of education for women and girls
- A panel discussion, "Rethinking Education for Girls and Women," examined new curricula to encourage social transformation
- Another side event, "Boys Speak Out," sought to share experiences of young men in relation to women's advancement

Senior Policy Adviser on Education for UNICEF, Dr. Changu Mannathoko, participated in a panel discussion at the Baha'i International Community's New York offices on 23 February 2011 as part of the annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

UNITED NATIONS — The education of women and girls, which is critical to the advancement of society, should include elements that acknowledge the importance of spiritual and moral development.

That was among the main points of a statement and program of events offered by the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) at the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Participants from Belize, Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam, made up the Bahá'í delegation to the Commission, held from 22 February until 4 March 2011.

The theme of this year's event was "access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work." Government delegates and

non-governmental organizations from around the world reflected the theme in speeches, panel discussions and workshops.

In its statement to the Commission, the Bahá'í International Community observed how, in the realm of education, "spiritual and moral development has often been divorced from intellectual and vocational training."

"Imparting the ability to reflect on and apply spiritual, moral, and ethical principles will therefore be indispensable to the task of building a prospering world civilization," it said.

(The full statement can be read on page 2.)

Curriculum reform

A panel discussion, titled "Rethinking Education for Girls and Women: Beyond the Basic Curricula," was held at the BIC's New York offices on Wednesday 23 February.



Among the panellists, Dr. Changu Mannathoko — Senior Policy Advisor on Education for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) — said that in many countries, the current curriculum for girls is too often focused on the expectation that they will do particular jobs.

“The present curriculum is not transformative enough for it to change the lives of girls and women,” said Dr. Mannathoko.

What needs to happen instead, she said, is to ensure that opportunities for boys are also available to girls. “It can't be designed just for boys, it must be for both,” she said.

Dr. Mannathoko also spoke about the problem of HIV/AIDS in southern Africa and the need to look at gender behavior in terms of preventing rape and violence against women.

Boys speak out

The Bahá'í International Community also hosted a series of events sponsored by a coalition of non-governmental organizations, including the National Alliance of Women's Organizations (NAWO) from the United Kingdom.

An unusual aspect of the series was the participation — sponsored by Widows Rights International — of six young men and boys, who contributed their own fresh insights into what can be done to support equality.

At a workshop titled “Boys Speak Out,” Charlie Clayton, 17, from the UK, reported on a school project in Sweden where gender equality was stressed from a young age. When both sexes were expected to work together equally, he said, the “boys were calmer and the girls were more confident.”

Mibaku Mollel, 23, from Tanzania shared his experiences of engaging other young African men in assisting more than 130 widows in villages to apply for microloans to start businesses.



Former Chilean President, Michelle Bachelet — Executive Director of UN Women — addressing the opening of the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in the United Nations General Assembly, 22 February 2011. (UN Photo by Devra Berkowitz)

“If more men and boys helped women, more women would have education. They would become teachers and the community would grow,” said Mr. Mollel.

Creation of UN Women

One of the most discussed topics at this year's Commission was the creation of a new agency, UN Women.

Established by the United Nations General Assembly in July last year, UN Women consolidates the work on women's issues that was previously handled by four separate agencies.

UN Women's leader, former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, introduced herself to the Commission on 22 February, explaining the agency's aims.

“This is a vision of a world where women and men have equal rights and opportunities, and the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment are firmly integrated in the development, human rights, and peace and security agendas,” said President Bachelet.

Over the past four years, a number of NGOs — including the Bahá'í International Community — were deeply involved in supporting the creation of UN Women. Eventually,

a coalition of more than 275 organizations in 50 countries joined the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) campaign in the creation of UN Women.

“We are very pleased about the creation of this new agency,” said Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations.

“It is an important step, and it will hopefully give greater impetus and coherence to the work of the United Nations in its work for gender equality and the advancement of women.

“Our hope now is that governments will fully fund UN Women, so that it can deliver on its promises. We also want UN Women to engage with civil society in a substantive manner at all levels, global, regional and national,” said Ms. Dugal.

