



**LEAVES, A Newsletter of the  
INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM  
Volume 20, Number 1 15 January 2018**



**International Environment Forum** A Bahá'í inspired organization addressing  
the environment and sustainable development

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### **From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters**

This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on environment, climate change and sustainability. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to [newsletter@ief.org](mailto:newsletter@ief.org)

Please share the *Leaves* newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

### **The Climate Change Debate: a Bahá'í Perspective**

Excerpts from a letter of the  
Universal House of Justice  
29 November 2017

*In response to a letter expressing concern about the extreme politization of the climate change debate in certain countries, the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, has provided the following reply giving the Bahá'í perspective. It not only addresses the issue of climate change itself but, more broadly, clarifies certain ideas about the way in which Bahá'ís are to understand and contribute to the betterment of the world.*

Your letter reflects thoughtful concern about the practical limits of scientific knowledge, its implications for public policy, and its possible misrepresentation in an argument warning about catastrophic anthropogenic climate change that you feel is extreme, political, and unjustified by the facts. Although you do not mention it, you are surely aware that your measured skepticism is largely overshadowed in the public debate by another extreme perspective, promoted by political and vested interests, that goes as far as denying climate change and attempting to dismiss or contend with relevant scientific findings. Specific concerns about possible extremes on one side of the debate, therefore, must be addressed without appearing to advocate the other extreme. On the matter of climate change and other vital issues with profound implications for the common good, Bahá'ís have to avoid being drawn into the all too common tendencies evident in contemporary discourse to delineate sharp dichotomies, become ensnared in contests for power, and engage in intractable debate that obstructs the search for viable solutions to the world's problems. Humanity would be best and most effectively served by setting aside partisan disputation, pursuing united action that is informed by the best available scientific evidence and grounded in spiritual principles, and thoughtfully revising action in the light of experience. The incessant focus on generating and magnifying points of difference rather than building upon points of agreement leads to exaggeration that fuels anger and confusion, thereby diminishing the will and capacity to act on matters of vital concern.

One of the most pressing problems of humanity in the current century is how a growing, rapidly developing, and not yet united global population can, in a just manner, live in harmony with the planet and its finite resources. Certain biological realities present themselves when an organism negatively affects or exceeds the capacity of its ecosystem. The limited availability and inequitable distribution of resources profoundly impact social relations within and between nations in many ways, even to the point of precipitating upheaval and war. And particular arrangements of human affairs can have devastating consequences for the environment. The question of the impact of climate change, and to what extent it is man-made and its effects can be ameliorated, is today a major aspect of this larger problem. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh directly and indirectly touches on a range of such concerns in a manner that speaks to a harmony between society and the natural world. It is essential, therefore, that Bahá'ís contribute to thought and action regarding such matters.

Among the Bahá'í teachings are those concerning the importance of science. “Great indeed is the claim of scientists ... on the peoples of the world,” Bahá'u'lláh observed. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that the “sciences of today are bridges to reality” and repeatedly emphasized that “religion must be in conformity with science and reason.” Significantly, on an occasion when a scientific question was asked of Shoghi Effendi, he responded in a letter written on his behalf that “we are a religion and not qualified to pass on scientific matters.” And in reply to scientific issues raised on a number of occasions, he consistently advised Bahá'ís that such matters would need to be investigated by scientists.

Scientific inquiry into the question of human contributions to global warming has gradually unfolded over a century of investigation and, more recently, with intense scrutiny. While there will naturally be differences of view among individual scientists, there does exist at present a striking degree of agreement among experts in relevant fields about the cause and impact of climate change. Sound scientific results, obtained through the employment of sound scientific methods, produce knowledge that can be acted upon; ultimately, the outcomes of action must stand the test of further scientific inquiry and the objective facts of the physical world. In the spectrum of issues under discussion—which includes the extent of human contribution, projections of the possible future consequences, and alternatives for response—some aspects are, of course, less supported than others by scientific findings and hence subject to additional critical analysis.

A phenomenon as complex as climate change cannot be reduced to simple propositions or simplistic policy prescriptions. Even when there is agreement on some underlying facts, there may be a diversity of views about what to do in response to those facts, and the problem is compounded when uncertainty exists or when basic facts are contested for partisan reasons. But while there may indeed be a localized and highly charged political component to the public discussion, more remarkable is the fact that at a time when nations have difficulty reaching agreement on many important issues, the governments of nearly every country on earth have reached political consensus on a joint framework, in the Paris accord, to respond to climate change in a manner that is anticipated to evolve over time as experience accumulates. More than a century ago, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá referred to “unity of thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed.” The recently adopted international agreement on climate change, irrespective of any shortcomings and limitations it may have, offers another noteworthy demonstration of that development anticipated by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá. The agreement represents a starting point for constructive thought and action that can be refined or revised on the basis of experience and new findings over time.

