BAHA'I INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY   **STATEMENT LIBRARY**

World citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development

Based on a concept paper shared at the 1st session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

New York, U.S.A.
14–25 June 1993

In the spirit of Agenda 21, as "a dynamic programme" destined to "evolve over time in the light of changing needs and circumstances," [1] the Baha'i International Community offers the following proposal: To inspire the peoples of the world to champion sustainable development, the education programs and public awareness campaigns called for in Agenda 21 should foster the concept of WORLD CITIZENSHIP.

The Vision of World citizenship

The greatest challenge facing the world community as it mobilizes to implement *Agenda 21* is to release the enormous financial, technical, human and moral resources required for sustainable development. These resources will be freed up only as the peoples of the world develop a profound sense of responsibility for the fate of the planet and for the well–being of the entire human family.

This sense of responsibility can only emerge from the acceptance of the oneness of humanity and will only be sustained by a unifying vision of a peaceful, prosperous world society. Without such a global ethic, people will be unable to become active, constructive participants in the world–wide process of sustainable development. [2]

While *Agenda 21* provides an indispensable framework of scientific knowledge and technical know–how for the implementation of sustainable development, it does not inspire personal commitment to a global ethic. This is not to say that ethics and values were ignored during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) process. The call for unifying values was heard throughout this process from Heads of State to UN officials to representatives of non–governmental organizations (NGOs) and individual citizens. In particular, the concepts of "unity in diversity," "world citizenship" and "our common humanity" were invoked to serve as the ethical undergirding for *Agenda 21* and the *Rio Declaration*. [3]

The world community has, thus, already come to a basic accord on the need for a global ethic to vitalize *Agenda 21*. We suggest that the term *World citizenship* be adopted to encompass the constellation of principles, values, attitudes and behaviors that the peoples of the world must embrace if sustainable development is to be realized.

World citizenship begins with an acceptance of the oneness of the human family and the interconnectedness of the nations of "the earth, our home." [4] While it encourages a sane and legitimate patriotism, it also insists upon a wider loyalty, a love of humanity as a whole. It does not, however, imply abandonment of legitimate loyalties, the suppression of cultural diversity, the abolition of national autonomy, nor the imposition of uniformity. Its hallmark is "unity in diversity." *World citizenship* encompasses the principles of social and economic justice, both within and between nations; non–adversarial decision making at all levels of society; equality of the sexes; racial, ethnic, national and religious harmony; and the willingness to sacrifice for the common good. Other facets of *world citizenship* –– including the promotion of human honor and dignity, understanding, amity, cooperation, trustworthiness, compassion and the desire to serve –– can be deduced from those already mentioned. A few of these principles [5] have been articulated in *Agenda 21* –– most, however, are noticeably lacking. Moreover, no overall conceptual framework is provided under which they can be harmonized and promulgated.

Fostering *world citizenship* is a practical strategy for promoting sustainable development. So long as disunity, antagonism and provincialism characterize the social, political and economic relations within and among nations, a global, sustainable pattern of development can not be established. [6] Over a century ago Baha'u'llah warned, *"The well–being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."* Only upon a foundation of genuine unity, harmony and understanding among the diverse peoples and nations of the world, can a sustainable global society be erected.

We, therefore, recommend that *world citizenship* be taught in every school and that the oneness of humanity –– the principle underlying *world citizenship* –– be constantly asserted in every nation.

The concept of *world citizenship* is not new to the world community. It is both implicit and explicit in a host of UN documents, charters and agreements, including the opening words of the UN Charter itself: "We the peoples of the United Nations ... " It is already being promoted around the world across all cultures by diverse NGOs, academics, citizens' groups, entertainers, educational programs, artists, and media. These efforts are significant but need to be greatly increased. A carefully planned and orchestrated, long–term campaign to foster *world citizenship*, involving all sectors of society –– local, national and international –– needs to be put into place. It must be pursued with all the vigor, moral courage and conviction that the United Nations, its member states and all willing partners can muster.

The Promotion of World Citizenship

The following proposal for a campaign to promote *world citizenship* [7] fits naturally into the framework for reorienting education, public awareness, and training toward sustainable development, which is presented in Chapter 36 of *Agenda 21*.

Education

Education –– formal, non–formal, and informal –– is indisputably the most effective way to shape values, attitudes, behaviors and skills that will equip the peoples of the world to act in the long–term interests of the planet and humanity as a [8] The United Nations, governments and educational agencies should seek to make the principle of *world citizenship* part of the standard education of every child.