In Acre, the restoration of a holy place sheds light on the region's heritage



IN BRIEF

- The renovation of a Bahá'í holy place in Acre, Israel, includes the partial restoration of an ancient flour mill
- The site, which was graced by the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in the 1870s, now also reflects the region's industrial heritage
- The project has also restored the Ridvan garden to an island setting, with water now flowing all around

ACRE, Israel — After more than three years of restoration and conservation work, a Bahá'í sacred site is offering a glimpse into the industrial and spiritual heritage of this part of the Holy Land.

From the Roman era into the early 20th century, mills on this site — some two kilometers southeast of the old city of Acre — produced the flour to feed the area's population.

"This was a very significant agricultural hinterland for the city," said Albert Lincoln, Secretary General of the Bahá'í International Community. "The mills were part of what was probably one of the region's largest industrial complexes. They were first documented in 1799 by the French delegation surveying the area in connection with Napoleon's intended conquest."

But for Bahá'ís, this place has spiritual significance, said Mr. Lincoln. "It's one of

Above: Some 15 flour mills once operated at the southern end of the Ridvan Garden, and the buildings housing them have been recently restored.

the most beautiful holy places associated with the presence of Bahá'u'lláh here during the late 19th century."

In 1875 — eight years after Bahá'u'lláh's incarceration within the walls of the prison city of Acre — His son 'Abdul-Bahá rented an island formed by two water canals, diverted from the Na'mayn river to power the flour mills. On this island, 'Abdu'l-Bahá created an exquisite garden for His father Who, by then, had suffered more than two decades of imprisonment and exile. Bahá'u'lláh called the garden "Ridvan" — meaning "paradise."

A swamp drainage scheme to curb malaria and increase arable farmland in the 1930s and 1940s deprived the

garden of its unique island setting. But now, with the completion late last year of a project to restore those canals, the Ridvan Garden is an island once again.

A “verdant isle”

After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s acquisition of the island, pilgrims from Iran and neighboring countries brought shrubs, trees and flowering plants to populate the flower beds. During their long overland journeys, some of the travelers watered the plants at the expense of their own thirst.

As restrictions on His movements were gradually relaxed, Bahá’u’lláh made His first visits to the garden. He went there often, sometimes staying overnight in a modest house on the island.

“He referred to it as ‘Our Verdant Isle’ and wrote some beautiful things in which he describes Himself actually sitting in the garden at the time when it had water around it,” said Mr. Lincoln.

“In one passage, Bahá’u’lláh said that He was here in the garden enjoying ‘its streams flowing, and its trees luxuriant, and the sunlight playing in their midst.’ The whole narrative that goes with it is an outdoors narrative — it’s sun, wind, water — all these factors,” Mr. Lincoln said.

The spot also became known outside of the Bahá’í community. Laurence Oliphant, a British writer who visited in 1883, remarked, “Coming upon it suddenly it is like a scene in fairy land...The stream is fringed with weeping willows, and the spot, with its wealth of water, its thick shade, and air fragrant with jasmine and orange blossoms, forms an ideal retreat from the heats of summer.”

Using historic photographs and descriptions, an international team of architects and engineers has restored the Ridvan garden to a state that captures the spirit of its original character. The team was assisted by the Israel Antiquity Authority, which provided a conservation survey of the entire site and carried out part of the work.

“Our task was to investigate and find as much historical evidence as we could about how it looked, so we could



The restoration work has reinstated a bridge as an entrance to the Ridvan Garden. The original wooden bridge has been replicated exactly in stainless steel, painted blue. A weir has been created beneath the bridge to enhance the sound and movement of water as it flows south towards the flour mills.

bring the island back to life,” said Khosrow Rezai, a representative of the design team who oversaw the project.

The two canals now flow, although at a reduced rate, on either side of the garden at their original locations. They lead to the flour mills — some of which have also been restored. “We found an aquifer 40 meters underground and are using it to feed the canals,” said Mr. Rezai.

With the re-creation of the garden’s original setting, pilgrims can now experience the feeling of a spiritual retreat. “We have tried to convey, to the extent possible, the tranquillity of the garden prepared by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as a place where Bahá’u’lláh could find rest,” said Mr. Rezai. “Being able to see the water gives you an amazing feeling. You cross it, you smell it, you hear it. Hopefully it transmits the sense of happiness and joy that Bahá’u’lláh felt.”

On the southern horizon from the site, Mount Carmel rises up, the location of the Shrine of the Bab and its monumental garden terraces. They — along with the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh

and its environs north of the Ridvan garden — were named UNESCO World Heritage sites in 2008.