While as a fundamental principle Bahá'ís do not engage in partisan political affairs, this should not be interpreted in a manner that prevents the friends from full and active participation in the search for solutions to the pressing problems facing humanity. Given that the question of climate change gives rise to social, economic, and environmental concerns across the world, interested Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions and agencies have naturally addressed it, whether at local, regional, national, or international levels. However, this does not mean that conclusions about scientific findings on climate change associated with such initiatives should be construed or presented as matters of religious conviction or obligation. Different Bahá'ís will, given their range of backgrounds, understand ideas about science and climate change in different ways and feel impelled to act differently, and there is no obligation for them to have uniformity of thought in such matters. Whenever Bahá'ís do participate in activities associated with this topic in the wider society, they can help to contribute to a constructive process by elevating the discourse above partisan concerns and self-interest to strive to achieve unity of thought and action. A range of Bahá'í concepts can inform these efforts; the letter of

the House of Justice dated 1 March 2017, for example, addresses moral questions of consumption and excessive materialism that are associated with the exploitation and degradation of the environment. At the start, there are no doubt many uncontroversial areas of overlap where the effort to address the question of anthropogenic climate change corresponds with widely accepted approaches to improving the environment. Areas for collaboration with others could broaden as experience and learning unfolds.

In those parts of the world where discussions surrounding anthropogenic climate change have indeed fallen prey to an almost intractable divide, Bahá'ís must be sensitive to the danger of this divisive partisan approach taking root in the community. This may well mean that some individuals or agencies have to consider to what extent their views about action required on climate change reflect a posture that is too extreme, whether in exaggerating the problem or minimizing it. Concepts and principles associated with Bahá'í consultation inform how the friends should interact among themselves and how they participate in social discourses and social action. Consultation provides a means by which common understanding can be reached and a collective course of action defined. It involves a free, respectful, dignified, and fairminded effort on the part of a group of people to exchange views, seek truth, and attempt to reach consensus. An initial difference of opinion is the starting point for examining an issue in order to reach greater understanding and consensus; it should not become a cause of rancor, aversion, or estrangement. By acting in unity, a conclusion about a particular course of action may be tested and revised as necessary through a process of learning. Otherwise, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains, "stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden."

Also relevant to such participation is greater appreciation and application of Bahá'u'lláh's insights on moderation. "In all matters moderation is desirable," He states. "If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil." This call for moderation includes in particular the manner of speech if a just conclusion is to be achieved. "Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation," Bahá'u'lláh writes. "One word is like unto springtime causing the tender saplings of the rose-garden of knowledge to become verdant and flourishing, while another word is even as a deadly poison," He explains. "It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man's station." By moderation, Bahá'u'lláh is in no way referring to mere compromise, the dilution of truth, or a hypocritical or utopian consensus. The moderation He calls for demands an end to destructive excesses that have plagued humanity and fomented ceaseless contention and turmoil. Moderation in deliberation and action stands in contrast to the arbitrary imposition of views through power or insistence upon ideological aims, both of which obstruct the search for truth and sow the seeds of continuing injustice. A moderate perspective is a practical and principled standpoint from which one can recognize and adopt valid and insightful ideas whatever their source, without prejudice. "Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation," Bahá'u'lláh states. "He discerneth the truth in all things, through the guidance of Him Who is the All-Seeing."

The House of Justice trusts that, in pursuing the many facets of their work of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society, individuals, communities, and institutions will continually grow in their capacity to make a distinctive and effective contribution to addressing the multitudinous problems afflicting society and the planet, including those associated with climate change.



## **Bahá'í Perspectives on Agriculture and Food 20 January to 9 March 2018**

<http://www.cvent.com/events/bah-perspectives-on-agriculture-and-food/event-summary-1aaa0e38f3e4419e9f2bf3997ab79f00.aspx>



**Faculty:** Paul Hanley, Arthur Lyon Dahl, Kim Naqvi, Gary Reusché, Neil Whatley, Robert White

Baha'u'llah described agriculture as "a vital and important matter" that was foremost among the principles "conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world" (Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed After the Kitab-i-Aqdas 90, 89).

Yet current agricultural policy often prioritizes yield and profit over health, sustainability, and sociocultural features of rural communities, while the poor struggle to even feed themselves, and climate change makes farming increasingly unpredictable. These

and other factors threaten food security. In *Baha'i Perspectives on Agriculture and Food*, we will examine the teachings of the Baha'i Faith on agriculture, food, and rural development; relate these teachings to contemporary public discourse on these issues; and suggest ways in which agricultural activities can be incorporated into core activities, community-building, and emerging social action.

\$75 base price; Required textbook (not included in course fee): *The Spirit of Agriculture*, Paul Hanley (ed.), George Ronald, 2005. This book must be purchased, either online or as an electronic book.

- Baha'i Distribution service:** <http://www.bahai bookstore.com/Spirit-of-Agriculture-The-P8790.aspx>
- Amazon:** <https://www.amazon.com/Spirit-Agriculture-Paul-Hanley/dp/0853985014/>
- George Ronald:** <http://www.grbooks.com/george-ronald-publisher-books/social-and-economic-development/spirit-of-agriculture-the-1318240900>

You may join our online learning community as an individual or as part of a study group (2 to 20 people). In either case, you can do all your work at home at any time of the day or night. We assign mentors to advise, encourage, assist, and answer questions. Groups are expected to meet every week or two for group discussions. Web-based forums connect all learners--individuals and members of a group--to the insights and perspectives of fellow students from all over the world.

To form a group, ask some friends whether they'd like to take the course with you. If at least one other agrees, go into the registration system, establish a group, and pay for it. Then email the confirmation number and its web link to the others, so they can click through and add themselves to the group. One person (or a Spiritual Assembly) pays for the group; the group members reimburse the payee based on whatever arrangement the group devises.