The details of educational programs and activities incorporating this principle will vary a great deal within and among nations. However, if *world citizenship* is to be understood as a universal principle, all programs must have certain aspects in common. Based on the principle of the oneness of the human race, they should cultivate tolerance and brotherhood, nurturing an appreciation for the richness and importance of the world's diverse cultural, religious and social systems and strengthening those traditions that contribute to a sustainable, world civilization. They should teach the principle of "unity in diversity" as the key to strength and wealth both for nations and for the world community. They should foster an ethic of service to the common good and convey an understanding of both the rights and the responsibilities of *world citizenship*. These programs and activities should build on the country's positive efforts and highlight its tangible successes, including models of racial, religious, national and ethnic unity. They should emphasize the importance of the UN in promoting global cooperation and understanding; its universal goals, objectives and programs; its immediate relevance to the peoples and nations of the world; and the role that it must increasingly assume in our ever–contracting world.

Before undertaking a campaign to promote *world citizenship*, a common understanding of the concept will need to be developed and agreed upon. The Commission on Sustainable Development might set up a special committee or working group to begin developing guidelines for *world citizenship* and proposals for incorporating this principle into existing formal and non–formal educational programs. Alternatively, the Commission might seek the assistance of the High Level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development or the Inter–Agency Committee on Sustainable Development. The UN Secretariat might even choose to set up a *world citizenship* Unit, similar to the erstwhile Peace Studies Unit, to develop these guidelines and coordinate the system–wide implementation of *world citizenship* education. Whatever path is chosen, this task must be given high priority.

world citizenship could be incorporated easily into all of the activities suggested in chapter 36.5. of *Agenda 21* for reorienting education toward sustainable development. A few examples illustrate:

- National advisory bodies/round tables (36.5.c) should facilitate the incorporation of *world citizenship* into educational programs within the country.

- Pre–service and in–service training programs for all teachers, administrators, educational planners and non–formal educators (36.5.d) should include the principle of *world citizenship* in their programs.

- Educational materials on sustainable development produced by UN agencies should encourage *world citizenship* (36.5.g), as should educational materials about the United

Nations.

- *Agenda 21* calls for "the development of an international network" to support global efforts to educate for sustainable development (36.5.k). This network could both encourage UN agencies and member NGOs to create materials based on the guidelines for *world citizenship*, and provide the means for sharing them.

- Governments and educational authorities have already been called upon to "eliminate gender stereotyping in curricula" as a means to promote sustainable development (36.5.m). We would recommend that, in the spirit of *world citizenship*, stereotyping based on religion, culture, race, class, nationality and ethnicity also be eliminated.

Public Awareness

People need to think of themselves as world citizens and understand their personal responsibility to promote sustainable development. [9] Campaigns to raise public awareness of the challenges of world citizenship must make use of the full range of media and the arts, including television, video, film, radio, electronic networks, books, magazines, posters, flyers, theater and music. These campaigns should enlist the advertising and entertainment industries, the media –– both traditional and non–traditional –– the entire UN system, all member states, NGOs, and popular personalities. They should reach out to the home, the work place, public areas and schools. The guidelines for *world citizenship* called for above should be appropriate for use by such public awareness campaigns and should serve as basic reference for all media programming.

world citizenship could be included in the activities presented in chapter 36.10. Of *Agenda 21* for increasing public awareness and sensitivity about sustainable development. The following examples illustrate:

- National and international advisory boards (36.10.a) could encourage the various media to adopt the guidelines for *world citizenship*. The media have done much to raise public awareness of global interdependence and the enormous challenges facing the world community. They have also highlighted the seemingly insurmountable differences that divide us. The media have a responsibility to help people understand that diversity need not be a source of conflict; rather, diversity can and must now serve as a resource for sustainable development. They can do so by focusing on the constructive, unifying and cooperative undertakings that prove humanity's capacity to work together to meet the enormous challenges facing it.

- In promoting "a cooperative relationship with the media" (36.10.e), the United Nations must boldly define its own identity and the promise it holds for the world community. The United Nations was established on high ideals and with a vision of a peaceful, progressive world. By providing a framework for communication and cooperation, and by initiating innumerable, constructive projects, it has added significantly to the understanding, hope and goodwill in the world. Yet its accomplishments are little known to the generality of mankind. Using the concept of *world citizenship* as an

integrating theme, the United Nations should publicize its ideals, activities and goals, so that people come to understand the unique and vital role the UN plays in the world and, therefore, in their lives. Similarly, the UN should promote *world citizenship* in all its public activities, including celebrations of its historical milestones and tours of UN headquarters. Every UN document that deals with sustainable development should also include this principle –– beginning with the preamble of the proposed *Earth Charter*. *world citizenship* must become the single most important point of ethical reference in all UN activities.

- The services of the advertising industry (36.10.e) should be enlisted to promote *world citizenship*. Campaigns could be organized around such themes as: We the Peoples of the United Nations: Celebrating Unity in Diversity One Planet, One People In All Our Diversity, We Are One Human Family Our Common Future: Unity in Diversity
- *world citizenship* should also be promoted –– internationally, nationally and locally –– through the holding of contests and the presentation of awards (36.10.e).