“With its conservation — and the partial restoration of the flour mills — the whole site says something about the historical roots of the Bahá’í Faith in this land and how they are intertwined with the history of the region,” said Mr. Lincoln.

Capacity building seen as crucial to eradicating poverty

IN BRIEF

- **Bahá'í delegates to the UN Commission on Social Development stressed the importance of capacity building in global efforts to eradicate poverty**
- **Such efforts should not merely be concerned with the lack of material resources but also the absence of ethical and social resources**
- **A panel discussion on "Building Vibrant Communities" also sought to identify qualities of communities that are socially and economically healthy**

UNITED NATIONS — Initiatives to address poverty should give attention to strengthening the moral, ethical and spiritual capacities of individuals and communities.

That was among the messages delivered by the Bahá'í International Community and other non-governmental organizations at this year's United Nations Commission on Social Development.

"Efforts to eradicate poverty must be guided by a vision of human prosperity in the fullest sense of the term — a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual dimensions of human life," said May Akale, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community, in an oral statement to the Commission on Monday 14 February 2011.

"Poverty, as has often been stated, is not merely the lack of material resources, but also the absence of those ethical and social resources that create

an environment in which individuals, through social institutions and communities, can develop to their fullest capacity," said Ms. Akale.

Such efforts at capacity building should stress helping people "cultivate the capacities to become protagonists of their development."

This is especially so where it concerns the next generation, she said. "Of particular concern in seeking to develop these capacities are the many influences at work on the hearts and minds of children and youth."

"It is important to appreciate the extent to which young minds are affected by the choices of their families and communities. No matter how unintentional, choices which condone deficient ethical norms, such as the admiration for power, the seeking of status, the glorification of violence and pre-occupation with self-gratification, exercise a profound influence on young minds."

"Building Vibrant Communities"

As a side event to the Commission, the Bahá'í International Community sponsored a gathering at its offices, titled "Building Vibrant Communities: Strengthening Capacities for Justice, Equity and Collective Action."

Held on 10 February 2011, the event took the form of a participatory "World Cafe." Some 30 representatives from non-governmental organizations took part in an informal discussion, co-sponsored by the International Movement ATD Fourth World and the Huairou Commission, which helps economically disadvantaged women organize for change.

Conversations centered on identifying the elements needed to create



At right: May Akale, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community, prepares to deliver an oral statement to the UN Commission on Social Development on Monday, 14 February 2011.



A “World Cafe” hosted at the Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations offices on 10 February 2011, as a side event to the UN Commission on Social Development. Participants discussed the features of a healthy community.

communities that are economically and socially healthy.

“Extreme poverty is a violation of human rights,” said Cristina Diez, who represents ATD Fourth World to the United Nations, adding that the most excluded and stigmatized members of society “challenge us to think of the world in a different way.”

Justice, equity and collective action must be exercised to ensure that all members of a community can have input into decisions that affect the entire group, she said.

Shannon Hayes of the Huairou Commission spoke about working with the consequences of AIDS in communities. Transparency, tolerance, inclusiveness, empowerment and democratic processes are some of the characteristics that need to be brought to the task of community building, she said.

Erin Murphy-Graham, an assistant professor of international education at New York University and a Bahá’í, sought to answer the question, “What is a community?” Honesty, civic engagement and a concern for others are all necessary features, she said.

Following the speakers’ presentations, participants met in smaller groups to discuss the features of a healthy society. Many concluded that the values of justice, equity and unity would need to be included in conver-

sations about building spiritually and materially prosperous communities.

Education and empowerment, particularly of women and youth — they decided — would help to develop the skills and confidence needed for community members to recognize and demand their rights.

The United Nations Commission on Social Development meets annually to consider issues relating to poverty, social integration, and employment. This year’s session ran 9-18 February 2011.

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— May Akale, Bahá’í International Community

Fifty years on, Uganda's Bahá'í temple stands as a symbol of unity and progress

IN BRIEF

- **Uganda's Chief Justice praised the role of the Kampala Bahá'í House of Worship in contributing to social transformation and religious unity**
- **His remarks came at a celebration in January of the Ugandan temple's 50th year, which drew 1,000 participants from 18 countries**
- **Chief Justice Odoki said the temple had had a "discernible impact on the lives of those who have been associated with it and those who have visited it"**

KAMPALA, Uganda — At a ceremony to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Bahá'í House of Worship here, Uganda's Chief Justice has praised the temple's continuing contribution to the unity of religion and social transformation.