Note: All our courses are "asynchronous," which means there is no work that has to be done at a particular time. You can do everything at any time. For more information, go to [wilmetteinstitute.org/ourcourses/frequently-asked-questions/](http://wilmetteinstitute.org/ourcourses/frequently-asked-questions/).

Discounts are available for early registration and for senior citizens (age 65+), students, and pioneers. If you need a financial aid discount, write us at [wi@usbnc.org](mailto:wi@usbnc.org). Plenty are available. Registration is limited to 40 people, so sign up today.



<http://wilmetteinstitute.org/from-pomegranates-to-revelation-global-climate-change-week-forum/>

**From Pomegranates to the Book of Revelation—Lively Discussions  
in the Global Climate Change Week Forum**

Reprinted from the January 2018 eNewsletter of the Wilmette Institute.  
 © National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States  
 by Christine Muller

The Wilmette Institute participated in Global Climate Change Week, October 9–15, 2017, for the second time this year. The Institute was one of 144 institutions of higher learning from around the world that raised awareness and called for urgent action to address climate change. The Wilmette Institute's participation consists of a special forum on its Learning Center Home Page (click on Home Page, then on Forum to Discuss Global Climate Change Week). The Wilmette Institute, which operates its online learning center year round, also keeps its Forum for Global Climate Change Week (GCCW) open year round.



Arthur Lyon Dahl

**The Big Picture for Climate-Change Discussions.** Arthur Lyon Dahl, who is well-known in international sustainable-development and environmental circles and is the president of the International Environment Forum, opened the discussion for the Wilmette Institute's GCCW forum by providing the big picture in his summary of the position of the Bahá'í-inspired International Environment Forum:

Climate change is not an issue that can be solved in isolation, but is integrated with many other challenges facing humanity. It opens a dialogue on the consumer society and its use of energy; on the economy and extremes of wealth and poverty; on social justice and concern for future generations; on migration, immigration, and the integration of diverse peoples into harmonious communities; and on environmental sustainability, among others.

The threat of climate change has the potential of propelling humanity forward on its path to stronger global governance just as threats to peace and security and the violation of human rights did last century.

...There is a growing realization that these issues must be addressed at the level of values if we are to see adequate change at other levels.

John Watson, from Poughkeepsie, New York, USA, related the topic of climate change to what he learned in the Wilmette Institute course **Exploring the Book of Revelation**:

Some good folks seem to have difficulty with the reality of climate change and humankind's contribution to it on religious grounds. Having just taken a course on **Exploring the Book of Revelation**, I'd like to offer a few observations to think about.

Revelation is full of colorful, often highly symbolic imagery. Among these are many relating to destructive events in our natural world, including the sea being poisoned and a third of its creatures dying, a third of the rivers being poisoned as well, and the sun being empowered to burn much of mankind. One might reasonably see these and other calamities as indirect consequences, as punishments from the hand of God, rather than the direct result of human action, but in Rev. 11:18 we see "and Thy wrath is come indent. . . and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth." Related to this is the command in Genesis to go forth and multiply and subdue the earth, and the long-standing belief in our responsibility for stewardship of the earth.

Altogether it suggests two things to me. One is that it is possible for humans to "destroy the earth" and the other is that that's not the side I want to be on.

**Personal Actions.** The participants were very interested in taking personal actions. That should not be surprising in a Bahá'í forum because expressing our beliefs in daily life is a core Bahá'í teaching. The following quotation from the writings of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, was part of one forum posting:

Not until we live ourselves the life of a true Bahá'í can we hope to demonstrate the creative and transforming potency of the Faith we profess. Nothing but the abundance of our actions, nothing but the purity of our lives and the integrity of our characters, can in the last resort establish our claim that the

Bahá'í spirit is in this day the sole agency that can translate a long-cherished ideal into an enduring achievement. —*Bahá'í Administration*, letter dated November 24, 1924, 68.

John Krochmalny, from Sylvania, Ohio, shared the following about his commitment to action:

What we are doing over here [John was discussing actions with a learner in Singapore] on a local level is to actually “walk your talk” in that we try to embody the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in our daily decisions and actions. In so doing, we don't come across as hypocrites telling others what they should do. My individual choices have led me on an action plan leading toward a sustainable living system. It's not perfect nor all-inclusive by any means, but it's a start that produces models for evaluation and assessment.

Later in the discussion on action, John wrote: “The magnitude of the problems seems daunting. But something must be done, and we cannot pass the solutions to someone else—we must become the solutions.”

Many other participants in the GCCW forum shared their personal actions. One of them does not drive and, fortunately, has access to good public transportation. Another is driving an electric car and buying the electricity for his car from renewable energy. Yet another pointed out that we can do much to reduce energy use in our homes by avoiding overheating and overcooling and by using energy efficient appliances and IT devices.

**We Need Trees!** In a conversation that continued a thread from a discussion that began during last year's GCCW, the participants discussed the importance of trees and of their being given a chance to grow old so that they can absorb more carbon dioxide. Marilyn Goebel, whose tree farm in Northeast Oregon is owned by the Leo and Marilyn Goebel Family Trust, wrote: “It takes a tree about 50 years to produce 200 board feet in our area. Thereafter it gains 200 board feet every 10 years. Many people harvest their trees when they are only 50–70 years old and then start all over again.” Marilyn went on to say that “A board foot is 12” by 12” by 1”.”



On the community level, some of the participants in the Forum are involved with like-minded organizations. Project engineer Robert Lilly shared his design for a 120 acre, 15 parcel, subdivision in Sacramento, California, USA, that is based on principles of sustainability.