- While heightening public awareness "regarding the impacts of violence in society" (36.10.l), the media can generate commitment to *world citizenship* by highlighting examples of constructive, unifying undertakings that show the power of unity and common vision.

Each country should be encouraged to earmark resources for promoting *world citizenship*. Consideration should also be given to including among the proposed "indicators of sustainable development" (40.6.) the promotion of this principle. Countries could, for example, be encouraged to report efforts to foster tolerance and appreciation of other cultures, equality of the sexes and the concept of one human family through curricula, entertainment and the media.

The Challenge of World Citizenship

In conclusion, *world citizenship* is a concept as challenging and dynamic as the opportunities facing the world community. We, the peoples and nations of the world, would be wise to embrace courageously its underlying principles and be guided by them in all aspects of our lives –– from our personal and community relations to our national and international affairs; from our schools, work places and media to our legal, social and political institutions. We, therefore, urge the Commission to encourage the entire UN system to incorporate the principle of *world citizenship* into the full range of its programs and activities.

The Baha'i International Community, which for over a century has been fostering *world citizenship*, would be pleased to assist the Commission, governments, NGOs and others to further develop the concepts contained in this document; to provide practical models of racial, religious, national and ethnic unity for sustainable development; and to take part in consultations on this crucial issue. As a global community encompassing the diversity of humanity and sharing a common vision, the Baha'i International Community will continue to promote sustainable development by encouraging people to see themselves as citizens of one world, the builders of a just and prosperous world civilization.

Notes

1. *Agenda 21*, Chapter 1.6.

2. One of the most often–repeated themes of *Agenda 21* is the vital importance of "broad public participation in decision–making;" "commitment and genuine involvement of all social groups;" "real social partnership;" and "new levels of cooperation among States, key sectors of societies and people."

3. The call for a global ethic was raised often during the UNCED process, with particular intensity at the Earth Summit and Global Forum, from Heads of State to UN officials to NGO representatives; through official UNCED documents, NGO treaties, workshops, books and artistic presentations. The following are just a few examples:

4. The speeches to the Earth Summit by the President of Brazil; the President of France; the Prime Minister of Ireland; the Prime Minister of Japan; the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands; the President of the United Mexican States; the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; the Prime Minister of Turkey; the Prime Minister of Tuvalu; the Secretary of State of the Holy See; and the Secretary–General of UNCED;

5. NGO Treaties prepared at the Global Forum including *The Youth Treaty; The Earth Charter; The Rio de Janeiro Declaration; The People's Earth Declaration; The Treaty on Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility; and The Treaty of Ethical Commitments;*

6. Global Forum activities, including the Evening Series in the Park, reflecting "the cultural diversity of the Human Family"; and the Peace Monument, whose inscription reads, *"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens;"*

7. Statements and publications by governments, UN Agencies and NGOs to the various Preparatory Committee sessions and other UNCED–related events including *The Universal Code of Environmental Conduct* (NGO/Media Symposium, October 1990); *In Our Hands: Women and Children First* (Report of the UNCED/UNICEF/UNFPA Symposium, May 1991); *The Earth Charter* (US Citizens Network on UNCED, July 1991); *One Earth Community* (The Working Group of Religious Communities on UNCED, August 1991); Caring for the Earth (IUCN/UNEP/WWF, October 1991); *An Earth Charter* (International Coordinating Committee on Religion and the Earth, 1991); Agenda Ya Wananchi (Roots of the Future, December 1991); *An Environmental Ethic or Earth Charter* (UNEP–UK National Committee, February 1992); *Principles on General Rights and Obligations* (General Assembly document, A/CONF.151/PC/WG.III/L.28, 9 March 1992); *Earth Charter, Japan* (Peoples Forum, Japan, 1992); *Earth Repair Charter* (Earth Repair Foundation, 1992); and *Our Country*, *The Planet* (Sir Shridath Ramphal, 1992).

8. *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, Preamble.

9. For example, see Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Principles 5, 8, 20, 25; and *Agenda 21*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 23, 24 and 36.

10. See *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, Principle 25.

11. Within the context of the principle of *world citizenship*, this program should be "carried out by the various actors according to the different situations, capacities and priorities of the countries and regions" (*Agenda 21*, Chapter 1.6.).

12. *Agenda 21*, Chapter 36.3. affirms that "Education should be recognized as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues. Both formal and non–formal education are indispensable to changing people's attitudes. It is also critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision–making. To be effective education should deal with the dynamics of both the physical/biological and socio–economic environment and human (which may include spiritual) development."

13. *Agenda 21*, Chapter 36.9. calls attention to the importance of promoting "broad public awareness as an essential part of a global education effort to strengthen attitudes, values and actions which are compatible with sustainable development."