"It is a reminder of what is to be put in place for a better future," the Honorable Mr. Benjamin J. Odoki told some 1,000 visitors who gathered in Kampala on 16 January 2011 for festivities to mark the temple's golden jubilee.

"Celebrations such as this are a gracious reminder to us to count our blessings, to put God at the center of our lives, and to look at civilization as basically spiritual in nature," said Chief Justice Odoki, who was guest of honor at the event.

The first Bahá'í House of Worship on the continent — known as the "Mother Temple of Africa" — was built between 1957 and 1960 on Kikaya Hill, three miles north of Kampala.

Chief Justice Odoki, who recalled that he was a student in the city when

the temple opened, said that the House of Worship has had a "discernible impact on the lives of those who have been associated with it and those who have visited it."

"It has attracted, and brought in through its doors, the diversity of the kindred of the earth who have found spirituality inside it," he said.

A spiritual and social purpose

On 15 January, participants from some 18 countries — including a dozen African nations — gathered for a program of prayers and choral singing inside the House of Worship to mark the anniversary. Outside, visitors were given a taste of the various community building activities that the Bahá'í community today offers.

"It is the combination of social welfare and acts of service that will regenerate the world," said Chief Justice Odoki, acknowledging the foundation of Bahá'í schools "based on moral principles where children of different races and backgrounds have cultivated

The Chief Justice of Uganda, the Honorable Benjamin J. Odoki, was guest of honor at the celebrations marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Kampala. "The temple is a silent teacher," said Chief Justice Odoki, "a beacon of light whose magnificence is a call to the Bahá'ís to arise and serve humanity."



lasting relationships based on the principle of oneness of humanity.”

The concept of the Bahá’í House of Worship, as envisaged by Baha’u’llah, not only incorporates a central meeting place for prayer and meditation but, in time, a range of facilities to serve the social and educational needs of the surrounding population.

“Areas of education are very important,” said the Chief Justice. “They are the foundation for development. This is a very important social obligation of the religious groups, to be able to uplift the people because of the abject poverty the communities face, including ignorance and disease.”

The House of Worship provides a range of educational programs in its grounds including study circles for adults and youth, as well as several children’s classes every Sunday.

“These are for everyone,” said Aqsan Woldu, who lives close to the temple and often serves there. “One of the things the children learn in these classes is the presence of God. We have stories about the Messengers of God and what the attributes of God are and what we should develop. And beyond that we have songs, because music is food for the soul and everyone should sing and learn.”

“In the future, I think the House of Worship will be the central point, the pivot,” said Mr. Woldu, “and the surroundings will be these schools, a hospital, and so on. People will come up and say prayers at the House of Worship and then go back to their duties. This is a beautiful thing.”

Religious unity

Robert Byenkya — another Ugandan attending the golden jubilee — noted how people of all ages benefit from the temple’s programs. “They are welcome to enter and worship at their

convenient time,” he said. “Children, junior youth, the aged, people who are mature, they can come to be together.”

When people of different faiths — Christians, Muslims and Bahá’ís among them — pray together at the House of Worship, there is a special atmosphere, added Mr. Woldu.

“The temple plays a big role in that people who had some kind of prejudice towards other religions, when they come here, they see that we’re all saying prayers from different Holy Scriptures. Once you are inside the House of Worship we are one in the name of God. And that just brings us together,” said Mr. Woldu.

For the last fifty years, the temple’s expansive gardens have also proven to be a popular place for visitors to rest and contemplate.

“When it’s school time, you find a lot of students on the hill, reading,” said Brenda Amonyin, who lives in Kampala. “Some people come and pray. They say their private prayers in the temple during the week days when the temple is open. Others come on Sundays.”

Chief Justice Odoki particularly thanked the Bahá’í community for maintaining the gardens. “They represent the spiritual purity to unite the world,” he said.

About 1000 people from 18 countries attended the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the inauguration of the Bahá’í House of Worship in Kampala, Uganda. On the evening of 15 January, the outer paths encircling the temple were lined with candles and visitors entered for an impromptu prayer gathering, during which spontaneous group singing broke out.