Paul Hanley

**Accommodating 11 Billion People on Our Earth?** One lengthy conversation thread (57 postings, the longest so far) started with a posting by a participant who has been inspired by Paul Hanley's [Wilmette Institute webinar \*Eleven\*](#), based on his book with the same name. The announcement for the webinar explained its title this way: “UN projections show global population reaching 11 billion—and the world economy growing by 500%—by the end of this century. Can the planet accommodate 4 billion more people when our current ecological footprint already exceeds Earth's biocapacity by 60%?” (By the way, in November the Wilmette Institute offered a course called **Sustaining 11 Billion People: Challenges for an Ever-Advancing Civilization** with Paul Hanley as the Lead Faculty. On January 20, 2018, Paul Hanley will be offering **Bahá'í Perspectives on Agriculture and Food**, [registration is open](#); Arthur Lyon Dahl will be one of the faculty.) The conversation in the discussion thread about *Eleven* covered several topics including the meaning of education.

**Eating Less Meat or No Meat?** The benefits of eating less meat or no meat at all evoked an especially passionate conversation in the discussion thread about *Eleven*. One participant even shared a [delicious vegan recipe that includes pomegranate seeds](#). In case you are wondering why eating fewer animal products is an important topic for some participants in the forum, you can [read the entire conversation](#) in the GCCW forum.

**Why Should I Engage with Climate Change?** There are many reasons to become more engaged with climate change as an article about a [recent report by the U.S. Global Change Research Program](#) points out: “Choices made today will determine the magnitude of climate change risks beyond the next few decades.” All

people of faith should see these choices as profound spiritual and ethical challenges because climate change is and will increasingly exacerbate social problems and will contribute to the disintegration of society and to unprecedented human suffering.

**More about GCCW.** Finding more [information about the forum for Global Climate Change Week](#) is easy. Click on the link, and scroll down to the final paragraph for easy instructions about how to access and participate in the Wilmette Institute's forum for 2017. If you do not have access to the Learning Center Home Page of the Wilmette Institute, send an e-mail to its director, Dr. Robert Stockman at [rstockman@usbnc.org](mailto:rstockman@usbnc.org).



Christine Muller

**Wilmette Institute Courses on Climate Change and Sustainable Development.** In the early Spring, beginning on April 1, 2018, the Wilmette Institute is offering its annual course on **Climate Change** with Christine Muller as Lead Faculty. The [Climate Change course is now open for registration](#). In the fall, beginning on September 1, 2018, the Institute will also offer **Sustainable Development and the Prosperity of Humankind** with Arthur Lyon Dahl as Lead Faculty. Look for the registration link during the summer.

## Roundtable on Global Government

In October 2017, the Great Transition Initiative organized a Roundtable on Global Government over the Internet. It started with an essay by Luis Cabrera on "Global Government Revisited: From Utopian Dream to Political Imperative". Many people commented on the essay, and some of those commentaries have been published in the final report of the roundtable (<http://www.greattransition.org/publication/roundtable-global-gov>), including one by IEF board member Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen.

Sylvia said "To make such a vision a reality, we need to build a sense of global community through education and hold governments accountable to their promises in the international sphere.... In sum, there are many ways to strengthen the good elements of global governance that we have now. Over time, this can contribute to a culture that willingly accepts "real" binding international law that is enforceable, in the same way that we accept binding national laws for the protection of the social good in our communities."

To read the whole of Sylvia's commentary, go to <http://www.greattransition.org/roundtable/global-gov-sylvia-karlsson>.

## Global Social Observatory in Geneva

The Global Social Observatory in Geneva ([www.gsogeneva.ch](http://www.gsogeneva.ch)) wrapped-up its year with a celebration of its mission on 19 December at International Environment House in Geneva, Switzerland. As an organization that encourages dialogue across a wide range of social issues and has strongly invested in the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the event discussed three key themes and related cross-cutting issues with about 40 high-level participants from across international organizations, civil society including IEF, and the private sector. The thematic presentations were on innovation in the digital age, by Francis Gurry, Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), nutrition and healthy lifestyles by Johanna Ralston, CEO of World Obesity Federation, and skills, systems, synergies and sustainable development by David Nabarro, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Climate Change. Some of the highlights of the discussion follow.

Innovation is one of the characteristics of our rapidly-changing world, growing much faster than the economy as a whole, but with a major shift towards Asia and intensifying competition and complexity. It is also a major cause of disruption. The creative industries in the private sector are transforming the production, distribution and consumption of things like music, literature, videos and games, with policy only reactive after the fact. Artificial intelligence and robotics are transforming manufacturing and labour markets. When the World Trade Organization was set up, industrialized nations agreed to the offshoring of manufacturing to countries with

cheap labour in exchange for royalties from their intellectual property, but by destroying jobs at home and increasing the flow of wealth to the holders of patents and trademarks, the result has increased unemployment while accelerating the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. Now that technology has reached the point where goods can be manufactured entirely by machines without workers, there is a reverse tendency to bring back manufacturing closer to the markets. But this will not create significant employment.

Another disruption on the horizon will come from the life sciences and gene editing, with a race between China and the USA, and implications for human health and the environment which are hard to anticipate but will certainly raise significant challenges.