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— Aqsan Woldu, a Ugandan Bahá’í



For seven imprisoned Iranian Bahá'í leaders, continued tribulations — and support



Between 8,000 and 10,000 mourners from throughout Iran were reportedly in attendance at the 11 March 2011 funeral of Mrs. Ashraf Khanjani, who is the wife of one of the seven imprisoned Bahá'í leaders.

IN BRIEF

- The seven imprisoned Iranian Bahá'í leaders faced new tribulations — and evidence of support
- In March, the seven learned that their 20-year prison sentence had been unjustly reinstated, after an appeals court reduced it to 10 years
- But the turnout of more than 8,000 mourners for the funeral of the wife of one leader offered tangible signs of support

TEHHRAN — The sight of large crowds anywhere in contemporary Iran is unusual these days, owing to the general unrest in the region. So it certainly took extra courage for an estimated 8,000 people or more to turn out for a funeral in March — and especially for the funeral of a well-known Bahá'í.

But photographs of a memorial gathering held at Gulistan Cemetery here on 11 March 2011 do indeed show thousands of people in attendance — as well as a scattering of security men with cameras on the periphery.

Even more than bravery, the photographs are evidence of the obvious sympathy that many Iranians feel for the plight of Iran's persecuted Bahá'ís, especially for the seven imprisoned Bahá'í leaders who have been the focus of so much international attention in recent months.

That's because the funeral was for the wife of one of those leaders, Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani. His wife of 50

years, Ashraf Khanjani, passed away on 10 March — and within 24 hours a huge memorial service had been organized.

While an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 people attended, among them was not Mr. Khanjani himself. He was refused compassionate leave by prison officials, and so he remained in Gohardasht prison in Karaj.

"This is a desperately cruel turn of events," said Diane Ala'i, representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in Geneva.

"For an innocent man to be denied the opportunity to be with his devoted wife as she passed away, and then to be unable to attend her funeral — this shows the depth of inhumanity to which the Iranian authorities have sunk," said Ms. Ala'i. "Islamic compassion and justice are nowhere to be seen."

20-year sentence reinstated

Later in the month, the seven learned that their 20-year prison sentences had been reinstated, six months after an appeals court reduced the original sentence to 10 years.

The seven — Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm — were arrested in 2008 and charged with espionage and other crimes against the state that stemmed entirely from their service as members of a national-level group that helped see to the minimum needs of Iran's 300,000-strong Bahá'í community.

After a plainly unjust trial in the first half of 2010, the seven were found guilty and sent to Gohardasht prison in August 2010, to serve out their sentences. Since then, the seven have faced a series of tribulations, such as appalling prison conditions, threats from other prisoners, and limited visitation and furloughs.

A beacon of hope

Reports indicated that Mrs. Khanjani's funeral attracted mourners from all walks of life. She had devoted her life to raising her four children as well as caring for others whose parents were unable to feed and clothe them.

"She was looking after up to 40 or 50 children at any one time, without any regard for their religious background," said Ms. Alai. "This is the kind of person she was — kind and generous, and a beacon of hope dedicated to maintaining the unity of their family in the face of harsh religious persecution."

Prior to the 1979 Iranian revolution, Mr. Khanjani was a successful factory owner. His brick-making factory — the first automated such facility in Iran — employed several hundred people before he was forced to shut it

down and abandon it, because of the persecution he faced as a Bahá'í. The factory was later confiscated by the government.

In the early 1980s, Mr. Khanjani served as a member of the soon-to-be disbanded National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran, a group that in 1984 saw four of its nine members executed.

Later, Mr. Khanjani was able to establish a mechanized farm. But the authorities made it difficult for him to operate. Their restrictions extended to his children and relatives and included refusing loans, closing their facilities, limiting business dealings, and banning travel outside Iran.

Mr. Khanjani was arrested and imprisoned at least three times before his latest incarceration in May 2008. "Life over the past three years since this most recent arrest has been particularly hard on his wife and family," said Ms. Alai.

"After Mr. Khanjani was transferred to Gohardasht last August, travelling some 100 kilometers there and back every fortnight for the women has been an extra burden to bear."

To add to their ordeal, Mr. and Mrs. Khanjani's immediate family has been targeted by the Iranian government for arrest and imprisonment.

"At this very difficult time, Mr. Khanjani and his family can take comfort in the fact that the thoughts and prayers of governments, organizations and people of goodwill throughout the world are with them," said Ms. Alai on the day of the funeral.

In Iran, arsonists threaten reprisals if Bahá'ís befriend Muslims

GENEVA — Following a wave of arson attacks against Bahá'í-owned businesses in Rafsanjan, Iran, many Bahá'ís there were sent a letter early this year warning them to stop forming friendships with Muslims.

The anonymous document demands that Bahá'ís sign an undertaking to "refrain from forming contacts or friendships with Muslims" and from "using or hiring Muslim trainees." It also wanted Bahá'ís not to teach their Faith, including on the Internet.

Should the conditions be accepted by the recipients, the letter states, "we will guarantee not to wage any attack on your life and properties."

The whole episode appears to be part of a new campaign to fracture relationships between Bahá'ís and Muslims in the city, said Diane Alai, the Bahá'í International Community representative to the United Nations in Geneva.

"For more than two months now, innocent Bahá'ís have been having their businesses fire-bombed," Ms. Alai said in January. "Some of them

have suffered more than one arson attack on their properties." At least a dozen Bahá'í shops have been attacked since October, she said.

"Now, in addition to their livelihoods, their very lives are being threatened unless they promise to isolate themselves from their friends and neighbors," she said.

"What are the perpetrators of such attacks and threats hoping to achieve?" asked Ms. Alai. "All it demonstrates for the whole world to see is the religiously motivated hatred being fomented by certain elements in Iranian society."

Ms. Alai noted that Bahá'ís have approached local authorities asking for an investigation. "But nothing has been done," she said. "Unbelievably, they've even been accused by some of

starting the fires themselves, under instruction from foreign governments."

The attackers have targeted household furniture repair businesses, home appliance, and optical stores, in particular.



Above: A Baha'i-owned shop in Rafsanjan, Iran, targeted by arsonists.

Reflecting growing impatience on human rights, the UN revives a special investigator on Iran

Council, continued from page one

In the past, the Council's predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights, approved a string of country-specific resolutions calling for "special rapporteurs," as these investigators are known, including some 16 for Iran.

In 2002, the Commission stopped appointing investigators for Iran in an effort to encourage a dialogue with the country on human rights. Then, in 2005, the Commission was disbanded in favor of a new entity, the Human Rights Council, which, for a variety of reasons, has been considerably more reluctant to criticize individual countries — until now.

Human rights activists said they believe the moral authority behind having such a UN-appointed special rapporteur is a critical step in bringing to light the severity of rights violations in Iran — and in giving encouragement to human rights defenders within the country.

Increased legitimacy

"Today we have a vigorous human rights community in Iran, even though the majority of rights defenders are in prison, their offices shuttered or they are in exile," said Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran.

"But their impact on the discourse in Iran is very significant, and having a UN-mandated special rapporteur will make a huge difference to them — and we believe it will make a huge difference in the situation in Iran because it gives legitimacy and documentation to the reports of violations taking place in Iran," said Dr. Ghaemi.

Dr. Ghaemi and others said it was very significant that the resolution was supported by countries which have had good relations with Iran, such as Brazil. Some 52 countries from every

region of the world co-sponsored the resolution, including many who are not on the 47-member Council.

In the discussion at the Council before the vote, Iran tried to deflect concerns by suggesting that the resolution was a purely political move, led by the United States, which "has the largest range of violations of human rights within and outside the country," according to a statement read by the Iranian representative, Zamir Akram.

The resolution itself was short, just seven paragraphs. It states simply that the Council had decided to appoint a new special rapporteur on the situation in Iran. It also calls also on Iran to let the new investigator visit the country. This would be the first such visit by a human rights investigator from the UN since 2005.

Secretary-General expresses "serious concern"

The resolution also took note of a recent report by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that expressed "serious concern" about Iran's human rights record.

"The Secretary-General has been deeply troubled by reports of increased executions, amputations, arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trials, and possible torture and ill-treatment of human rights activists, lawyers, journalists and opposition activists," wrote Mr. Ban in a 14 March report to the Council.