Intellectual property regimes need to balance incentives for innovation and investment while ensuring the social benefits of innovation which are an important public good. In Africa, the digitization of financial transactions has empowered the masses by making it possible to send money anywhere over cellphones. The intellectual property system is intended to promote transparency by making that knowledge public and limiting protection in time. A shift to a block-chain system could privatize knowledge, adding to the wave of privatization that has affected the world since the 1990s. Today's privatized world is at odds with the multilateral system.

Transfer of technology is an old issue with little interest today. The challenge now is the asymmetry in technology around the world, with a few countries like the USA and China able to invest hundreds of billions of dollars a year in research and development, leaving almost everyone else behind.

The same acceleration and change has occurred in food systems and health, with the spread of fast foods and high sugar consumption in an increasingly complex global food system creating an epidemic of non-communicable diseases and obesity. The commercial side is not only at fault, since it is driven by the need to create shareholder value under pressure from institutional investors like pension funds. Health and the economy are thus intimately linked. There is no point in encouraging people to improve their lifestyles, when in fact the major determinants of health, be they access to affordable food, a place to exercise in urban areas, or the air we breathe, are largely out of the hands of most people. Undernutrition is not just about calories, but a loss of food diversity. Overnutrition cannot be solved by a simple solution like a tax on sugar, but requires multiple efforts to address more sedentary jobs and urbanization. We need diverse crops and diverse offerings, and ways of getting food into cities. Approaches need to be multisectoral and embrace complexity. Following the success of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, we should consider a Framework Convention on Health, or perhaps start with one on sugar or fast-foods.

Language is also important. "Brexit" seems like an action verb, while "remain" is passive. Politicians can win with a good narrative story, regardless of whether it has any foundation in fact. We have yet to develop good stories around the 2030 Agenda and SDGs that people can relate to, although the efforts of IEF to rewrite the goals and targets for individuals and communities are a step in that direction. Ideally we should empower communities to develop their own stories of the future they would like, drawing inspiration from the SDGs.

We are fortunate to have a constructive context in which to work, with the 2030 Agenda and SDGs adopted at the highest level in 2015. They apply to everyone, and address the underlying conditions for poverty to leave no one behind. They are people-centered, universal, interconnected, integrated in action and achieved through partnerships. They are impacting national development plans, NGOs and businesses. At their core are common belief systems and value systems that require new ways of organizing, financing and working. They call for new narratives for transformation, but this will require a community of transformers who are ambitious, determined and working together in alignment. They need to learn new skills, systems thinking and how to build synergies, aiming for equity, fairness, the health of the planet, and peace.

The dismal narratives used in the past do not work; if you scare people enough, they deny rather than act. We need a positive vision of the future that works for everybody, looking beyond the imminent dangers to the possibilities that technologies and demographics could bring by 2050. The question is how to get there. The 2030 Agenda is not the only agenda out there, as evidenced by global trade and investment policies that are inconsistent with and undermine the SDGs. It will take strong political decisions to bring about alignment, but it is not evident how to do this. We cannot deny that there is a dark side, whether in corruption, corporate

dishonesty or hacking disruption (with governments the biggest hackers). Beyond good stories, we need ways to transform peoples' values, perhaps in partnership with faith-based organizations and others that work at this level. The Pope's Encyclical had great impact. Without common shared myths and values, we just have marketing.

We do not know what will work, and are in uncharted territory

## **World Health Promotion Conference in New Zealand in 2019**

The next World Health Promotion Conference will be held in New Zealand on 7-11 April 2019. It is co-hosted and organised by the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE), and the Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand (HPF). The theme is Waiora: Promoting Planetary Health and Sustainable Development for All. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the framework for the sub-themes of the conference, which is therefore aligned with the aims of IEF. IEF members are invited to participate. More details are available on the conference website: <http://www.iuhpe2019.com/en-gb/iuhpe-home>.

IEF has been invited to consider being part of a small (6 members at the time of writing) working group of Pacific island and NZ health professionals who have registered an interest to offer a sub-plenary session on spiritual health promotion for sustainable development. There are already two Baha'is who are members of this group, The Spiritual Health Promotion Group, including Sione Tu'itahi, Executive Director of the Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand, and co-chair of the conference. They plan to include the spiritual dimension in the dialogue at the conference, and to explore and share contributions of spiritual approaches and faith-based organisations to planetary health and sustainable development. Having a sub-plenary with a focus on the spiritual dimension can enable Baha'i-inspired groups and other faith-based organisations to broaden the conversations and enrich the learning from the conference.

The organizers would appreciate if IEF members could share the website link with individuals and organisations that work in sustainable development and planetary health and wellbeing. Please also let the IEF secretariat know if you are interested in participating in the conference and representing the IEF there. If there is sufficient interest, we may plan an IEF activity alongside the conference.

## **The Walking Bus in Switzerland**

A study by the ATE Swiss Association for Transport and Environment has measured the impact of the Walking Bus campaign in Switzerland, where the practice is known as the 'Pédibus'. Over 1,000 parents were surveyed in order to gain an understanding of children's mobility practices and the factors which influence their choices, the use of the Walking Bus in French-speaking Switzerland and its impact on children's mobility, the key motivating factors for parents, and the perceived benefits. The goal is to gain a clearer understanding of children's mobility, for the benefit not only of urban planning and development stakeholders, but also for those involved in children's daily journeys to and from school.

The Walking Bus is an accompaniment system that enables groups of four to eight children to walk to and from school accompanied by a parent. Only 10 years ago, there was an all-too-obvious lack of studies on the role of children in the public sphere.