Mr. Ban's report also expressed concern about continuing reports of the persecution of minority groups in Iran. He specifically highlighted reports of persecution against Iranian Bahá'ís, and noted as well that members of the Arab, Armenian, Azeri, Baloch, Jewish, and Kurdish communities have also reportedly faced discrimination and persecution.

In the case of Bahá'ís, Mr. Ban noted that a number of Bahá'ís have been

arrested recently, and that seven Bahá'í leaders were sentenced to long prison terms after a trial last year. That was denounced as completely unjust by a succession of governments, lawyers, and human rights organizations.

"The High Commissioner for Human Rights raised their case several times in letters to and meetings with the Iranian authorities, expressing deep concern that these trials did not meet due process and fair trial requirements," said Mr. Ban, noting that the High commissioner had asked Iran to allow independent observers in to monitor the trial but the request was rejected.

Mr. Ban referred to the fact that the High Commissioner expressed concern that the charges brought against them appear to be a violation of their internationally recognized right to freedom of religion and belief, and freedom of expression and association.

Mr. Ban also noted that the UN also has been receiving reports of persecution directed against Christians.

And he said that members of the Kurdish community have continued to be executed on various national security-related charges, including *Mohareb* (enmity against God).

Finally, Mr. Ban expressed concern over the fact that Iran has not allowed any UN human rights Special Rapporteurs to visit the country since 2005. He encouraged Iran to "facilitate their requested visits to the country as a matter of priority in order that they might conduct more comprehensive assessments."

Review: **Abbas Effendi**

Abbas Effendi, continued from page 16

Christian churches and the message of religion in atheist assemblies, because He saw in the union of east and west a portal to a new world where justice, unity and peace reign.”

The distinguished Lebanese poet Henri Zoghaib commented that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the first to initiate a serious dialogue among religions.

“With this book...,” wrote Mr. Zoghaib, “I discovered the nature of the teachings that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had disseminated concerning the oneness of East and West, and of His message calling for the oneness of religions.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá sailed from the Holy Land to Port Said at the end of August 1910, some 50 years after the Bahá’í Faith had first been taken to Egypt by Bahá’í merchants from Iran. Following initial experiences of persecution, a modest community was established, made up of Iranians and native Egyptians. But the Bahá’í Faith was viewed with suspicion by many, including the local press and Persian-language newspapers published in Egypt.

Although he intended to rest in Egypt for a month, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stayed for an entire year because of health concerns. He also believed He had a mission to accomplish in Egypt, said Prof. Bushrui. “Firstly, to revive the truth and purity of religious faith — whether Muslim or Christian — and, secondly, to bring East and West together.”

His visit resulted in a profound change of attitude of Egyptians towards the Bahá’í Faith at the time, particularly on the part of the press.

“Whosoever has consorted with [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] has seen in Him a man exceedingly well-informed, whose speech is captivating, who attracts minds and souls, who is dedicated to belief in the oneness of mankind...” wrote the newspaper, *al-Mu’ayyad*, whose editors had previously been antagonistic towards the Faith.

In addition to journalists, numerous prominent Egyptians sought out ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. These included clerics, parliamentarians and aristocrats,

among them the last Khedive of Egypt and Sudan — Abbas Hilmi Pasha — who exhibited particular reverence towards Him.

“There was also a very significant meeting with the jurist and scholar Muhammad Abduh,” said Prof. Bushrui. “He admired ‘Abdu’l-Bahá greatly and wrote Him a letter. When you read it, you can see it’s from someone who recognized that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had a special divine light in his heart and mind.”

Abbas Effendi begins with an extended, introductory essay charting the life and work of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his stay in Egypt. The book then moves to an anthology of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s letters and lectures in Arabic, examples of the press coverage of His visit, an epilogue examining His legacy to the Bahá’í community today, and statements about Him by Egyptians and other prominent Arab admirers.

Prof. Bushrui also describes how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s influence extended further afield into the Arabic-speaking world. “For example, in the Will and Testament of the founding father of Arab-American literature, Ameen Rihani, we find this: ‘I am a believer in the unity of religion, for in its mirror, I see reflected the images of all Prophets and Messengers — Confucius, Buddha, Zoroaster, Socrates, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and Bahá’u’lláh... In practical terms, religion is, above all, the recognition of the Divine Truth spoken by whoever has taught a single letter taken from the book of love, of piety and of charitable deeds.’”

Ameen Rihani’s niece — May Rihani — has acclaimed Abbas Effendi as a “gift to humanity,” describing Him as “an enlightened messenger, an inspiring voice, and a profound advocate for world peace, the unity of religions, and genuine in-depth dialogue between the East and the West.”

“We need ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s voice more than ever before in these present turbulent times of religious fanaticism, misunderstandings among the cultures of the world, and an easy readiness for confrontation,” said Ms. Rihani, who is senior vice president and director of the Global Learning Group at the Academy for Educational Development, which is based in Washington D.C.



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

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Printed using
soy-based inks
on paper from
sustainable
forests.



100 years on, a call for tolerance and unity reverberates from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Egypt

Abbas Effendi: the Hundredth Anniversary of His Visit to Egypt

— By Suheil Bushrui
Al-Kamel publishers
Beirut

Available in print from Al-Kamel or as a free ebook at: <http://www.bahai-egypt.org/2011/04/abbas-effendi-egypt.html>

IN BRIEF

- A new book, published in Arabic, tells of the impact 'Abdu'l-Bahá had 100 years ago among prominent Egyptian thinkers
- The Bahá'í leader's call for religious tolerance and unity at the time foreshadows conditions in modern Egypt
- The volume has received high praise from contemporary Arab writers for its scholarship and lessons for today

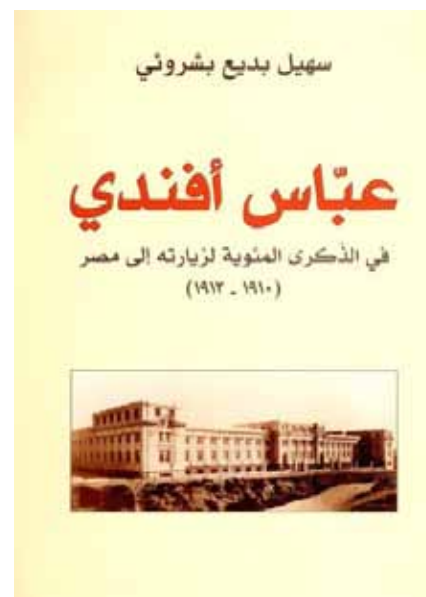
A new book by a noted Arab scholar suggests the idea of a “clash of civilizations” between the Muslim East and the Christian West were of considerable concern 100 years ago in Egypt — and that a visiting Bahá'í leader did much to calm the waters and show a path to reconciliation.

Written by University of Maryland Professor Suheil Bushrui, and recently published by Al-Kamel publishers in Beirut, *Abbas Effendi: the Hundredth Anniversary of His Visit to Egypt* introduces the life and work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a modern Arabic-speaking audience that, up until now, has remained largely unaware of His legacy to their society.

During His stay in Alexandria, between September 1910 and August 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá conversed with Egyptians from all walks of life about the fundamental principles required for the building of a peaceful and prosperous society. Abbas Effendi, known more commonly as 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was the son of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. He led the Bahá'í community after the passing of His father, from 1892-1921.

“It was important to present 'Abdu'l-Bahá, not necessarily as a religious leader,” said Professor Bushrui, “but more as a great mind who was able to convey an understanding of the importance of religion at a time when materialistic civilization was prevailing in Europe and America, and the Muslim world was overcome with political and other ambitions.”

“I have to say — even for me as a lifelong Bahá'í — through the writing of this book I have come to be far more aware of the unique personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His immense achievement in promoting cultural and



religious dialogue between the worlds of the East and the West,” he said.

The volume has been winning high praise from a number of prominent Arab thinkers, whose appreciation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá echoes that of their counterparts a century ago.

Internationally recognized Middle East expert Edmund Ghareeb has described the book as “a pioneering and highly informative work.”

“*Abbas Effendi* is a superbly careful and informative piece of scholarship,” wrote Dr. Ghareeb, “which makes a major contribution to knowledge of the Middle East at a crucial period of its modern history, and adds considerably to our knowledge of this unique reformer.”

In a review published in the Lebanese daily newspaper *As-Safir*, author Mahmud Shurayh said 'Abdu'l-Bahá “found no embarrassment in teaching the messages of Christ and Muhammad in the Jewish synagogues, the message of Muhammad in

Abbas Effendi, continued on page 15