Children had long been reduced to the status of 'invisibles', despite representing a substantial and growing population segment: in 2016 in Switzerland, 928,268 schoolchildren (primary and lower secondary levels) walked to school daily.

In Switzerland, active transportation involving children remains highly developed, with 75% of them walking to school. Despite this, the country is not immune to the decline in active transportation generally observed in children in developed countries. There has been a nearly 10% drop in active transportation among children aged 6 to 9 in the past 20 years. While it accounted for 68% of the transportation mix in 1994, the figure had

dropped to 59% by 2015. Conversely, the share of the mix claimed by car transportation increased from 23% in 1994 to 27% in 2015.

Studies carried out around the world have concluded that the main reasons for the sharp decline in active transportation is the larger distances to be travelled (especially in North America) and a feeling of insecurity when it comes to road traffic. This perceived lack of safety tends to increase the child accompaniment rate, creating a vicious cycle that bolsters the use of motorised mobility: the feeling of insecurity pushes parents to drive their children to and from school, increasing traffic near schools and further increasing feelings of insecurity.

The ATE study showed that the perceived lack of safety associated with the route to school is the most significant factor leading parents to accompany their children to school. Given this, a practice such as the Walking Bus is an effective solution for countering the decline in the use of active transportation among schoolchildren. The Walking Bus strikes a proper balance between parental accompaniment and independent mobility for the youngest children. In French-speaking Switzerland, the primary reason for making use of the Walking Bus is safety, whereas in other countries such as France and the United States, adoption of this practice is associated first and foremost with social links and family organisation.

Among the vast majority of French-speaking Swiss who are familiar with the Walking Bus, the innovative practice has a very high satisfaction rate (96%), thus confirming that the campaign meets the needs and expectations of parents. The Walking Bus campaign generally has a very strong and positive influence on soft mobility. Nearly half of parents in French-speaking Switzerland who were surveyed said that they had made a conscious shift toward a more sustainable form of mobility as a result of the campaign. Of those parents, 54% changed how they get around, placing greater emphasis on walking than on taking the car; 43% arranged with other parents to walk their children to school; 30% joined an existing Walking Bus; and 11% created a new one. The Walking Bus and the associated awareness campaigns are not limited to creating new routes, but also have an effect on the development of soft mobility practices overall and on the transportation methods families choose. The Walking Bus practice also contributes to socialisation and to cooperation between civil society and public authorities.

The study confirms the relevance of developing a campaign to promote the Walking Bus. The findings show that the Walking Bus works best and completely meets its objectives in French-speaking Switzerland. The structure implemented by the ATE, the support available throughout the year by the cantonal coordinating bodies, available materials and tools, as well as the festive events which are organised, are all key to the success of the Walking Bus. This campaign template can be reproduced in new cantons and countries in order to improve the safety of children's travel while promoting soft mobility.

The study is available in its entirety in French and German in the ATE publication 'Mobilité d'avenir', 'Mobilität mit Zukunft' (downloadable at [www.ate.ch/etudepedibus2017](http://www.ate.ch/etudepedibus2017) or at [www.pedibus.ch/etude](http://www.pedibus.ch/etude)).

Source: [http://www.pedibus.ch/medias/Actualit%C3%A9s/FR/2017/Etude%20P%C3%A9dibus%202017/ATE\\_PEDIBUS-AN\\_2017.pdf](http://www.pedibus.ch/medias/Actualit%C3%A9s/FR/2017/Etude%20P%C3%A9dibus%202017/ATE_PEDIBUS-AN_2017.pdf)

## **Arctic methane releases and climate change**

IEF member Harold Lane of "Habitation: Surviving Climate Change" has recently shared with IEF some reports supporting his long-standing concern with the danger that methane releases from the Arctic could lead to a sudden acceleration of climate change. At the heart is a report from Natalia Shakhova and Igor Semiletov of the University of Alaska Fairbanks published in *Science* (5 March 2010) and a further paper in *Nature Communications* (2017) showing that large amounts of methane, both as methane hydrates and as gas, stored under the permafrost of the 2 million square kilometre East Siberian Arctic Shelf, were destabilising and venting through gaps in the permafrost, emitting as much methane to the atmosphere as all the rest of the oceans. Methane concentrations in the Arctic are already the highest in 400,000 years. Release of only one percent of the stored methane under the ice shelf could alter the atmospheric burden of methane, a

greenhouse gas 30 times more potent than carbon dioxide, up to 3 to 4 times. There is an imminent danger that the release of methane through hotspots amounting to 10 percent of the ice shelf could pass from linear to exponential.

Another report by Kate Marvel in *Scientific American* (December 2017) describes the contradictory roles of cloud cover in amplifying or reducing global warming, which are difficult to include in climate models. While the acceleration may be less than earlier feared, there is no indication that clouds will slow down warming. These are the kinds of results that are pushing some scientists in America, a country desperately looking for any excuse to avoid reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, to explore geoengineering solutions such as cloud brightening, with unpredictable and highly risky consequences. Another graphic from *Scientific American* (January 2018, p. 76) on killer seas shows that past mass extinctions of biodiversity occurred with extreme levels of carbon in the oceans, and suggests that the predicted coming sixth mass extinction could begin by 2100. Harold wonders if altering the size of cloud droplets over the East Siberian Arctic Shelf might cool it and slow or prevent the release of methane.

This is an excellent illustration of the complexity of the many interrelated environmental challenges and other problems facing the world, often accelerating in unpredictable ways with possible disastrous consequences for the planet and humanity. We can only wonder which ones, in which combination, might "cause the limbs of mankind to quake" as Bahá'u'lláh put it, and bring us to our senses.

The Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Baha'i Faith, has written: "Until such time as the nations of the world understand and follow the admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh to whole-heartedly work together in looking after the best interests of all humankind, and unite in the search for ways and means to meet the many environmental problems besetting our planet, ...little progress will be made towards their solution." (Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, from a letter dated 18 October 1981 to an individual believer.) How long will we wait?



**WAUKESHA COUNTY  
GREEN TEAM**

*Community powered. Sustainability driven.*

**Waukesha County,  
Wisconsin (USA)  
Green Team and Permaculture  
and Gardening Group**

Submitted by Mike Paik,  
Waukesha County Green Team

Sustainability is more than a concept; it is a way of life for this Wisconsin group, the Waukesha County Green Team. What an exciting journey it has been: In 2008 strangers and acquaintances worked together for a common goal of societal change. Not wishing to lose their momentum, they came together again to meet the challenge of the National Day of Service in January 2009. Other like-minded people were invited to join the planning group to determine future direction and goals. After several months this group became what would be known as the Waukesha County Green Team. They chose The Natural Step model of sustainable community wide planning as their guide.

Many areas of interest developed, including electric/hybrid vehicles, environmental education, networking and creating a sharing platform for other similar organizations in Waukesha County. One of the first sub-groups developed around healthy eating and gardening practices. It was named the Permaculture and Gardening Group. Free, donate what you wish, presentations by Master Gardeners and other experts were offered several times yearly, often with up to 100 people in attendance. Over the years the WCGT incorporated as a 501 C 3 non-profit and formalized the organization's structure. Officers were chosen, and duties formalized. Annual Meetings, and bi-annual strategic and business planning sessions have helped the team remain focused on their mission: "The Waukesha County Green Team is a voluntary organization of Waukesha County residents who care about the environment in which we live and raise our families. We are concerned about the quality of our water, our food, the air we breathe, and preserving the phenomenal natural resources,

abundant in our County. We believe that Waukesha County will continue to be a great place to live for years in the future if we continue to educate ourselves on the wise use of our resources and take action to preserve those resources for future generations.”

At the onset it was decided that the WCGT would be an informational/educational and not an advocacy organization. This has enabled them to maintain good relations with other organizations, governments, and educational institutions. Two Green Alliance Forums were held to determine common goals for these groups, and in 2017 a Sustainability Fair was held which drew over 500 attendees to dozens of exhibits and presentations. Through a combination of grants and funding outreach, a half-time administrative and outreach position was created. They are often present at farmer’s markets, faith communities and other organizations’ events. They also maintain a Facebook Page and have a monthly ‘green drinks’ meet and greet. Two community-based ‘sprout’ semi-autonomous groups have recently been developed to enhance local outreach. The newly re-designed website contains a user-friendly, dynamic location to learn about the Waukesha County Green Team’s activities, and those of similar organizations: <https://www.waukeshacountygreenteam.org/>

The Permaculture and Gardening Group of the Waukesha County Green Team promote health and good resource stewardship through education, communication, and local action. Our journey and mission: “Be the change you want to see.” Land restoration and habitat development is the key to good stewardship. The group is comprised of local residents with a passion for gardening in a more sustainable way with a focus on healthy eating, organic food production and good stewardship of land and resources. Most of the members are Master Gardeners and share their successful techniques learned from many years of hands on experience. Developing relationships with local farmers and supporting farmers markets is one way we expand our eating local movement. One of the first activities we pursued was a book club that promoted an ongoing education commitment. These dedicated people also donate their time for planning 5-6 educational presentations each year.

Examples of topics we shared were: Creating a Living soil, Raising chickens, Land Restoration, Seed Starting - Seed Saving, Water Harvesting, How to start a Community Garden, Perennial Crops, Organic Gardening Techniques, Responsible Lawn Care, Soil Health, Composting Methods, Vermiculture, Pest Management, Bee Keeping, Raised Beds, Straw Bale Gardening, Food Waste Reduction, Elements of Permanent Agriculture. The group also hosts 2-3 farm tours for sharing successful organic farming methods and year round growing techniques. Members have been active in starting community gardens, farm to school initiatives and promoting eating local. All the members enjoy sharing harvests, plants, and seeds and believe that these are important aspects of the group’s permaculture philosophy which is “care for the planet,” “care for the people” and “share the surplus.” Members and their guests also attend bi-monthly video nights and have a video list / library. Other members have on going children’s classes that provide programs for food education, food preparation, and hands-on gardening. Some members also support the local “Wildlife in Need” program having the children and adults make, for example, bird perches and baby animal nests. They also contribute garden excess for the animals.

Another important educational initiative is that members strive to connect with other like-minded groups by providing presenters who will pass on the knowledge and importance of sustainable living. Individually and collectively we are involved in engaging people of all ages and backgrounds to come together in a participatory process of learning, growing, and working together side by side. We all need to move away from practices that are harming the earth and its inhabitants and embrace a promising future!

*A core element of a strategy of sustainable development is the reform of agricultural policies and processes. Food production and agriculture is the world's single largest source of employment; nearly 70% of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Although farming has been devalued by manufacturing and a rapidly expanding urban population, agriculture still represents the fundamental basis of economic and community life: malnourishment and food insecurity suffocate all attempts at development and progress. Despite this pivotal role, poverty is often concentrated in rural areas. Damage to natural resources, poor information and infrastructure often result in food insecurity, premature deaths and mass migration to urban areas in search of a better life. The farmer must be accorded his or her rightful place in the processes of development and civilization building: as the villages are reconstructed, the cities will follow.*

(Bahá'í International Community, *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward As One*, 2008)

## Global Civil Society Declaration on Climate Induced Displacement (Continuation from December *Leaves* article)

### Preamble

We, the representatives of civil society gathered at International Civil Society Week 2017 held in Suva, Fiji between 4-8 December 2017:

**Acknowledging** that climate change is one of the most pressing challenges our planet faces, which impacts people's ability to realise human rights and sustainable development for current and future generations

**Noting** the impacts of climate change are often felt first, and hardest, by those countries and communities with the least responsibility for the crisis and with the least capacity to respond or adapt, including small island states in the Pacific and other vulnerable regions

**Acknowledging** that these impacts fall most upon people in vulnerable situations in our societies, indigenous peoples, minorities, older persons, children, persons with disabilities, women and persons whose basic economic necessities are unfulfilled, and that there is a legal obligation and moral imperative to act in a people centred and rights focused manner,

**Reaffirming** the importance of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Climate Agreement adopted under the Convention, and calling on all Governments, International Organisations, the private sector and Civil Society Organisations to undertake ambitious action to achieve the goal to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels

**Also noting** the leadership of many least developed countries and small island states, particularly those in the Pacific and other vulnerable regions in committing to deep and long-term cuts in emissions

**Calling** on developed countries to continue to take the lead in mobilizing climate finance from a wide variety of sources, instruments and channels, noting the significant role of public funds, including through the provision of adequate, predictable and stable climate finance

**Reaffirming** that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and that climate change impacts, directly and indirectly, the enjoyment of human rights. Conversely, failure in ensuring the enjoyment of human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights to the maximum of the available resources of each nation, compounds and worsens the vulnerability of communities to climate change impacts

**Noting** that States have an obligation to take effective measures to prevent and redress climate impacts, and therefore, to mitigate climate change, without ignoring their obligation to also ensure that all human beings have the necessary capacity to adapt to climate crisis

**Affirming** that climate justice requires that climate action be consistent with existing human rights agreements, obligations, standards and principles

**Recognising** that the impacts of climate change are a driver of "human mobility" inclusive of migration, displacement and (planned) relocation, and that displacement and migration will continue and increase as climate impacts worsen. That climate change represents an existential threat to some communities and countries, particularly in small island states, the Pacific and other vulnerable regions threatening their traditional livelihoods, well-being, mobility and culture

**Recognising** that communities that have their human rights guaranteed and fulfilled at home are at a lower risk of needing to move as a result of climate change impacts, and acknowledging that internal or international migration as a response to climate change is a policy of last resort. Where migration must occur 'migration with dignity' represents best practice, being the provision of skills, opportunities and community in host countries, or home country if displacement is internal

**Taking note** of the ongoing process for the development of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration due to be adopted in 2018 which must address climate change as a driver of migration if it is to be forward looking and robust. Emphasizing that the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration focuses on international migrants only, and that the needs of

persons internally displaced by climate change must also be addressed in a rights-respecting manner

**Calling** on States, and International Organisations to recognise climate change as a key driver of migration in the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, with affected populations needing long-term solutions including expanded migration channels. That the compact recognises that human rights obligations must be respected regardless of an individual's migratory status, and that the human rights of people migrating due to climate change impacts should form a core component of policy responses to climate displacement in compact

**Further calling** on States negotiating the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration to engage and include the voices of those impacted by climate displacement in the process of negotiation to ensure that the policy response meets their needs and new norms are developed to address policy gaps

**Declaring** that we, the representatives of International Civil Society Week 2017 in conjunction with the Pacific Islands Development Forum call on the international community to include the following in the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration:

- Recognition that climate change is included as a driver of internal and international displacement
- Commitment to fulfil the objectives of the Paris Agreement, to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C, will significantly reduce the number of people who are required to move due to climate change.

- Reaffirmation that the UN human rights treaties and regional human rights treaties provide an agreed-to legal basis for action for States Parties, and acknowledgement that an explicit integration of such instruments into the global compact will enhance its effectiveness

- A commitment that where people are compelled to move as a result of the impacts of climate change, their rights under international human rights law will be recognized and upheld, including non-refoulement, self-determination, non-discrimination, and the full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to which they are entitled

- Recognition that building resilience is a critical aspect of reducing climate driven migration and that countries and regional organisations must ensure that communities at risk of slow onset and rapid onset events have key human rights (such as the rights to food, water, housing, health and work) protected to reduce the likelihood of the creation of conditions that would necessitate migration.

- Commitment to consultation and engagement with impacted communities where adaption and resilience programs cannot prevent climate-induced displacement, forcing relocation. And, where return is appropriate, how "Building Back Better", in keeping with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, should be implemented.

- Commitment to those who are most vulnerable to climate displacement, including coastal and small island communities, indigenous peoples, minorities, older persons, children, persons with disabilities, women and persons whose basic economic necessities are unfulfilled as people in need of particular protection.